



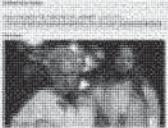




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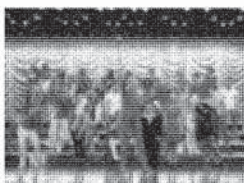
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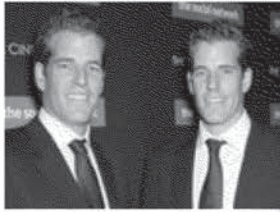
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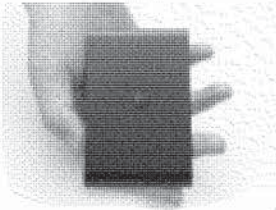
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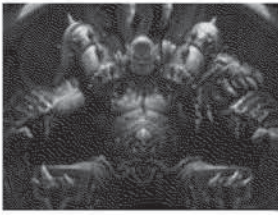


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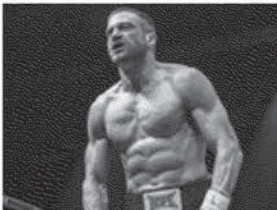
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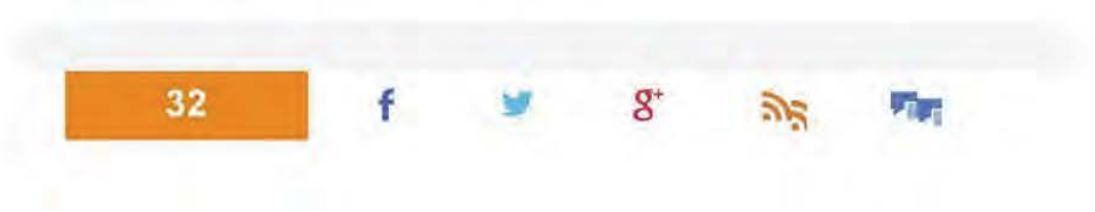


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Facebook bug silently tallies up extra "likes"

By Rick Burgess on October 5, 2012, 5:00 PM



Facebook is once again finding itself under investor scrutiny after a U.S. security researcher uncovered a flaw in its "like" system which appears to be responsible for liking sites an unintended number of times.



Although Facebook has pointed to a feature glitch as the indubitable cause, some cynics believe Facebook has much to gain by padding its social graph via means of "Like fraud".

Researchers found that sending a URL to a friend via Facebook's private message system would add two likes to a page instead of just one. That clearly shouldn't be expected behavior. Comments left on Facebook posts also add to the

EXHIBIT J

total number of likes, which is actually by design. Some users find the sincerity of such a practice nebulous at best, however.

Confirming the discovery, Facebook said, "*We did recently find a bug with our social plug-ins where at times the count for the Share or Like goes up by two, and we are working on fix to solve the issue now.*"

Facebook reiterated though that some behaviors will generate likes without explicitly liking something, such as messaging a URL to a friend. On Facebook for Developers, the BBC points out though, there are actually four ways to generate likes. However, only one of those methods actually requires users to click a like button. The rest are done behind the scenes.

Last month, the social networking icon kick started an initiative which intends to fortify the integrity of Facebook's likes and shares. Amongst the improvements, automated tools were deployed with the intent of deleting disingenuous likes that were determined to be purchased or originate from malware or compromised accounts



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Links shared privately on Facebook increase page's Like count

by KS Sandhya Iyer, 5 October 2012



Back in August Facebook had announced that it had 955 million active monthly users as of June 30, up 29 percent from a year earlier. Bit it also estimated that as many as 8.7 percent of those accounts, or a tad over 83 million, are fake.

More recently, there were reports of Facebook making 'efforts' to weed out fake profiles that are being created by computer

programs, which are used for inflating the number of "likes" on a Facebook page for a brand.

In that respect, The Next Web makes an interesting observation. The tech blog reports that when a Facebook user sends a link to a Web page through a private Facebook message, that Web page will get not one but two extra "Likes," if it is a Facebook-"Like"-able Web page.

The site stumbled upon a YouTube video (now deleted) on Hacker News posted by Polish start-up Killswitch.me that clearly showed how sending a private Facebook message containing a link to a page increased the counter on that page by two "Likes".

Considering whether or not the two Likes was a bug, Facebook issued a statement saying:



"We did recently find a bug with our social plugins where at times the count for the share or like goes up by two, and we are working on fix to solve the issue now. To be clear, this only affects social plugins off of Facebook and is not related to Facebook page likes. This bug does not impact the user experience with messages or what appears on their timelines."

The blog thus simplified it to state that Facebook is keeping an eye on your private

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messages for URLs that have Like buttons and should be increased. The Next Web further pointed out that the Like button entry on the Facebook Developers page states that the number shown on Like buttons on other websites is a total of likes of that URL, shares of that URL, likes and comments on Facebook stories about that URL and inbox messages containing that URL as an attachment.

