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Phone users to get better protection from hackers

By Louisa Tang (/action/news/storiesby/storiesby/678458/storiesby.do?sortBy=latest&bylineId=1111626&pageNum=0), TODAY **Posted** 15 Jan 2016 10:56



File photo of a youth in Singapore using a mobile phone. (Photo: Francine Lim)

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SINGAPORE: The widespread use of mobile phones has created more opportunities for hackers to steal information from them, but two projects are under way in Singapore to give users better protection from cyberattacks.

The Institute for Infocomm Research (I2R) has developed a system to detect if fingerprints used in recognition systems, which can be found in newer mobile phone models, are real or spoofed.

Separately, researchers from Singapore Management University (SMU) are working on a detection mechanism for facial authentication functions on mobile phones, which will be able to prevent hackers from using photos or videos to gain access.

These were two projects showcased at the inaugural Singapore Cybersecurity R&D Conference on Thursday (Jan 14). The two-day conference, held at the Singapore University of Technology and Design, will bring together about 400 academics and practitioners through talks and exhibits.

Dr Vrizlynn Thing, department head of I2R's Cyber Security and Intelligence division, said that fingerprint recognition hacking has been a problem ever since the system was implemented in mobile devices.

Motorola first introduced a fingerprint reader in its Android-based Atrix 4G model in 2011, while Apple rolled out the Touch ID function in 2013, with the iPhone 5S. Touch ID is now a widespread feature in the newer Apple mobile devices, including the iPad Air 2 and iPad Mini 4.

I2R's Fingerprint Biometrics Liveness Detection system counters hacking attempts by sensing air bubbles and ridges on fingertips to differentiate from spoofed fingerprints, which hackers fashion from materials like gelatin or latex.

Users now have more to protect on their phones, with the devices storing confidential data such as emails, contacts and photos. Dr Thing said that hackers are getting more sophisticated, while common vulnerabilities are still being exploited.

"People are getting more and more knowledgeable in terms of attacks. Of course, the common vulnerabilities are being exploited. But there are trends of more sophisticated attackers who have better resources and stronger financial backings to be able to do such type of (hackings)."

Facial authentication hacking is also "quite a common problem" among mobile device users now, said Dr Li Yan, a research fellow at SMU's School of Information Systems.

Facial authentication was first implemented in Android mobile phones in 2011, through the feature "Face Unlock". The system that Dr Li and his fellow researchers are working on, called FaceLive, works with the camera and inertial sensors already available in mobile phones.

It gets users to move the mobile phone in front of their face to capture different angles of it.

The team is currently working on the demo, and is contacting some companies - including local banks - on implementing it in their systems.

Meanwhile, a new National Cybersecurity R&D Laboratory (<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/national-cybersecurity-r/2424340.html>) at the National University of Singapore will begin operating by the end of this year.

The lab, supported by the National Research Foundation at a budget of S\$8.4 million over three years, will allow researchers in Singapore and around the world to simulate small- and large-scale cyberattacks using its computers.

Read the original TODAY report here (<http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/phone-users-get-better-protection-hackers>).

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