

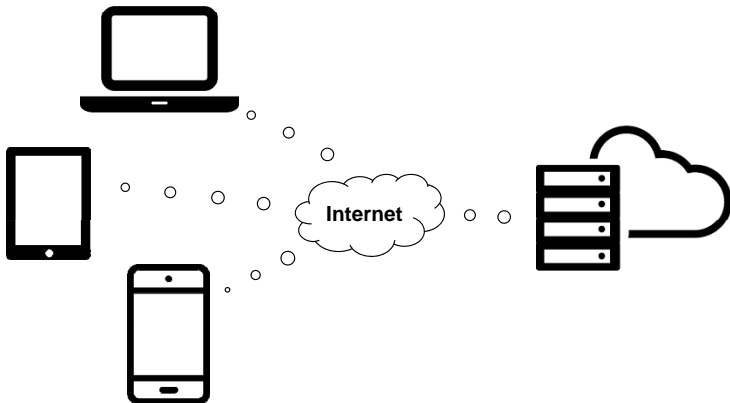
Automatic Forgery of Cryptographically Consistent Messages to Identify Security Vulnerabilities in Mobile Services

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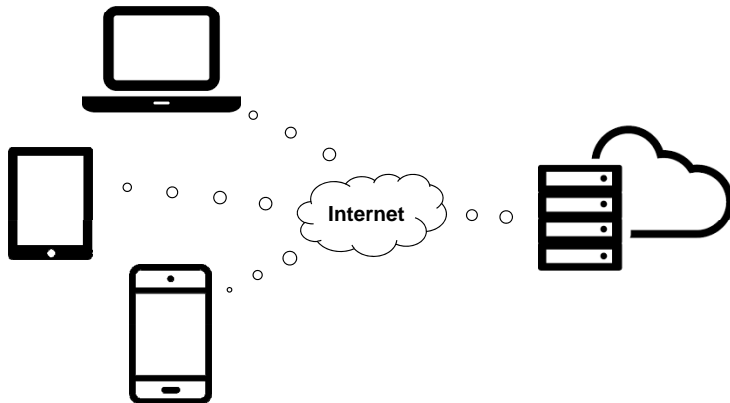
Feb 24th, 2016

Mobile Apps Often Need to Talk to a Remote server



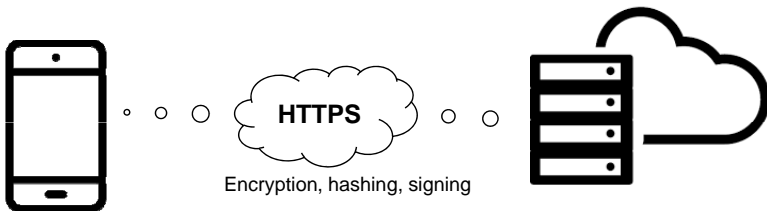
- Saving resources (e.g., energy, and storage) on mobile
- Providing customized data (e.g., only retrieving the weather where you live)

Users Have to be Authenticated to Use the Service



- Server needs to know who you are, then push the data of your interest
- Crucial to ensure the **authentication** process is secure

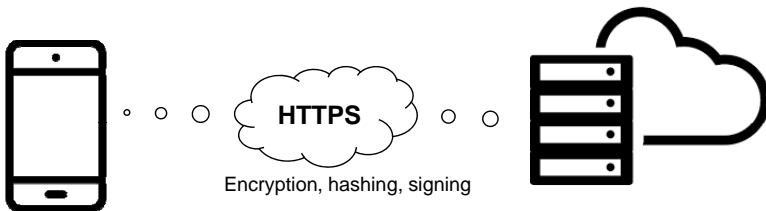
Various Ways Used for the Authentication Security



App developers have been using

- 1 Encryption of crucial data (e.g., user name, password)
- 2 Hashing (e.g., through MD5, SHA1) the user password
- 3 Signing (e.g., through HMAC) each message

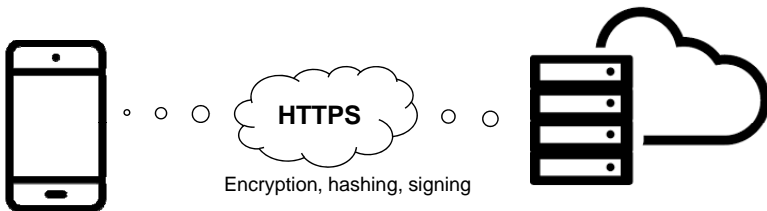
Are They Enough?



