

World Romance Scam Prevention Day: Applying a multi-faceted approach to protecting users

To mark World Romance Scam Prevention Day, the Online Dating and Discovery Association (ODDA) is using the month of October to raise awareness of the issue and highlight what our members are doing to remove scammers from their sites. We're also looking at how technology is helping platforms keep their users safe from online harm.

In this article, the ODDAs Simon Newman (SN) talks to Karima Ben Abdelmalek (KBA) from French location-based app, happn.



SN: happn have over 150 million users worldwide, what are you doing to prevent fraud on your app?

KBA: In today's digital age, online dating platforms like happn must prioritise user safety and trust. Fraud and scams are constant threats, and protecting our community requires a multi-faceted approach. At happn, we combine four necessary and complementary means to prevent fraud and ensure a secure environment for genuine connections. These are:

- **Human Intelligence to support users;**
- **Artificial intelligence on profile activity;**
- **Technological innovation on photos;**
- **Prevention or education in our communication with users.**

Our moderation team tirelessly monitors activity and handles user reports as quickly as possible, while our in-house AI solutions provide automatic detection in real-time. These methods are combined with innovation, such as biometric verification, profile certification, and continuous user education, fostering a trusted space for all users.

SN: Please tell me more about the human intelligence side – how do they help keep your users safe?

KBA: We have a moderation team that works 24/7. They deal with every report made on the application, carry out investigations and take necessary measures to ensure user safety.

They also listen to our users' requests/needs to support them in their experience on the app.

SN: More and more apps are using AI to detect scammers and monitor profile activity. How does happn leverage this technology?

KBA: We have a deep knowledge of app usage that has been developed over a number of years. As a result, we are able to quickly identify users who demonstrate suspicious behaviours.

In terms of identifying scams, we initially based our analysis on the geographical origin of the profiles. However, because scammers often use VPNs to disguise their true location, we have deepened our profile analysis.

This means we analyse a lot more information than we used to - including keywords and photos. We have also created our own technology that detects specific texts and logos and we have developed our knowledge of suspicious behaviours.

Today, we can do this almost in real-time - our objective is that a fraudulent profile should not remain on happn for more than a few minutes.

SN: We've seen a rise in deepfake photos in the past few years. As the technology evolves, they are becoming harder to spot. How do you deal with this threat?

KBA: This is something happn take very seriously. One of the ways we do this is through profile certification using biometric technology. This lets everyone know that the person they are talking to is who they say they are, which contributes towards building an environment of trust.

We are also using digital fingerprinting on photos to create a bank of images of those frequently used by scammers so that we can automatically ban them from accessing our site.

SN: You mentioned earlier about the importance of awareness and prevention among your community. Can you tell us more about this?

KBA: Yes. Awareness and prevention are a key part of a multi-faceted approach, alongside technology, in keeping our users safe. We run regular awareness campaigns within the application that give security advice on a range of issues, such as never giving out bank details to strangers.

SN: Finally, tell us a bit more about happn.

KBA: happn was launched in 2014 and since then, we have grown to over 155 million users worldwide. happn isn't just an app; it's an environment to foster trustful and authentic connections.

SN: Thank you for your time Karima.

You can find more about happn on their website: www.happn.com

You can also download their app from the App Store and Google Play.