Reflecting Ireland

An insight into consumer behavioural change in Ireland

Young, confident and most at risk of fraud



ptsb Altogether more human

November 2026

Young, confident and most at risk of fraud

Why feeling equipped to spot scams does not always protect us from them

Younger adults stand out for both their confidence in spotting scams and their experience of falling victim to fraud. Under-35s are the most likely to say they are very confident they can spot a scam, yet those aged 25–34 are the most likely age group to be victims of fraud: 43%, compared with 18% of adults aged 55 and over.

There is also a wide gap between confidence and accurate judgement. Across all adults surveyed, 83% say they are confident they could spot a scam text or email, yet only 29% of those who were shown a genuine banking message correctly identified it as so[1].

With a focus on the experience of younger adults, this report examines how targeted approaches, everyday online habits and the mental shortcuts people use to assess messages may shape people's vulnerability as fraud becomes more sophisticated and convincing.



[1] Half of all survey respondents were presented with a legitimate text message from a bank, and the other half were shown a fraudulent message purporting to be from a bank.

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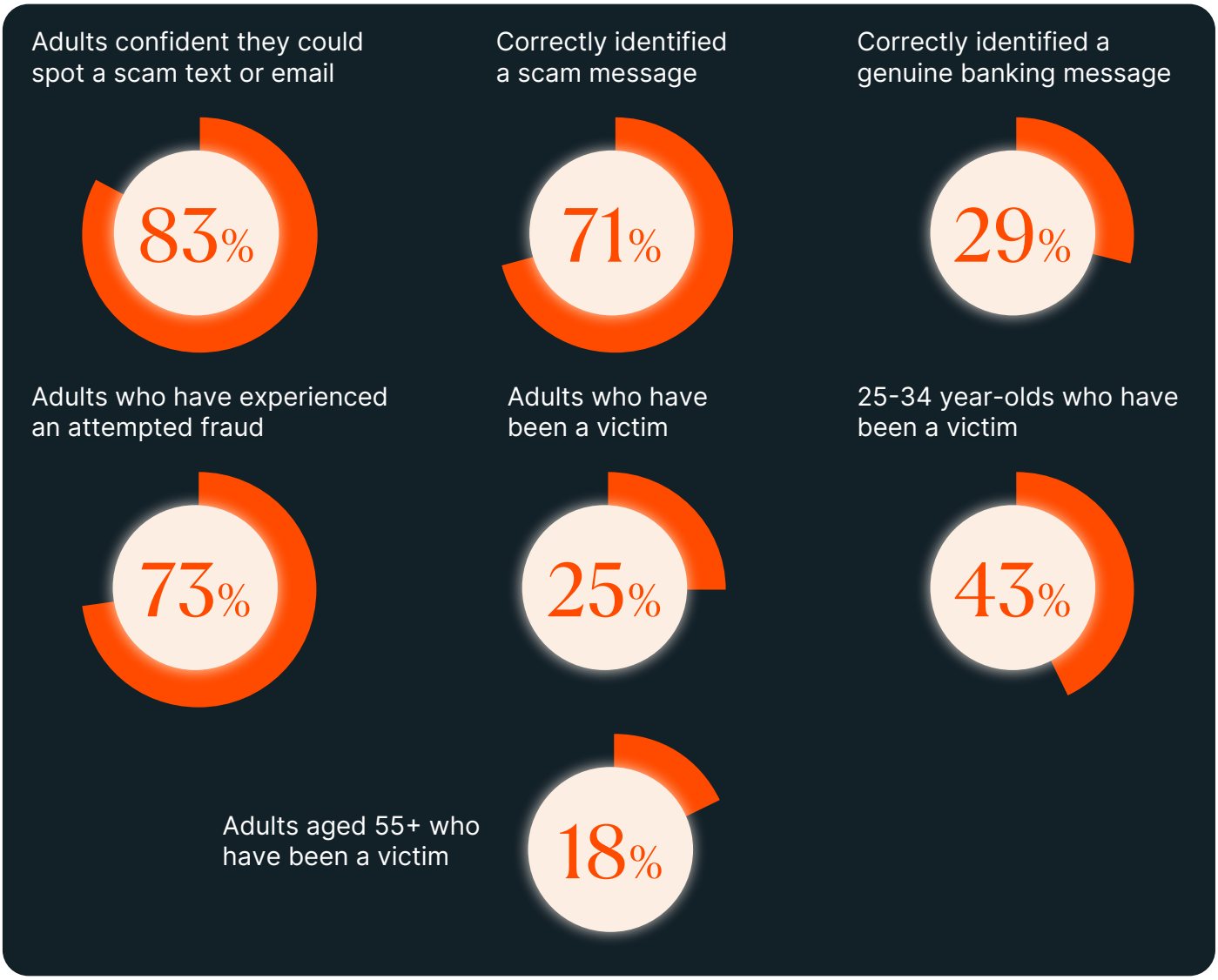
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Executive Summary