Can a malicious client forge a valid message?

- Completely control a client app execution
- Reverse engineer how a valid message is generated
- Forge new valid authentication messages

Security Implications



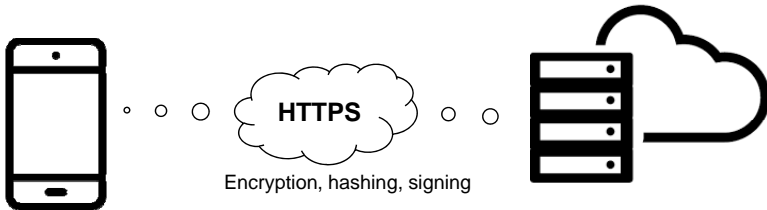
Testing Various Vulnerabilities at Server Side

- Password brute forcing attack
- Leaked password probing (password reuse practice)
- Access token hijacking, SQL injection

Solutions in Web Applications

- 1 **Limiting the number of login attempts.** One simple solution app developers can adopt is to keep a login attempt state at server side and limit the number of login attempts within a certain time window.
- 2 **Using CAPTCHA.** Password brute forcing is not a new attack, and there are already solutions to mitigate this. One way that has been widely used on the desktop is the CAPTCHA [[VABHL03](#)].
- 3 **Two-factor authentication.** The most effective way to defeat all these malicious login attacks, we believe, is to adopt two-factor authentication [[Wei88](#)].

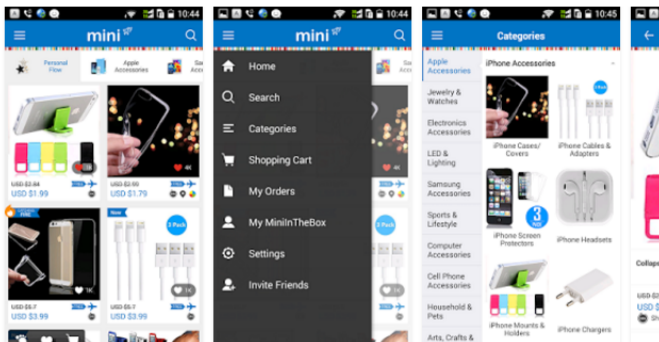
Introducing AUTOFORGE



AUTOFORGE

- Given a mobile app, and few inputs
- A system that can automatically generate legal request messages via *protocol field inference* and *crypto API replay*
- Test various security vulnerabilities at mobile app's server side

A Running Example: Mini Online Shopping App



- “Mini offers a convenient way for customers around the world to **shop** for a wide variety of cool gadgets, electronic accessories, watches and lifestyle products at affordable prices, all with FREE SHIPPING!”
- **Installs:** 1,000,000 - 5,000,000 (according to Google Play)

Observation of a Traced Network Packet

```

GET
/api/rest/app_server.php?sign_method=md5&client=android&app_key=A4H0P4JN&format=json&cv=3.9.
0&country_code=US&country=USA&currency=USD&timestamp=2015-08-
01%2013%3A00%3A59&v=1.2&pwd=695409430D3127CB969820016CB308F5&email=testappserver%40gmail.com
&method=vela.user.login&app_secret=4ce19ca8fcd150a4w4pj9llah2499lut&language=en&sign=424978B
759DA07CF8C8C41CCB5B8E718&keys=app_key%2Capp_secret%2Cclient%2Ccountry%2Ccountry_code%2Ccurr
ency%2Ccv%2Cemail%2Cformat%2Clanguage%2Cmethod%2Cpwd%2Csign_method%2Ctimestamp%2Cv&sid=1d3a4
0c25a86417c979fd847d7173e33 HTTP/1.1
x-newrelic-id: XAYCV1ZADgsAUFRTBQ==
User-agent: LightInTheBox 3.9.0(Android; 16; 4.1.1; 480_752; WIFI; generic; M353; en)
Host: api.miniinthebox.com
Connection: Keep-Alive
Accept-Encoding: gzip
Cookie: cookie_test=please_accept_for_session; AKAMAI_FEO_TEST=B; ASRV=A_201505081100

