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The IG Scammers in Thailand

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Abstract

In 2021, Ponzi Schemes through Instagram application have been famous and reaching out to many Thais. This kind of fraudulent investing scheme is promising high rates of return with little risk to investors. They used Instagram platform (IG) as the tool to connect with the victims. The purposes of this study are to study how the scammers lure the investors in Thailand through IG and to investigate how the scammers make the investors believe that they will receive high rates of return, as well as how people become involved in them. The data of the study were collected from 5 IG scammers, the ones who promising extraordinarily high rates of returns, which of whom had a number of followers between one thousand to seven thousand followers. The study investigates only the posts of those scammers that advertise investors by promising very high rates of returns with little risk to investors. The study uses move-step analysis to analyze the different moves creating of the scammers, the use of stance and linguistic engagement, formulaic expressions and politeness strategies, narrativity, naming, and lexical range as techniques used by scheme creators. The study reviewed that these linguistic and confusing choices are regulated as tools to attract the investors and, ultimately, to deceive. Moreover, the content of particular moves could promote change in a potential victim's mind, exciting him or her to unwise action. After investigating each move, the IG scammers are building solidarity with the investor and playing to the investor's egocentrism, both of which keep the investor from making well-informed decisions.

Keywords

IG scammers, Ponzi scheme, internet scammers, discourse analysis, persuasion, move-step analysis

1. Introduction

On September 12th, 2021, a 17-year-old girl was attempting to rob a gold shop at the Big C in Nonthaburi province in central Thailand. After she got arrested, she told police that she put money into one of IG investment account after seeing an advertisement on social media. Encouraged by a big return she invested 50,000-baht of a life insurance payout from her father's death in it. She soon discovered the investment was scam after she could not contact the IG account owner. said she was cheated by the IG scammers (Bangkok Post, Sep 13th, 2021). This is not the first time that teenagers are victimized by the IG scams. According to the reporting of the vice minister of the Ministry of Justice that there were over 500 students got cheated by the 17-year-old online investment scammer. He said this report just showed only one province, there will be more in all over Thailand (Thairath Online, 2020).

Ponzi schemes are investment frauds which lure their investors by promising contradictorily high rates of returns with little risk to investors (Interpol, 2019; Wells, 2010). Ponzi Schemes introduced to Thailand since 1982, the scheme called Mae Chamoy fund, it was stated by Thipayaso, drew in 15,473 victims at that time (Thairath Online, 2019). Today, this kind of schemes are still going on, there are many Thais been deceived to this trap.

This study investigates motives of Ponzi schemes, the stance and linguistic engagement that make people become involved in them by using move-step analysis as a tool to analyze the different moves creating of Ponzi schemes. According to Wells (2010), a Ponzi scheme is an investment fraud which lures its investors by promising abnormally high rates of returns with little risk to investors so the data of this study investigates on the posts that advertise investors by promising very high rates of returns with little risk. The analyzing has two stages, one is a board genre approach and two is looking at the layout details and physical parts of the scams on IG.

2. Research Objectives

1. To study how the scammers lure the investors in Thailand through IG.
2. To analyze the intention of the scammers behind each move.
3. To investigate how the scammers make the investors believe that they will receive high rates of return, as well as how people become involved in them.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Genre analysis

Genre analysis is a framework that analyzed the forms and rhetorical functions of non-literary discourse. It works from data to a description of texts in their environment (Shaw, 2005; Naksawat, 2015). When it comes to text analysis, genre analysis is seen as crucial (Dudley-Evans, 1994). The study of how language is used in a specific context with a focus on rhetorical styles, discourse, rhetorical move, and linguistic characteristics is known as genre. (Swales, 1990). Thus, different genres serve different functions and have distinct rhetorical structures. Swales (1981) pioneered the genre analysis approach that is now used in text analysis. This method has been used to investigate both the common structure of writing and the language used in texts belonging to the same discourse community.

According to Bhatia (2002), genre analysis is the study of how language is used in a broad sense to explain both how a text is constructed and how it is used and interpreted in

specific contexts to achieve specific purposes. Hyland (2002) also stated that genre analysis provides valuable information about how genres are constructed as well as the rhetorical contexts in which they are used. The analysis is divided into two types: lexico-grammatical features and rhetorical features. The analysis of lexico-grammatical features focuses on textual language features. In other words, it is a method of analyzing a text in terms of the word-classes, tenses, or clauses that are used and determining the frequency of these specific features. However, Nwogu (1997) defines rhetorical features or move structure of texts as "the identification of schematic units or moves" (p. 122).

