

Deepfake Romance: 37 Arrested In AI Model Deepfake Scam



Hong Kong police have uncovered a sophisticated fraud operation that merged deepfake technology with traditional romance scams, resulting in losses exceeding HK\$34 million (US\$4.37 million). The operation, run from two industrial buildings in Kowloon Bay, illustrates that scammers are firmly updating their MO to use artificial intelligence to bolster their scams and make them more believable.

The scammers methodology provides a glimpse into how the scammers did their thing. Operating in shifts, the group recruited young people, including students, to create fake dating profiles enhanced by deepfake technology. They harvested photos of attractive individuals from social media, using AI to generate convincing composite images and videos. Some scammers even employed deepfake technology during live video calls with victims, demonstrating an unprecedented level of technological sophistication in their deception.

“New recruits would be trained to use different dating apps to fish for targets, who would usually be based in Taiwan or [Southeast] Asia, such as in Singapore and Malaysia,” Superintendent Charles Fung Pui-kei said. “Scammers may have hired models to pose for deepfake videos as well, which would be combined with photos generated with AI technology,”

What makes this case particularly noteworthy is its industrial scale and organization. The operation maintained two professional-looking offices - one spanning 1,000 square feet with four rooms, the other a 700-square-foot open plan space. Police seized an arsenal of digital tools: 116 mobile phones, eight computers, and detailed operation manuals. The investigation also uncovered significant wealth accumulation, with authorities seizing HK\$6.8 million in cash, 2kg in gold bars, luxury watches, and an expensive car - tangible evidence of the operation's profitability.

This case represents the second major deepfake fraud syndicate uncovered in Hong Kong since October 2024, when authorities dismantled a similar operation that had defrauded victims across Asia of HK\$360 million. The rapid succession of these cases points to an alarming trend: the emergence of industrial-scale fraud operations that leverage cutting-edge AI technology to create increasingly convincing deceptions.

As Superintendent Charles Fung highlighted in the press conference, investigators are now examining potential links between these operations, suggesting the possibility of a broader, more organized network of AI-powered fraud factories across the region.