The research shows that confidence in spotting fraud does not always translate into an ability to distinguish genuine communications from scams. The rules and instincts people rely on do not consistently help them make that distinction in a crowded, high-pressure digital environment. This contrast is particularly striking among younger adults: under-35s are the most likely to say they are very confident they can spot a scam, yet those aged 25–34 report the highest rate of fraud incidence, at 43%. The findings highlight the limits of confidence alone and the importance of independent verification.



What the findings tell us

- Younger adults are not protected by digital fluency alone. Their confidence, high level of online activity and higher exposure to targeted offers combine to create a distinct vulnerability.
- Fraudsters are moving beyond the most familiar formats. Opportunity-based scams such as ticket, romance, investment, rental and QR-code scams exploit moments when relevance, hope or urgency can outweigh our caution.
- Effective protection means people taking a moment to look again: question first impressions, verify unexpected contact independently and report anything suspicious.
- Confidence can create blind spots. Consumers may feel protected because they recognise familiar warning signs, while less familiar or more convincing scams pass through those filters.
- Rules of thumb need to be updated as scams evolve. Warning signs remain useful, but no single rule reliably establishes whether a message is genuine.

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High confidence in spotting scams not replicated when tested

The message test revealed a marked difference in how adults assessed fraudulent and genuine contact. While 71% correctly recognised the scam message, only 29% correctly recognised the genuine banking message[2]. This suggests that some consumers may be applying broad suspicion rather than evaluating each communication on its own merits and evidence.

	All adults	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Confident they could spot a scam	83%	85%	83%	88%	83%	82%
Very confident they could spot a scam	27%	41%	41%	30%	20%	19%
Correctly identified the scam message	71%	72%	70%	71%	72%	70%
Correctly identified the genuine message	29%	43%	39%	23%	25%	24%

Confidence can narrow our attention

Overconfidence bias describes the tendency to place too much confidence in our own knowledge or ability. In the context of fraud, that confidence can reduce the impulse to slow down, validate the source or reconsider an initial judgement. The risk is not simply trusting a scam. It is also believing that our existing approach to identify and avoid scams is already sufficient to protect us.

[2] Half of all survey respondents were presented with a legitimate text message from a bank and the other half were shown a fraudulent message purporting to be from a bank.

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The stats tell a contradictory story

83%
of all adults confident they can spot a fraudulent message

29%
of all adults correctly identify a genuine message

43%
of 25-34 year olds say they have been a victim of fraud



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Generational fraud vulnerability



Adults aged 25–34 are the age group most likely to report having fallen victim to financial fraud. More than two in five (43%) of that age group say they have been victims, compared with 25% across all adults and 18% of those aged 55 and over. They are also among the most assured in their ability to recognise scams: 41% say they are very confident, the same proportion as those aged 18–24.



41%	18-24
41%	25-34
30%	35-44
20%	45-54
19%	55+



16%	18-24
28%	25-34
13%	35-44
13%	45-54
12%	55+



28%	18-24
43%	25-34
22%	35-44
25%	45-54
18%	55+

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Why younger people may be more exposed

Confidence

Feeling sure of their ability to recognise fraud may make people less inclined to question a familiar-looking message or seek a second opinion.

Effective targeting

Fraudsters can use people's online interests and activity to create convincing scams involving tickets, investments, rentals, promotions or impersonation.

