

Hooking phishers of men and women

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Phishing is a fraudulent attempt seeking to acquire money, confidential information or other gain such as usernames, passwords or credit card details from people by masquerading as a trustworthy entity such as a bank, service provider, social network, email systems or institutions. In order to improve security and reduce the risk that any of us is caught out by a phishing attack there is a need to carry out research so that countermeasures can be designed. Unfortunately, in carrying out such research it is possible for the scientists taking part to come unstuck by laws that are in place to protect users from the very attacks they wish to study.

Writing in the *International Journal of Intellectual Property Management*, UK researchers explain how the legal framework and ethical considerations involved in mobile and computer security research must be updated to allow such research to take place without legal impediment. Rasha Salah El-Din of the Department of Computer Science at the University of York working with Lisa Sugiura of the University of Southampton, explain how they were studying mobile users' susceptibility to phishing attacks, through the use of deception in research and discovered that they were subject to regulations concerning its use. The regulations were implemented despite the fact that their covert work was for the benefit of users and did not represent a fraudulent phishing attack in itself.

As a result of this, the team suggests that the research community needs to start a dialogue on self-regulation and boundaries of legal and ethical conduct. "We are currently in the process of organising an international

conference to discuss the legal and ethical challenges that face phishing researchers," the team says. "The conference will source multi-discipline expertise including: phishing researchers, board members of ethics committees, law professionals and industries affected by phishing such as [mobile phone operators](#) and banks."

They point out that while deception is a well-established research methodology in psychology research projects, there is no clear law on whether or not deception is allowable in security or phishing research.

More information: "To deceive or not to deceive! Legal implications of phishing covert research" in *Int. J. Intellectual Property Management*, 2013, 6, 285-293

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