

Snapchat Media Retrieval for Novice Device Users

Zubeida Casmod Khan, Thulani Mashiane and Nobubele Angel Shozi¹

Abstract: With roughly 30 million monthly users Snapchat is becoming an increasingly popular photo messaging application. Snapchat allows users to send time-limited photos and videos to other Snapchat users with the promise of it being deleted forever afterward. The use of Snapchat has become prevalent amongst mobile users, mainly because of the ephemeral nature of the Snapchat media; Snapchat's policy promises that a user's embarrassing media is deleted after a short viewing time. However, the promise that this media is deleted from a device after viewing time is short-lived. There is some evidence that Snapchat media has been retrieved using digital forensic software. Apart from the fact that researchers have successfully used digital forensic tools to extract this media from devices, there are easier ways to access Snapchat media. This coupled with the fact that there is evidence that some use the application for sexting, makes it extremely dangerous for unaware users. This paper will present an experiment for image retrieval on Snapchat with various devices. The purpose of this study is to raise awareness on the possibility, and the ease of image retrieval from Snapchat. It was found that researchers were able to retrieve pictures from Snapchat, using simple procedures that are easily enough for novice smartphone users to employ: not necessarily hackers or information security specialists, but an average smartphone user. The results indicate that, it is indeed possible for novices to retrieve Snapchat data, and as such this is a cyber-security threat. A user's Snapchat media could be easily saved by novice users, and there is, thus, a privacy vulnerability. This indicates that Snapchat does not protect its server using API protection techniques, and that such protection is required. Until such API protection techniques are employed, it is the responsibility of the user to ensure that the application is used carefully.

Keywords: Snapchat, privacy, cyber security, vulnerability, image retrieval.