Frictionless habits

We're all used to shopping and paying online quickly. But when everything happens at speed, people can sometimes skip the checks that can help keep us safe.

Cognitive load

Our busy, highly connected lives create distraction and digital fatigue. Under pressure, people are more likely to rely on instinct and be influenced by urgency, authority, fear or hope.

Older adults: caution can protect but risks missing genuine messages

Lower confidence

Only 19% of adults aged 55+ are very confident they can spot a scam, compared with 41% of those aged 25–34. Yet, when tested through this research, both groups correctly identified the scam text at the same rate, 70%.

Reported experience

Among adults aged 55+, 18% report having been victims of fraud, compared with 43% of those aged 25–34, challenging the traditional assumption that older people are more vulnerable to fraud.

Cautious shortcuts

Only 24% of adults aged 55+ correctly identified a genuine banking text[3]. A cautious approach may help explain why some genuine messages are ignored, although it is important to note that those who participated in the survey were not asked for reasons as to why they ignore messages.

Independent verification

Neither confidence nor suspicion alone should confirm whether a message is genuine. It is important that both younger and older people verify the contact independently rather than relying on their first impression.

Two Generations, Different Risks

Compare 25–34 and 55+:



[3] Half of all survey respondents were presented with a legitimate text message from a bank and the other half were shown a fraudulent message purporting to be from a bank.

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Fraud is evolving around familiar defences

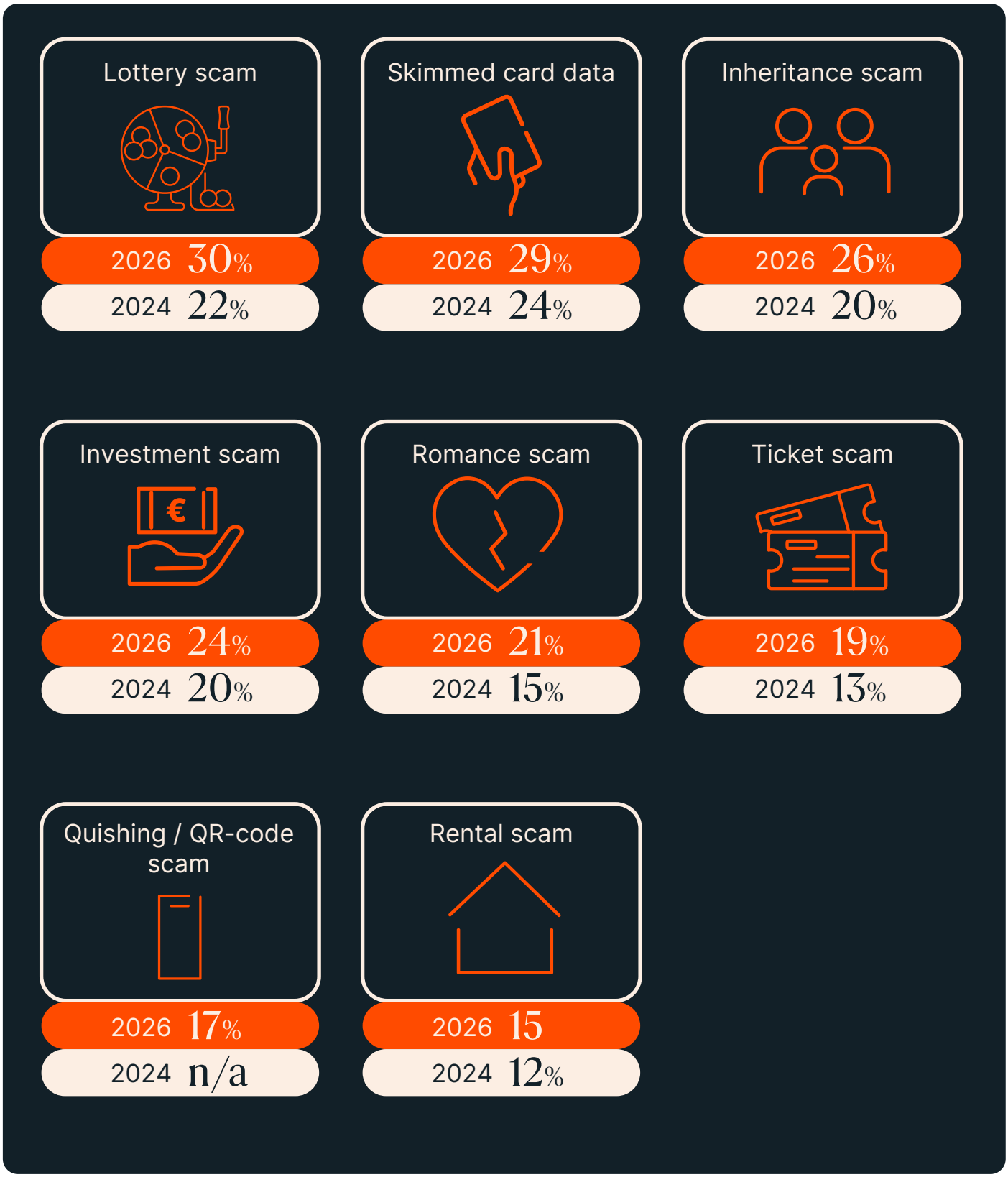
The overall proportion of adults experiencing attempted fraud or becoming victims has changed only modestly since our previous report on fraud in 2024. What is changing is how fraudsters operate, with a wider range of techniques and greater use of technology to make fraudulent contact feel more relevant, timely and credible.





