



By: *Elise Quevedo*

# Building a culture of protection



With less than a month until Christmas, I feel a responsibility to raise a topic that continues to grow every year. Digital hoaxes and scams are evolving faster than most people can keep up with.

This season brings excitement, generosity, travel, and celebration. But at the same time, it also brings distraction.

Scammers know this, and they plan around it. They count on busy minds and tired eyes. They count on people skipping verification because the queue is long, the kids are hungry, and the to-do list grows longer each day.

A few days ago, the BBC reported on the **AI hoax** at the Buckingham Palace Christmas Market in London. It spread across social platforms like wildfire. It looked cheerful and inviting, the images were polished, glowing with holiday charm. Many people shared it without thinking twice.

I remember seeing one of the first posts and thinking it looked strange. Buckingham Palace has a shop but has never hosted anything like that, so I saved the post to revisit later. When I dug deeper, I realised it was fake.

A complete digital fabrication created to draw attention and trigger engagement. To the untrained eye, it looked real enough to trust.

But even those of us who work in tech can nearly get pulled in when the illusion is strong enough. Technology has made misinformation cheap, fast, and very convincing.

If this can happen with something as harmless as a Christmas market, imagine what can happen with fake travel deals, counterfeit charity drives, cloned customer service hotlines, or AI-generated messages that mimic your bank, your boss, or your family member.

This holiday season is the perfect time to step back and remind people about the digital hygiene that protects them. Because once we enter December, scammers get bolder, their tactics sharpen, and their timing becomes precise. And yes, they always take advantage of

our busiest weeks.

## When Hoaxes Look Real

The London Christmas Market AI hoax is a good example of the new era we are living in. AI tools can now produce realistic visuals, imitate human writing, and build full digital stories in minutes.

These hoaxes spread because they strike the perfect balance between familiarity and novelty. They look close enough to reality to be believable, with enough holiday charm to spark excitement.

And this is why digital education matters more than ever. People are not always falling for scams because they are careless. Many fall because they have not been taught what to look for.

In a world that floods us with content, vigilance becomes a survival skill.

**The tools behind these scams evolve daily, and the only defence is awareness**

Holiday scams often appear as online store clones, fake customer support accounts, counterfeit giveaway campaigns, bogus travel deals, AI-generated messages pretending to be family, fake events, markets, and pop-ups.

The tools behind these scams evolve daily, and the only defence is awareness. And awareness grows when we talk about it openly and frequently. Hence, this article.

## Holidays Are a Prime Scamming Season

I see this pattern every year. People relax their digital instincts as the holidays approach. They focus on shopping lists, discount codes, food orders, travel plans, and family events. Their

attention shifts from caution to convenience.

Scammers understand human behaviour better than you might think. They strike when people are rushing.

**People often assume everything festive must be safe**

Many holiday scams succeed because people buy from websites they haven't checked and click faster when they want a bargain. People rely on public Wi-Fi while travelling and are tired after long workdays, so they fail to cross-check details.

People often assume everything festive must be safe. The combination of speed, distraction, and trust creates the perfect storm. But it does not need to stay this way.

## What To Look For Before You Click

I want to walk through a few reminders that help people stay safe as they move through this season. These are simple habits that protect your time, your money, and your peace of mind.

Check the URL carefully. Scammers often mimic brand names with small changes that go unnoticed.

Use official airline, hotel, and retailer apps and websites. These reduce the risk of fake landing pages.

Check image details. Many AI-generated pictures have strange lighting, inconsistent shadows, distorted text, or unrealistic crowds.

Search for news coverage. Real events have credible sources.



*Avoid public Wi-Fi for holiday shopping or banking. Hotspots are high-risk entry points*

Never pay for discounted items by bank transfer. Use secure payment gateways with fraud protection.

Avoid public Wi-Fi for holiday shopping or banking. Hotspots are high-risk entry points.

Look up the seller. If reviews or company details are missing, walk away.

Be cautious of charity requests. Many fake charities appear in December when people feel generous.

These steps take seconds. They can save people from months of stress.

## Scams Are Not Only Digital

People also let their guard down when travelling. Airports get crowded, and hotels get busy. People sometimes lose track of their belongings and even children! Scammers operate inside physical spaces, too.

Reminders that I use myself that will help you too:

Keep devices in zipped compartments.

Use charging banks instead of public charging stations.

Cover your keyboard when entering PINs.

Avoid sharing personal details in public spaces.

Use a VPN when accessing sensitive information abroad.

Security is not something we practise online or offline. It is something we should practise everywhere.

## The Importance of Sharing Awareness

There is another side to this conversation. We who work in tech, security, digital strategy, or communications have a responsibility to keep sharing updates.

People rely on us more than we realise. When we explain what is happening and why, it empowers others to make better decisions.

**The more we share, the faster we build a culture of protection rather than panic**

Digital literacy is a community effort. It grows when we talk about it, when we remind each other, when leaders take it seriously and teach their teams to stay safe.

The more we share, the faster we build a culture of protection rather than panic. Let's not make the often-used "sharing is caring" phrase a meaningless phrase.

## What Worries People Most

During the holidays, fear usually comes from one of three places. People fear losing money, embarrassment if they fall for a scam, and that technology is becoming too powerful to trust.



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As mentioned many times, technology has accelerated faster than public education. AI trickery is accessible to anyone with a cell phone. And many people feel unprepared for what is coming.

It is the reason why education matters more than ever. When people understand what today's hoaxes and scams look like, they regain confidence.

When they know how to check details, verify sources, and slow down before clicking, they reclaim control.

Knowledge reduces fear.

## A safer holiday culture

Digital hoaxes and scams are not slowing down. They are becoming more innovative and more creative. It means our awareness must rise with them.

I do believe that we can create a safer holiday culture if we stay informed and keep each other informed. We need to slow down before clicking and teach our friends and families the signs.

As technology accelerates and scammers adapt, are we ready to adapt faster? Take one minute today to check your digital habits. Share this reminder with someone you care about.

Awareness can protect your holidays more than any password can. Remember, together, we are stronger.