Scams that start on social media

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Scammers are hiding out on social media, using ads and offers to market their scams, according to people's reports to the FTC and a new Data Spotlight. In the first six months of 2020, people reported losing a record high of almost $117 million to scams that started on social media. People sent money to online sellers that didn't deliver, to romance scammers, and for phony offers of financial help.

The biggest group of reports were about online sellers that didn't deliver the goods. They were more than one-quarter of all reports about scams that started on social media in the first half of 2020. Next came reports of romance scams: about half of all romance scams reported since 2019 started on social media, usually on Facebook or Instagram. People also told the FTC about social media messages that pretended to offer grants and other financial relief because of the pandemic — but were really trying to get money, personal information or both.

Scammers can hide behind phony profiles on social media. They can take over an account or join a virtual community you trust to encourage you to trust them. But you can make it harder for scammers to target you:

- Review your social media privacy settings and limit what you share publicly.
- Before you buy based on an ad or post, check out the company. Type its name in a search engine with words like or "scam" or "complaint."
- If someone appears on your social media and rushes you to start a friendship or romance, slow down. Read about romance scams.
- If you get a message from a friend about a grant or financial relief, call them. Did they really send that message? If not, their account may have been hacked. Check it out before you act.

  If you spot a scam, report it to the social media site and the FTC at ftc.gov/complaint.