

Researchers develop new Facebook app to detect pedophiles and criminals

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Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) undergraduate students have developed a new privacy solution for Facebook. The Social Privacy Protector (SPP) can help parents adjust their children's profiles in one click, prevent criminals from garnering valuable personal information and keep teens safe from pedophiles.

The SPP "app" has multiple levels of protection, but the most important component reviews a user's friends list in seconds to identify which have few or no mutual links and might be "fake" profiles. The app analyzes each friend and scores the "connectedness" to every friend. It flags the lowest scores as suspicious and asks whether the friend should be restricted from personal user information, but doesn't defriend them.

"An important feature of our app is the ability for parents to better protect their kids' privacy with just one click instead of having to navigate the more complicated [Facebook privacy settings](#)," Michael Fire, a Ph.D. candidate in BGU's Department of Information Systems Engineering explains.

"While Facebook encourages connecting with as many people as possible, we advocate limiting users, and have, for the first time, provided an [algorithm](#) to scientifically determine who to remove from friend lists," Fire adds. "Predators rely on people friending anyone, and with teens now allowed to have Facebook accounts, we believe that our solution can provide necessary protection for all users."

The SPP also notifies the user about the applications installed on their profile that could threaten his or her privacy.

Fire, working with Prof. Yuval Elovici and undergraduate students Dima Kagan and Aviad Elishar of BGU's Telekom Innovation Laboratories and Information Systems Engineering Department, developed the Facebook application and software based on their research on Facebook and social networks in general. The app was part of a final project for Kagan's and Elishar's bachelor's degrees.

"Social media is an incredible phenomenon, but has significant pitfalls if used haphazardly, especially by teens," explains Doron Krakow, executive vice president, American Associates, Ben-Gurion of the Negev (AABGU). "We're very proud of the fact that at BGU even undergraduate students have the opportunity to work with top researchers and can devise such an important app that could protect millions of youth."

The free software is available as a Facebook [app](#) for all browsers, and as an add-on for Firefox. The paper has been submitted for publication.

Provided by American Associates, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

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