Bhatia's framework (1993), the structure of IG scammers may follow a seven-move genre analysis pattern, which includes "Establishing credentials (Move 1), Introducing the candidature (Move 2), Offering incentives (Move 3), Enclosing documents (Move 4), Using pressure tactics (Move 5), Soliciting response (Move 6), Ending politely (Move 7)." (p. 62). Move 2 includes three steps: (1) "offering the candidature," (2) "essential detailing of the candidature," and (3) "indicating the value of the candidature" (Bhatia, 1993, p. 64). Bhatia's (1993) move analysis framework was very useful and was used as a model in this study to define the definitions of moves and to discover the move structure of IG scammers.

Move-Step analysis is a functional unit in a text used, it is used to discover the regular texts in certain genres of writing. The move is a section of text representing a specific communicative function, contributing its own communicative purpose of the genre, and it is a text segment made up of linguistic feature bundle making the segment a uniform orientation and signal the content of discourse in it. (Swales, 1990 ; Nwogu, 1997; Kanoksilapatham, 2003) The scammers' goal behind posting fraudulent advertising message is to convince the followers to engage the scammers' business. The study is focusing on conventionalized rhetorical patterns or moves that IG scammers produce and physical layout that may affect attention and decision of victims.

The scammers' goal is to get money from followers, the content of their IG posts must be convincing enough to change the mark's status quo mentality that is, 'never send money to unknow person'. To identify the features of IG scammers might lead an implicit mark to the point that the victims are willing to send some of their 'trust-money' to strangers, there must be the triggers that cause victims jumping into the fire loop. There are implicit triggers of change created by Gardner (2006). The triggers exist within the mind that have the power to cause people to change their minds, the following as implicit triggers of change:

1. Reason: Figuring strongly in matters involving beliefs.
2. Research: Gathering evidence about the matter.
3. Resonance: Being an affective component.
4. Redescription: The process that a person can recreate in their mind, manifesting of what could happen.
5. Resources and rewards: The changing based upon the cost versus the reward.
6. Real world events: The changing sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly.
7. Resistances: Referring to the level of resistance that one has to change so that changes might be warranted when other elements are considered.

Once the victims are making a decision, any one of these elements come into play. Focusing on IG scammers, if the scammers succeed in taking down a mark, these elements necessarily play a considerable role in receiving the mark to change their minds and play the scammers' game.

3.2. The effects of color and design on audience attitude, behavior, and perception of advertisements

In text communication, color and design are a powerful force especially in the advertisements because they affect human perceptions, beliefs, and emotions, giving different impressions of objects and eliciting specific behavioral responses. (Ouverson, 1992; Gorn et al., 1997) According to the studies, it may be a reason that many online investment scammers using specifically kind of colors

A pastel color is defined as any hue with a high value (lightness) and low to medium saturation (the purity or intensity of the color). That is in fact a pretty wide breadth, meaning more colors are technically pastels than you might have thought.

“Pastels comes as a breath of fresh air amid the chaos surrounding modern digital marketing techniques. Subtle pastel shades are immensely effective in instilling a sense of calmness and serenity”.

(Martin,2021)

The goal of this study is to use genre analysis to find out how the 2021 Ponzi schemes using textual features in an online investment fraud. Analyzing the design of investment advertisement pages; fonts, colors, and emoticons.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Data Collection

4.1.1 IG Scammers Selection

Five activated IG scammers with a number of followers between one thousand to seven thousand followers were selected from various IG accounts that advertised about promising the high rates return interests, collected from September to December in 2021. Data were selected from 50 advertising posts from the 5 IG scammers that promising investors extremely high rates of return with little risk. The researcher chose IG platform to collect data because the Ponzi Schemes, IG scammers, were being used as a platform to communicate between the victims and the scammers according to Thairath Online (2019 & 2020).

4.2 Data Analysis

4.2.1 Moves and steps in the investment scams on Instagram

The data analysis used a broad genre approach which separated into three main moves, the first and the third moves have one step and a few steps on the second moves. The first move, focusing on what are the characteristics of the scammers. The second moves are the detail and the last one calls for specific action.

Table 1: The IG scammers' moves and steps.