So the question is, how big a deal is it and does it invade Facebook user privacy? Probably not - and here's why. That "Like" is only added to the page's counter. It does not reveal who added the Like. If you do not reveal something said or shared in private to others, you are not invading their privacy. Here's how Facebook clarified on the issue:

“
Absolutely no private information has been exposed and Facebook is not automatically Liking any Facebook Pages on a user's behalf. Many websites that use Facebook's Like, Recommend, or Share buttons also carry a counter next to them. This counter reflects the number of times people have clicked those buttons and also the number of times people have shared that page's link on Facebook. When the count is increased via shares over private messages, no user information is exchanged, and privacy settings of content are unaffected. Links shared through messages do not affect the Like count on Facebook Pages.

Facebook isn't going to be axed for this move for the simple reason that email providers like Gmail scan user emails all the time. It does so to show relevant ads, fight spam, and slow down viruses. What Facebook is doing is just adopting one of the many services of tracking the popularity of Webpages. While Google has a list of trends. The New York Times keeps a track of most emailed stories.

Facebook issued an updated statement to The Next Web giving further clarification:

“
Our systems parse the URL being shared in order to render the appropriate preview, and to also ensure that the message is not spam.

What Facebook is likely more concerned about is why the Like count is increased by two instead of one, and said it will investigate the bug.

Tags: Facebook, Facebook Like button, Facebook page Like, Facebook private message



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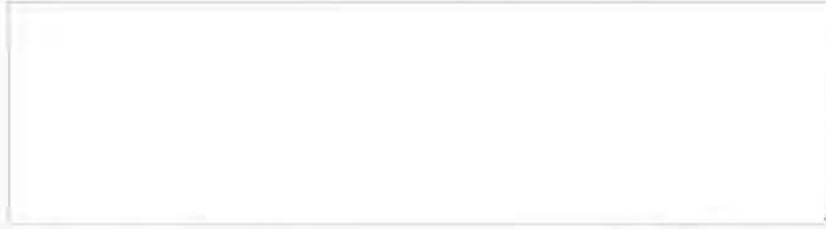
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Why Is Privacy of Personal Facebook Messages Being Called Into Question – Again?

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Oct. 5, 2012 12:30pm Liz Klimas

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A rumor that Facebook was revealing your private messages on Timeline was **recently raised** and **debunked**, but a new concern regarding private conversations and the potential for “like’ fraud” has come to light.

The Wall Street Journal **reports** that **Hacker News** has revealed a method that “let’s you pump up to 1800 ‘Likes’ in an hour.” How is this done? Hacker News posted a video showing the exploit, revealing that including links in private messages — if these links had a “like” button associated with them — would increase the “likes” on that actual page by two.

(Editor’s Note: The YouTube video was taken down for “depiction of harmful activities.” The group posted a version of it on Vimeo as well, but TheBlaze is not embedding the video to show how the hack works

because it includes graphic, NSFW photos.)

The Next Web’s Emil Protalinski **explains the implications of this exploit** as such: “Facebook is monitoring your private messages for links that have Like buttons and should be increased.”

The Hacker News users’ video states that they see this as leading to “like’ fraud.”

Facebook has responded saying that there was a bug identified in the system that was accidentally counting one “like” or “share” of a link or post as two. It states it is working to fix this. But in a statement reported by WSJ and others, Facebook emphasized that “no private information has been exposed.” Meaning, if you receive a message containing a link that has a “like” button, you are not automatically “liking” this item on your Timeline.

“Many websites that use Facebook’s ‘Like’, ‘Recommend’, or ‘Share’ buttons also carry a counter next to them. This counter reflects the number of times people have clicked those buttons and also the number of times people have shared that page’s link on Facebook,” including over private messages,” Facebook said in a statement.

Still, Paul Shea for Value Walk writes it’s probably news for many that the “like” counter is not just measuring clicks but sharing content as well — in the form of private messages in this case. Protalinsky for TheNextWeb outlines the specifics for how this works:

[...] on the Like button Web page over on Facebook Developers, the social networking giant says the number shown on a Like button is the sum of:

The number of likes of this URL.

The number of shares of this URL (this includes copy/pasting a link back to Facebook).

The number of likes and comments on stories on Facebook about this URL.

The number of inbox messages containing this URL as an attachment.

Shea writes that Facebook has “not crossed a line with this latest news, any more than they have on hundreds of other occasions.” Shea says he only expects the company will continue to experience backlash over privacy concerns “for as long as it operates.”

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Facebook private messages trigger 'likes' without telling

Ed Oswald (/author/Ed-Oswald/) | @edoswald
PCWorld Oct 5, 2012 7:34 AM

The next time you share a link with a Facebook friend via private message, be aware that you're anonymously "liking" that page publicly as well.



That's what developers with Polish startup [Killswitch.me](http://killswitch.me) (<http://signup.killswitch.me/>) discovered while researching other issues surrounding the "like" button.

They stumbled upon the fact that sending a message to a friend with a likable link triggers an anonymous like of that page.