```

```

{"result":"fail","code":"1001001","info":[],"error_msg":["Invalid email or password (User)"]}

```

- Many fields in a request message (18).
- We are interested in just a few of them, timestamp, pwd, email, sign

Challenges

```

GET
/api/rest/app_server.php?sign_method=md5&client=android&app_key=A4H0P4JN&format=json&cv=3.9.0&country_code=US&country=USA&currency=USD&timestamp=2015-08-01%2013%3A00%3A59&v=1.2&pwd=695409430D3127CB969820016CB308F5&email=testappserver%40gmail.com&method=vela.user.login&app_secret=4ce19ca8fcd150a4w4pj9llah24991ut&language=en&sign=424978B759DA07CF8C8C41CCB5B8E718&keys=app_key%2Capp_secret%2Cclient%2Ccountry%2Ccountry_code%2Ccurrency%2Ccv%2Cemail%2Cformat%2Clanguage%2Cmethod%2Cpwd%2Csign_method%2Ctimestamp%2Cv&sid=1d3a40c25a86417c979fd847d7173e33 HTTP/1.1
x-newrelic-id: XAYCV1ZADgsAUFRTBQ==
User-agent: LightInTheBox 3.9.0(Android; 16; 4.1.1; 480_752; WIFI; generic; M353; en)
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```

```

{"result":"fail","code":"1001001","info":[],"error_msg":["Invalid email or password (User)"]}

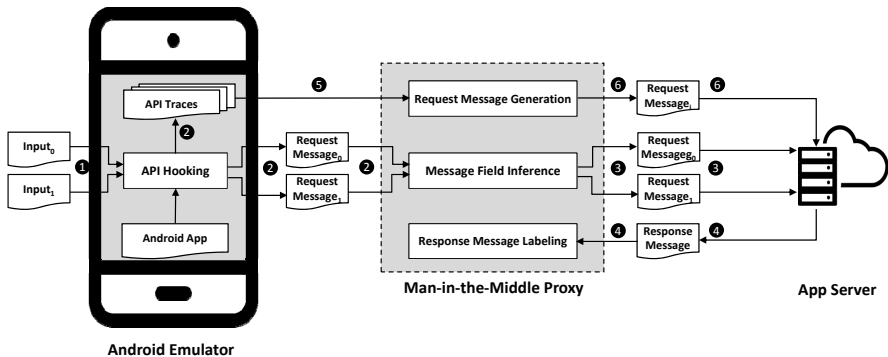
```

- Recognizing the protocol fields
- Identifying the cryptographic functions
- Deciding when to terminate
- Generating the valid messages

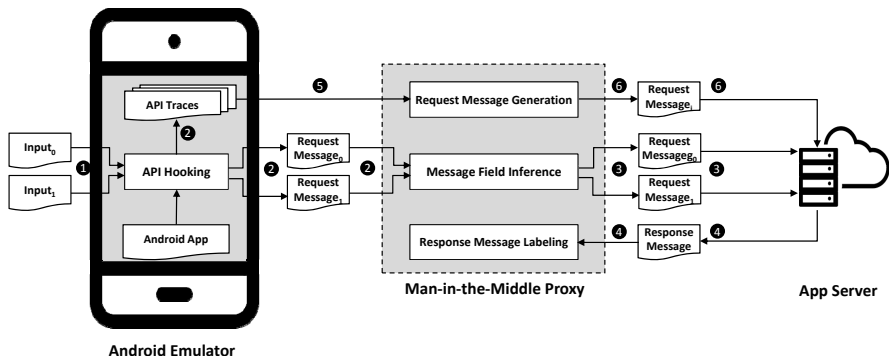
Key Insights

- **Inferring the message fields with diffed input**
- **Dynamically hooking well-known cryptographic APIs**
- **Labeling response message with controlled input**
- **Replaying the cryptographic function execution**

Overview of AUTOFORGE



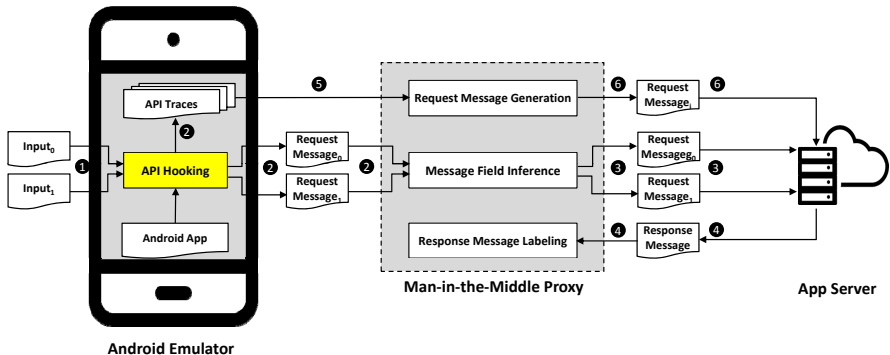
Overview of AUTOFORGE



HTTPS

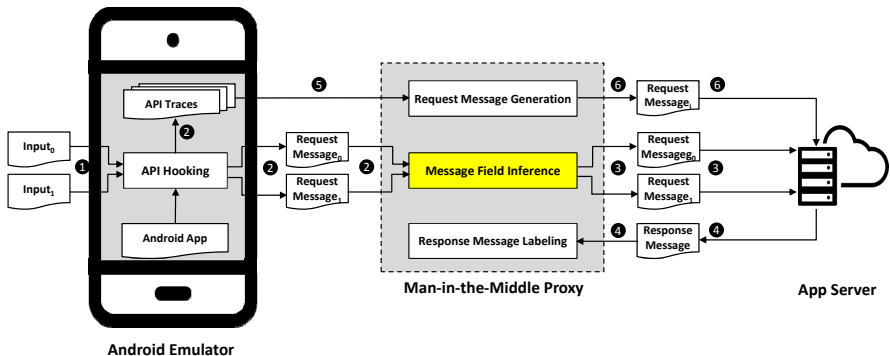
Since we control the client, we installed a root certificate on the emulator to make sure the proxy can get HTTPS messages.

API Hooking



- Run the app and type in the inputs
- Hooks the [well-known cryptographic functions](#) [Sch99]

Message Field Inference



- **Message field identification** that splits the messages into a set of fields
- **Field semantic inference** that infers the meaning of the identified fields

Message Field Identification: Differed Message Alignment