Move 1: Declaration	
Step 1:	Existing declaration
Move 2: Proposal	
Step 1:	Explicit proposal
Step 2:	Detail of process
Step 3:	Process explaining
Move 3: Action	

Step 1: Call for specific action

According to a broad genre approach, three moves namely, declaration (Move 1), Proposal (Move 2), and Action (Move 3) are considered the “frame moves” which contribute to layout of the scam IG genres. The three moves were used to analyze 50 advertising posts from the 5 IG scammers in this study.

4.2.2 The layout details and physical parts of the scams on IG.

The 50 advertising posts from the 5 IG scammers were analyzed their designing of investment advertisement pages’ layouts. The kinds of fonts, colors, and emoticons that the scammers used would also be analyzed. There might be hidden agendas in the cartoon characters and emoticon so they were investigated in this study.

5. Results

5.1 The genre of the IG scammers



Figure 1 the 1st IG scammer (Ban Nabtangii 1)

Table 2: The genre of the 1st IG scammer (Ban Nabtangii 1)

Move	Steps	Keywords	Characteristics
Declaration	Existing declaration	100% real	Strong affirmation
Proposal	Explicit proposal	-	Sincerity/ compulsory
	Detail of process	Fast and punctual	Very committed
	Process explaining	-	-
Action	Call for specific action	Click the link / Kha(คำา)	Friendly

This scammer provided strong affirmation that she is real and she is not a scammer. Recently, the medias try to explain that this kind of investments is a scam so some people already have the awareness about it. However, the scammer tried to use sincere explicit proposal step as a hidden agenda that they are a faithful and trust worthy one instead of explaining how they got the fund to run this impossible investing.



Figure 2 the 2nd IG scammer (Ban Nabngein)

Table 3: The genre of the 2nd IG scammer (Ban Nabngein)

Move	Steps	Keywords	Characteristics
Declaration	Existing declaration	Legally/ not gamble	safe
Proposal	Explicit proposal	guarantee 100% investing fund	confirmation
	Detail of process	Punctual/grouping	confirmation
	Process explaining	-	-
Action	Call for specific action	The link to access	-

The scammer did not provide many details or give affirmation that they are not scammers. For the declaration move they chose to say they are legally and not a gamble one which is difference for other scams.

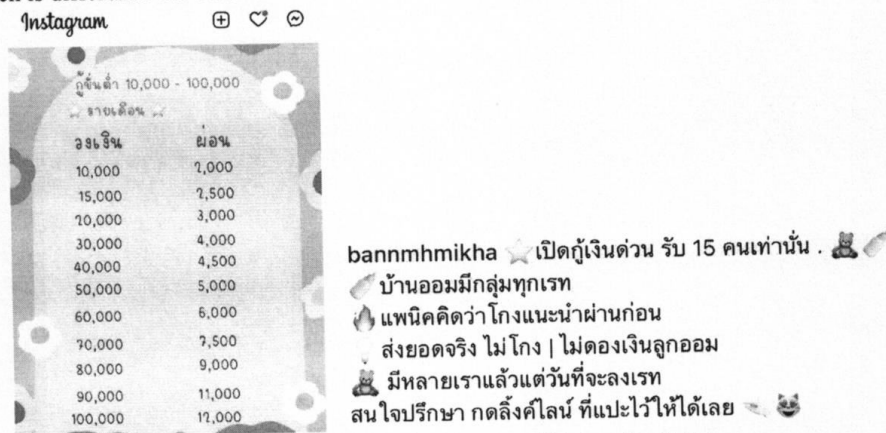


Figure 3 the 3rd IG scammer (Bannmhkha)

Table 4: The genre of the 3rd IG scammer (Bannmhmkha)

Move	Steps	Keywords	Characteristics
Declaration	Existing declaration	Many choices	flexible
Proposal	Explicit proposal	-	Sincerity/ compulsory
	Detail of process	Punctual/faithful	confirmation
	Process explaining	-	-
Action	Call for specific action	The link to access/ feel free/consulting	Friendly

Their explicit proposal showed that people who were interested in them but still not sure about them those people could just leave the account.