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A broader range of opportunity-based scams



Relevance can increase risk

Opportunity-based scams catch people at a moment when they are looking for something specific, such as a ticket, accommodation or an investment, or when they receive what appears to be a genuine message from a trusted brand. When something feels relevant or timely, people may be more focused on the opportunity than on checking whether it is genuine. AI and increasingly convincing impersonation can make these scams even harder to spot.

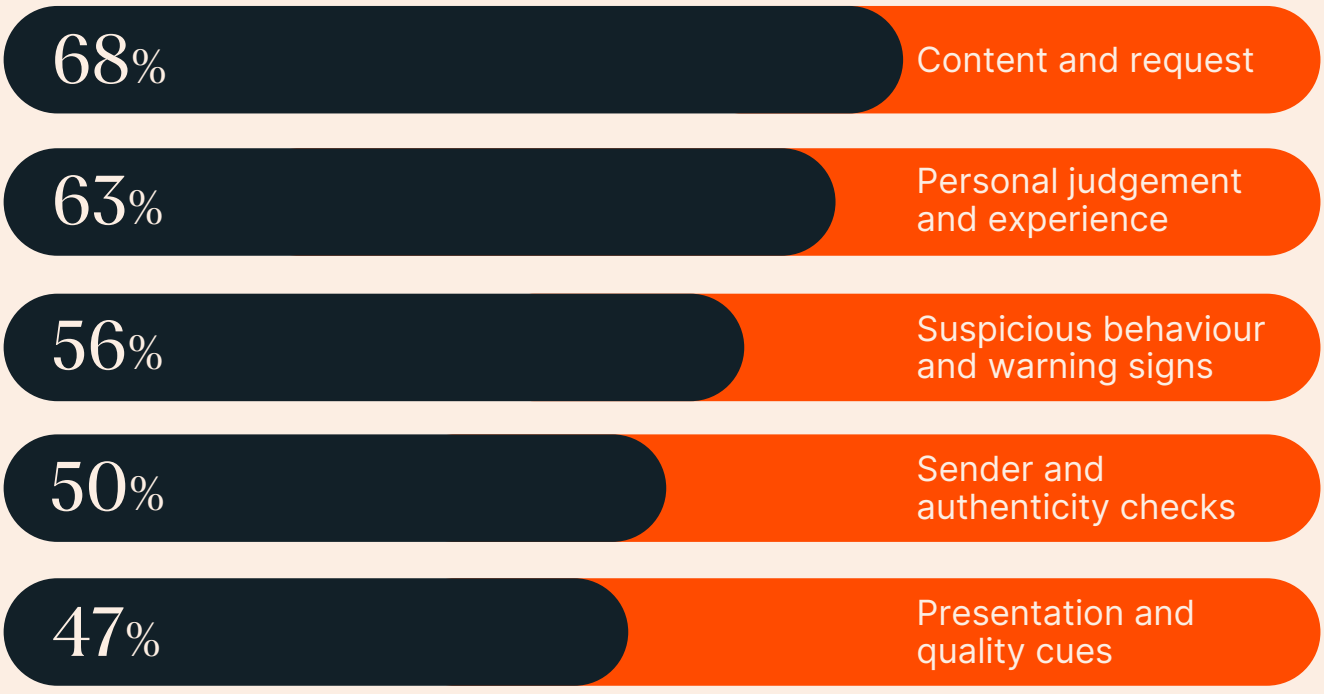
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How behaviour shapes vulnerability