```
GET /api/rest/app_server.php?sign_method=md5&client=android&app_key=A4H0P4JN&format=json&cv=3.9.0&country_code=US&country=USA&currency=USD&timestamp=2015-08-05%2003%3A19%3A26&v=1.2&pwd=695409430D3127CB158002B92FEC1831&email=testappserveralpha%40gmail.com&method=vela.user.login&app_secret=4ce19ca8fcd150a4w4pj91llah24991ut&language=en&sign=94056C9BE079510079D0BF9A372B4E65&keys=app_key%2Capp_secret%2Cclient%2Ccountry%2Ccountry_code%2Ccurrency%2Ccv%2Cemail%2Cformat%2Clanguage%2Cmethod%2Cpwd%2Csign_method%2Ctimestamp%2Cv&sid=ajnr9b3b2ktg1ldcucg661683 HTTP/1.1
x-newrelic-id: XAYCV1ZADgsAUFRTBQ==
User-agent: LightInTheBox 3.9.0(Android; 16; 4.1.1; 480_752; WIFI; generic; en)
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Connection: Keep-Alive
Accept-Encoding: gzip
Cookie: cookie_test=please_accept_for_session; AKAMAI_FEO_TEST=B; ASRV=A_201505081100
```

(a) Client Request with a Wrong Password

```
{"result": "fail", "code": "1001001", "info": [], "error_msg": ["Invalid email or password (User)"]}
```

(b) Server Response for the Wrong Password