Figure 4 the 4th IG scammer (Nicha House)

Table 5: The genre of the 4th IG scammer (Nicha House)

Move	Steps	Keywords	Characteristics
Declaration	Existing declaration	real person/ long time/ good profile	Strong affirmation
Proposal	Explicit proposal	sign contract	Sincerity/ confirmative
	Detail of process	-	-
	Process explaining	Other business	Trust worthy
Action	Call for specific action	Add line account	Friendly

This scammer explained more how she has enough fund to run this impossible investment using sign contract as a proof that she is not a scammer. she said people could contact her through Facebook and line application account if they have any question about this business, they can ask her for more details which was different strategies from the other three scammers.



Figure 5 the 5st IG scammer (Hate Itu House)

Table 6: The genre of the 5st IG scammer (Hate Itu House)

Move	Steps	Keywords	Characteristics
Declaration	Existing declaration	Less profit	Sincerity
Proposal	Explicit proposal	Less profit/not a betrayer	Sincerity
	Detail of process	Limited membership	compulsory
	Process explaining	Fruit selling business	Trust worthy
Action	Call for specific action	Add line account	Friendly

This scam explained more how they have fund to run this impossible investment through fruit selling business and others showing they were not scammers. They had less advertising text comparing with the other four.

5.2 The layout details and physical parts of the IG scammers from 1 to 5

The first IG scammer (Ban Nabtangii 1) has two girl cartoon characters at the front and back of the IG account name with girly drawing style on the side both left and right. Texts are in the middle of those drawing with hand written font. The pastel colors of this scam are pink, purple, blue, and orange. They put only purple heart emoticons in their messages.

The second one, Ban Nabngein, has less colors than the first one. They used a few pastel colors which are light blue and pink. There is only one girl cartoon character that took almost half of the room in each page of this account. They used different kinds of emoticons in different sentences. Some emoticons seem related to the messages for example; the message “We are punctual with your find” with a clock emoticon, some of them are quite related in term of similarity word but it totally different mean, “investing fund is guarantee” with a plant emoticon. To explain this one in Thai language they use “เงินต้น” (investing fund) so they used a plant as the word “ต้น” which mean tree. This scam also used hand written font in their posts.

The third one, Bannmhnikha, used very colorful pastel with hand written font. They mainly used bare and milk bottle emoticons, fire in the explicit message that if people do not

trust them just leave this account, and a hand and a cat in the consultation message. Most of the background layout are flowers. This scam did not have any cartoon character in their posts.

The fourth one, Nicha House, has one girl cartoon character with pink pastel color in different shades. They also used hand written font just like other IG scam accounts. Emoticons are only a smile with hearts in the eyes and hand pointing.

The last one, Hate Itu House, was using politic agenda in their account. The color of this account still the same as other which is pastel color, more in orange, purple and yellow. They did not use any cartoon character but they also used hand written font and had sad face of Prayut Chan-o-cha as an account picture. There were two emoticons; paper clips and trolleys.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Not all of the IG scammers genres filled up all steps in the three-move frameworks however it still be able to analyze how the scammers using the moves to persuade victims to believe that they are not a scammer and lure the investors to invest with them. The language they use was very informal some of them were typo which might not be important to the followers, they probably do not play any attention on this kind of mistakes.

The moves showed that all five scammers using the convincing word structures that they are not scammers. They all shared trust worthy characteristics by say they are real people, punctual, and provable. The profits of each one is not the same some of them give unreasonable amount of money while some of them still very less.

The physical layouts of those scammers are quite interesting with pastel color, emoticons, and hand written fonts. The focus groups of these scammer probably are teenager and young adults because of the layouts are childish, friendly, nice, cozy, and warm representatives, would draw attention of those group of people (Grohmann et al., 2013). Because of their youngness who does not have enough experiences in business and lacking of proper knowledge of investing, the scams could get through them. In Khon Khan, there were five hundred high school students felled for this scam, the scammer is 17-year-old (Thairath Online, 2020). One of the reasons that many high schoolers fall for IG scammers that they are easier to access comparing with the real fund institutions and the scammers are using the social network, IG, that teenagers use which make it easy to connect with them.

What else can we do to stop these kinds of scams even though we know the works of moves and steps of them and see how they manipulate people to fall into their trap, we still cannot do much. The new generations, the future of Thailand, are struggling with the financing issues losing their money to the scammers is that because of the unfairness in the society or it is just because of the corruptions that dramatical increasing for the last eight year since the military own the country. Why do people greed? If we have a reasonable state welfare our lives would be better and the scams will be less.

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