People use mental shortcuts, known in Behavioural Science as heuristics, to manage the volume of messages they receive. These heuristics conserve attention and can provide immediate protection. Links, requests for personal information, unusual wording and urgency are all meaningful cues. However, relying too heavily on these guidelines alone can also cause problems. For example, a person could become suspicious of the wording in a text, as that is subjective, and this may lead them to ignore a genuine message while a sophisticated scam that avoids familiar red flags appears credible.

What people assess / rely on



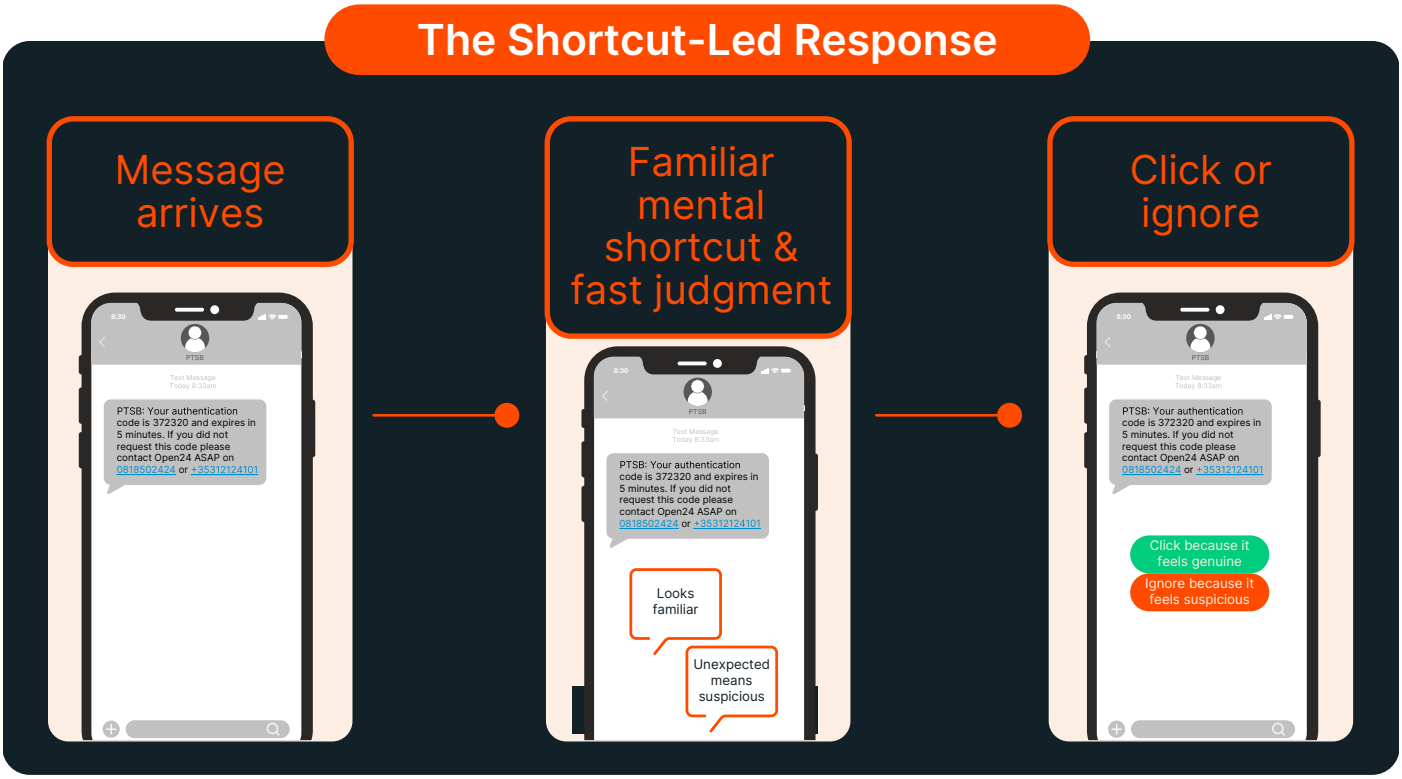
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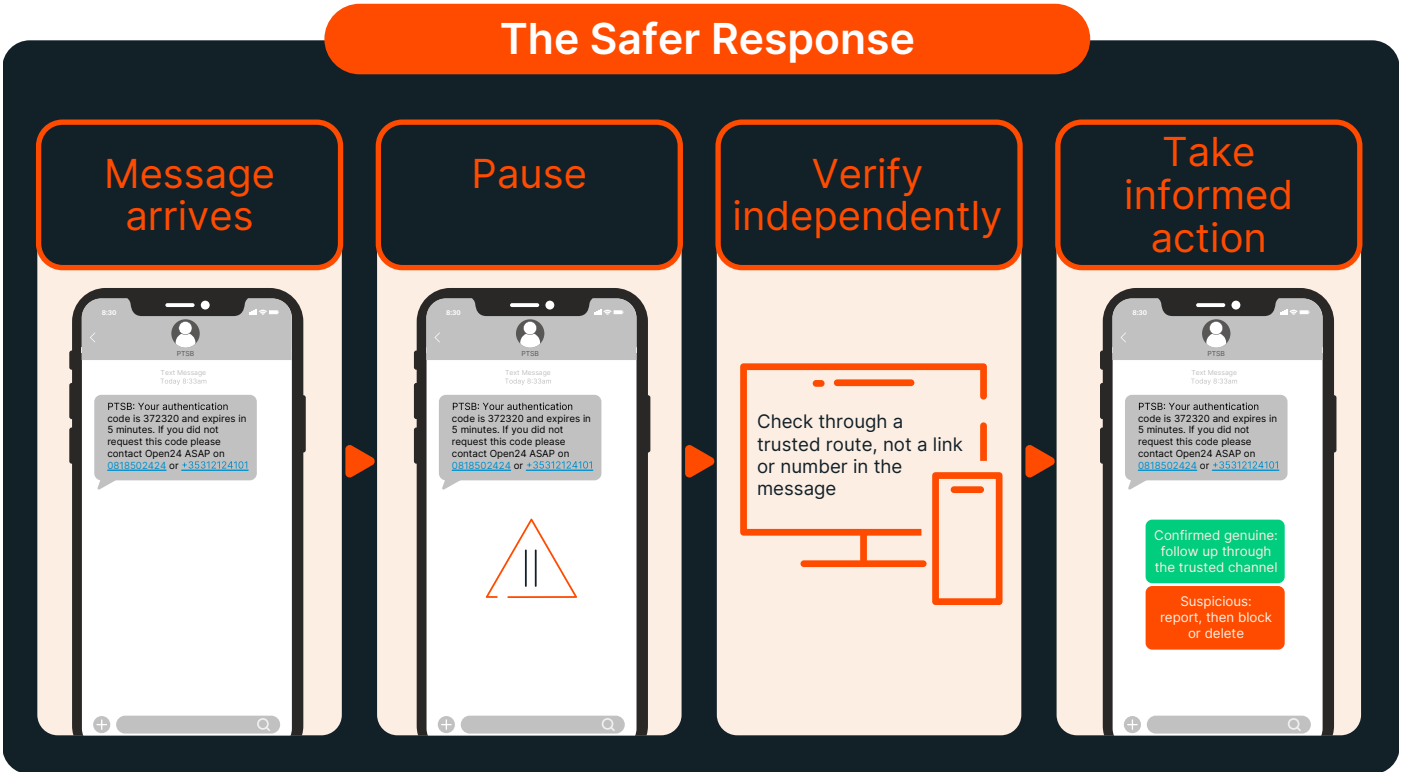
Our instinct can feel like evidence

Nearly one quarter of adults cite instinct or gut feeling when judging a communication. Instinct draws on experience, but it is also shaped by repeated exposure and familiar patterns. As scams evolve, what looks genuine at first glance may simply reflect what people have learned to watch out for in the past, rather than newer emerging risks.