```
GET /api/rest/app_server.php?sign_method=md5&client=android&app_key=A4H0P4JN&format=json&cv=3.9.0&country_code=US&country=USA&currency=USD&timestamp=2015-08-05%2003%3A20%3A01&v=1.2&pwd=A9672D9F5F7414D5B996964A7F07727E&email=testappserverbeta%40gmail.com&method=vela.user.login&app_secret=4ce19ca8fcd150a4w4pj91llah24991ut&language=en&sign=D2A173BEB8F169DD1A81CA8D59AD2C69&keys=app_key%2Capp_secret%2Cclient%2Ccountry%2Ccountry_code%2Ccurrency%2Ccv%2Cemail%2Cformat%2Clanguage%2Cmethod%2Cpwd%2Csign_method%2Ctimestamp%2Cv&sid=ajnr9b3b2ktg1ldcucg661683 HTTP/1.1
x-newrelic-id: XAYCV1ZADgsAUFRTBQ==
User-agent: LightInTheBox 3.9.0(Android; 16; 4.1.1; 480_752; WIFI; generic; en)
Host: api.miniinthebox.com
Connection: Keep-Alive
Accept-Encoding: gzip
Cookie: cookie_test=please_accept_for_session; AKAMAI_FEO_TEST=B; ASRV=A_201505081100
```

(c) Client Request with a Correct Password

