Apparent massive hack attack reveals stars' nude pictures

September 1 2014

Oscar-winning American actress Jennifer Lawrence at the "X-Men: Days Of Future Past" world premiere in New York on May 10, 2014

Scandal rocked both Hollywood and the US tech industry Monday after an apparent hack of a cloud data service unleashed a torrent of intimate pictures of celebrities onto the Internet.

Anonymous posters to online message boards boasted of having nude

images of scores of female stars including Oscar-winning actress Jennifer Lawrence, pop icon Rihanna and top model Kate Upton.

Early reports suggested hackers had "ripped" private images from tech giant Apple's iCloud online data storage, but the firm made no immediate comment and other services may have been targeted.

Some of the pictures had previously been circulated on message forums, and others appeared fake, but some major stars expressed outrage at a new breach and threatened legal action.

"This is a flagrant violation of privacy. The authorities have been contacted and will prosecute anyone who posts the stolen photos of Jennifer Lawrence," Lawrence's agent told entertainment media.

By late Sunday, Twitter had begun suspending accounts that linked to the Lawrence photos, tech news site Mashable reported.

Among the scores of celebrities whose pictures were allegedly stolen were Scarlett Johansson, Winona Ryder, Avril Lavigne, Amber Heard, Hayden Panettiere and Hope Solo.

Former Nickelodeon star and singer Victoria Justice said the images claiming to show her nude were anything but the real deal.

"These so called nudes of me are FAKE people. Let me nip this in the bud right now. *pun intended*" she tweeted.

Barbadian pop star Rihanna pictured at the World Cup match between Germany and Argentina in Rio de Janeiro on July 13, 2014

A spokesperson for actress and pop star Ariana Grande told BuzzFeed that images said to be of her are "completely fake."

'Creepy effort'

But horror movie actress Mary Elizabeth Winstead confirmed that some of her private pictures were in circulation and condemned those who stole them and who circulated them.

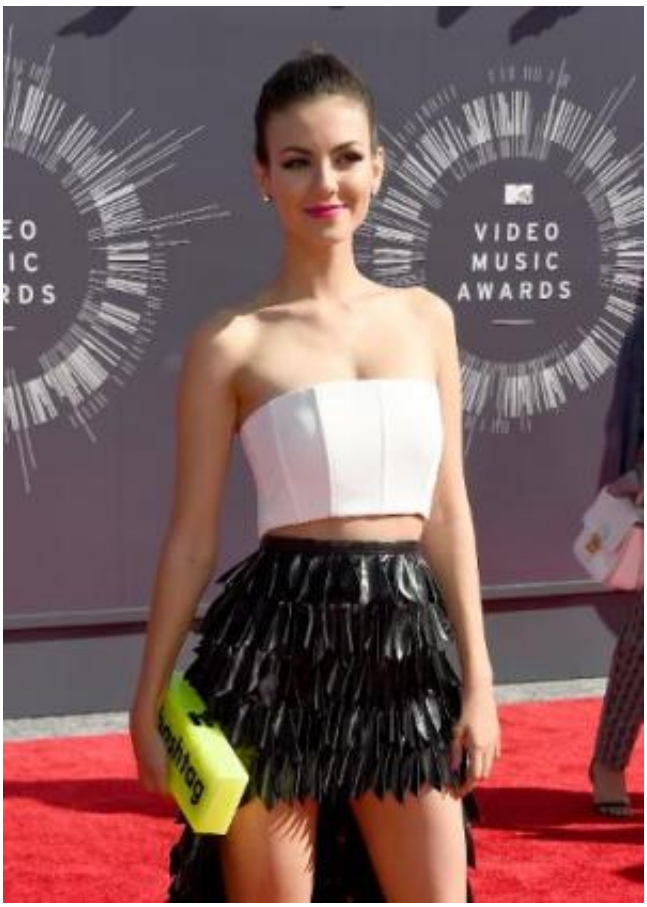
"To those of you looking at photos I took with my husband years ago in the privacy of our home, hope you feel great about yourselves," she tweeted.

"Knowing those photos were deleted long ago, I can only imagine the creepy effort that went into this. Feeling for everyone who got hacked."

The scale of the breach became apparent on Sunday when users of the 4chan message board, a diverse online community that has been criticized in the past for misogyny, began posting pictures.

Some more mainstream news and entertainment sites took up the story—and some linked to the images before taking them down amid legal threats and public outrage.

According to a report on news and gossip site Gawker, users of a AnonIB—an anonymous photo-sharing platform focused on stolen images of women—have been boasting of a hack since last week.



US actress Victoria Justice attends the 2014 MTV Video Music Awards at The Forum in Inglewood, California on August 24, 2014

Some users—hiding behind pseudonyms—made an apparent attempt to sell the pictures or to trade them with fellow hackers for others.

Tech news site The Next Web reported what it said was evidence that hackers had found a weakness in Apple's "Find my iPhone" service, an app that tracks lost or stolen handsets.

Apple has patched the alleged hole, the report said, but not before news of it spread in the hacker community, allowing unscrupulous strangers to access private online data.

The scale of the hack, and the targeting of women in the public eye, quickly revived the debate on social media about privacy concerns and about misogyny on the Internet.

The scandal also posed a public relations challenge to tech companies, who have been marketing online storage like iCloud, DropBox or GoogleDrive as a safe haven for users' private data.

Several popular tech blogs marked the story by providing advice on storing private data safely, by using advanced encryption and two-step password identification or by keeping it offline.

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Citation: Apparent massive hack attack reveals stars' nude pictures (2014, September 1) retrieved 18 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2014-09-apparent-massive-hack-reveals-stars.html

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