Default distrust can lead to missed warnings

Dismissing every unexpected message can mean missing genuine fraud warnings as well as scams. The aim is not to trust more readily, but to check uncertain contact through a separate, trusted channel rather than simply ignoring it.





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Looks Real? Look Again

Financial fraud is fuelled by psychology and enabled by technology. Fraudsters exploit the same human tendencies that support everyday decision-making: trust, speed, familiarity, hope and deference to authority.

Practical steps to check messages and respond safely

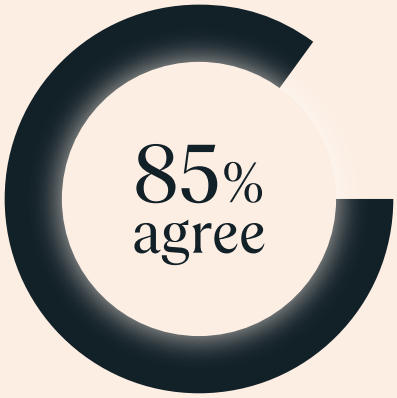
- Pause when a message creates urgency, fear, excitement or pressure.
- Check whether the communication is relevant to something you have actually done or requested.
- Verify the sender through an independently sourced number, website or official app such as fraudsmart.scamchecker.ie rather than using the contact route in the message.
- Review the whole communication, not one familiar signal such as a logo, spelling quality or the absence of a link.
- Report suspicious contact. Only 32% say they would report a suspicious message, limiting collective visibility of emerging techniques. If you think you have been scammed, contact your bank immediately. PTSB's fraud support is available 24/7; you can email phishingalerts@ptsb.ie, call +353 1 669 5851, visit a branch, and freeze your card through the PTSB app.
- Anyone who receives a suspicious message should avoid clicking links or responding, and report or mark the message as spam through their email or mobile provider. Where money or personal information has been shared, or fraud is suspected, the individual should contact their bank where relevant and report the matter to their local Garda station.
- Revisit personal rules of thumb regularly as scam methods, channels and impersonation techniques evolve.



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Keeping pace with fraud requires practical, timely support

Want more awareness of the latest fraud techniques



Believe increased AI use will create more sophisticated fraud



The demand is not for more generic awareness alone. It is for timely, practical support that reflects how fraud is changing and helps people verify before acting. Tools such as PTSB Protect can provide an additional layer of support by checking incoming texts for known fraudulent links, phone numbers and scam wording, alerting customers to potential threats. Customers can opt in through the PTSB app; detection relies on known fraud sources, so independent checks remain important.

Pause **Check** **Verify** **Report**



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Conclusion

The research challenges assumptions about who is most vulnerable to fraud and what protection looks like. The experience of 25–34-year-olds is particularly telling; strong confidence in spotting scams coexists with the highest reported rate of fraud impacts. The study also reveals a wider finding that despite a high level of awareness of fraud among the general public, gaps remain in message recognition and reporting.

This is not a simple story of awareness or a judgement on individual behaviour. It is a reflection of the environment in which decisions are made. Consumers are navigating high volumes of communications, sophisticated impersonation and increasingly relevant opportunities, often at speed. In that setting, confidence and instinct can become substitutes for verification.

The best protection is to pause and look again before acting. Check for warning signs, verify unexpected contact through a trusted source and report anything suspicious. As scams evolve and technology changes what they look like, the checks and verifications that we rely on must evolve too.



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Methodology

The Reflecting Ireland Q3 2026 research was conducted by Core Research through an online survey of 1,000 adults aged 18 and over living in the Republic of Ireland. Fieldwork took place from 10 to 23 September 2026. The sample is nationally representative based on age, gender, region and social class, with a margin of error of +/-3.02% at the 95% confidence level. Comparisons are made with Q2 2024 research conducted between 10 and 26 April 2024 and with the 2022 wave where available.

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