```
{"result": "success", "code": "1000000", "info": {"sessionkey": "6a6ac7ff985eb08524e89392ecladdcb"}, "error_msg": []}
```

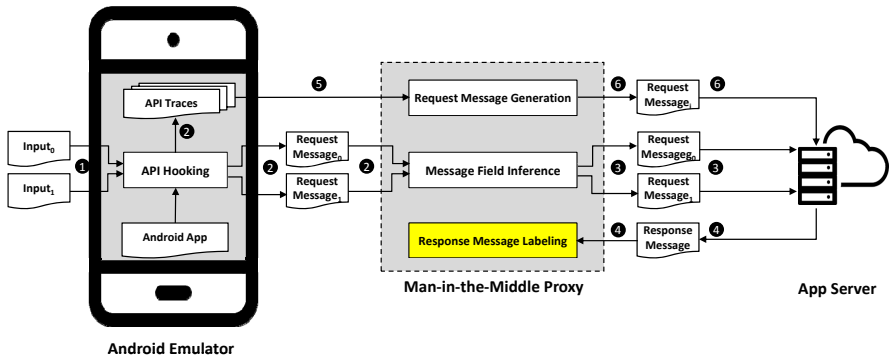
(d) Server Response for the Correct Password

Field Semantic Inference (Optional)

Approaches

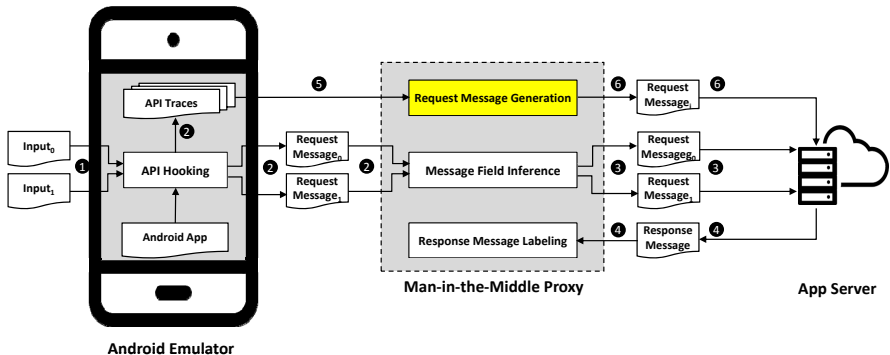
- **Pattern Matching.** System data such as `timestamp` always has patterns (e.g., 2015-08-05), we can use pattern
- **Content Matching.** Since we control the user input and some user input would not get changed, then we directly search the diffed field (e.g., a `username` we entered)
- **Degree of Differences.** By measuring the degree of the similarities, we can easily identify the cryptographically computed fields (such as `pwd` and `sign`)

Response Message Labeling



- If the Wrong(correct) password responses are identical, we will use the entire message as a Wrong password signature, if the Wrong(correct) password responses are different, we will align them and keep the common string as a signature.

Request Message Generation



- Modify inputs
- Re-execute API calls
- Replace them in message

- N different wrong passwords and 1 correct password

Experiment Setup: How the 76 Apps Were Chosen

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- 4 Manually run 105 one-by-one, we found
 - 15 of them do not contain the user login interface
 - 14 of them do not use HTTP/HTTPS protocols

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- 4 Manually run 105 one-by-one, we found
 - 15 of them do not contain the user login interface
 - 14 of them do not use HTTP/HTTPS protocols
- 5 Therefore, we have $105 - 15 - 14 = 76$ apps

I. Password Brute-force Testing

- Total 76 apps

- 86% of apps' server side are vulnerable to password brute-forcing attack

- Including CNN, Expedia, iHeartRadio, and Walmart.

Other Testing

- 1 II. Leaked Username and Password Probing Testing.
- 2 III. Facebook Access Token Hijacking Testing.

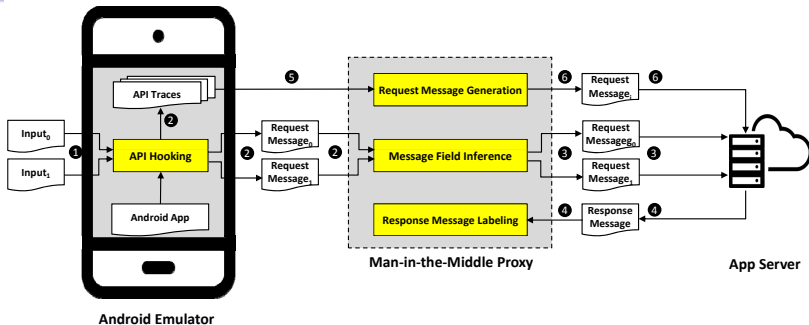
A Serious Security Problem at Server Side

- AUTOFORGE has demonstrated that lack of security checks at server side can lead to several severe attacks
 - 1 Password brute forcing
 - 2 Leaked username and password probing
 - 3 Access token hijacking.
- This is a very serious problem considering that a large volume of popular apps, including CNN, Expedia, iHeartRadio, and Walmart as demonstrated in our testing, are vulnerable to these attacks.
- ***HTTPS alone cannot defeat password brute-forcing, nor can hashing and signing of client request messages***

Related Work

- 1 **Protocol Reverse Engineering.** A large body of research focusing on protocol reverse engineering [[Bed](#), [MLK⁺06](#), [CKW07](#), [CS07](#), [WMKK08](#), [LJXZ08](#), [MWKK09](#), [CPKS09](#)]
- 2 **Application Dialogue Replay.** AUTOFORGE employs cryptographic function replay to generate the authenticated messages, which is similar to the existing application dialogue replay systems: RolePlayer [[CPWK06](#)] and Replayer [[NBFS06](#)].
- 3 **Mobile App Vulnerability Discovery.** A considerable amount of efforts have focused on discovering various vulnerabilities in mobile apps. TaintDroid [[EGC⁺10](#)], PiOS [[EKKV11](#)], CHEX [[LLW⁺12](#)], SMV-Hunter [[SSG⁺14](#)]. However, few efforts have been focusing on identifying the vulnerabilities in **app's server side**.

AUTOFORGE



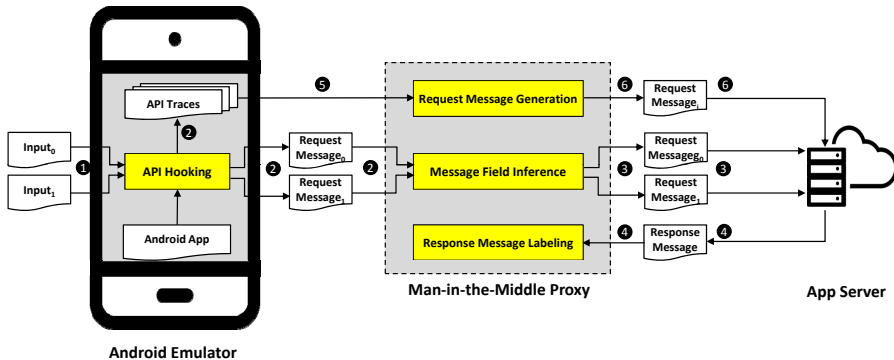
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- Given a mobile app, and few inputs
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- Test various security vulnerabilities at mobile app's server side

Experimental Result w/ 76 apps

- 86% of servers (including CNN, and Walmart) are vulnerable to password brute-forcing
- 100% are vulnerable to leaked password probing
- 12% are vulnerable to Facebook access token hijacking

Q&A



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