While this may come as a surprise, evidence that the company was scanning our messages for these likable links has been public for at least a week. Facebook states in a [September 27 FAQ for developers](#) (<https://developers.facebook.com/docs/reference/plugins/like/>) that "the number of inbox messages containing this URL as an attachment" is a factor in counting the number of likes that shows up on a page's Like Button.

Other factors include the number of actual likes, the number of shares (including a share on Facebook), and the number of likes and comments on stories on Facebook about the URL.

While this information seems to have been public for some time, those of us who aren't developers likely had no clue of Facebook's actions. That said, given how Facebook uses our activities to further its own business interests, this practice shouldn't surprise us. Facebook routinely relies on its members' personal information when it comes to serving [more targeted ads](#) (http://www.pcworld.com/article/230757/help_a_web_ad_is_stalking_me.html?tk=rel_news).

Personal messages seem to be another matter, however. We may privately share something with a friend that we'd rather not make public. Facebook seems to acknowledge that, [assuring The Next Web](#)



(<http://thenextweb.com/facebook/2012/10/04/facebook-confirms-it-is-scanning-your-private-messages-for-links-so-it-can-increase-like-counters/>) that the mention of the link merely adds an anonymous "like" and that no page or link is automatically liked on the user's behalf, nor does it appear on a user's timeline.

Will this appease privacy critics and uneasy users? As long as this remains Facebook's policy, it should. But Facebook should be warned: [a recent study](http://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2012/proceedings/SocialIssues/3/) (<http://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2012/proceedings/SocialIssues/3/>) by researchers at New Jersey Institute of Technology and Pace University shows that users are paying attention, and will respond if they feel their privacy is threatened.

Compared with Facebook users five years ago, today's Facebookers are much more engaged in protecting their privacy, and more "proactive" when it comes to responding to incidents that may affect their privacy on the site, researchers say.

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Ed Oswald



Ed is a technology journalist, music nut, and gadget geek who hails from the somewhat small town of Reading, Pennsylvania.

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by Lisa Vaas on October 8, 2012 | 8 Comments
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Facebook has confirmed that it's scanning private Facebook messages to boost "Like" counters on third party websites.

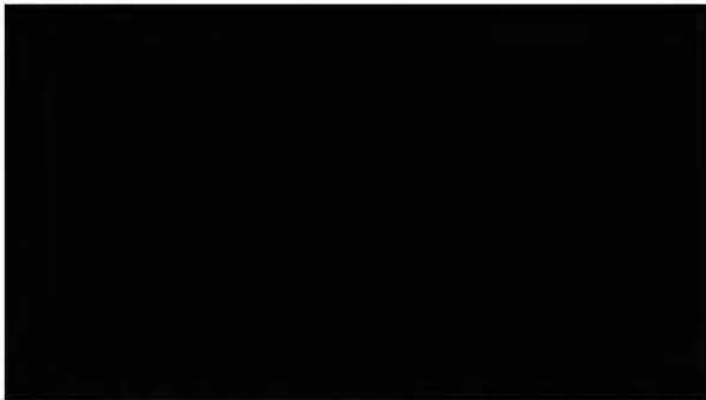


Killswitch.me, described by [The Next Web](#) as a "Polish startup", on Thursday posted a since-deleted YouTube video on [Hacker News](#) that showed that sending a link to a website via a private Facebook message increased that website's Facebook Like counter by two likes.

And then by another two. And then another, and another, causing the Likes to steadily balloon.

In fact, one poster on [Hacker News](#) testified that people could pump it up by 1,800 Likes per hour.

The video, removed from YouTube, can still be viewed on [Vimeo](#) (possibly not safe for work).



When TNW's Emil Protalinski checked with Facebook, company spokespeople confirmed that they had discovered a bug affecting Like counts.

But the bug didn't relate to the actual private-message peeping.

Rather, the bug concerned inflating page counts by two Likes instead of one, as a spokesperson told TNW:

We did recently find a bug with our social plugins where at times the count for the Share or Like goes up by two, and we are working on [a] fix to solve the issue now. To be clear, this only affects social plugins off of Facebook and is not related to Facebook page likes. This bug does not impact the user experience with messages or what appears on their timelines.

The fact that this is function is baked into Facebook code as opposed to being a potential fluke of privacy transgression is confirmed, as Protalinski noted, on the [Facebook Developers](#) page, which states that a websites' number of Likes is the sum of:

- + The number of likes of this URL.
- + The number of shares of this URL (this includes copy/pasting a link back to Facebook).
- + The number of likes and comments on stories on Facebook about this URL.
- + The number of inbox messages containing this URL as an attachment.



Facebook's scanning of private messages isn't new.

The power of the social media mammoth's data mining technology when applied to private messages came to light in March, when Facebook was credited with quashing potential child molestation between a 13-year-old girl and a man in his 30s who were having a [private Facebook conversation](#) about sex.

As Facebook described it at the time, its data mining technology scans postings and chats for criminal activity, analyzing relationships to find suspicious conversations between unlikely pairings: i.e., between people of widely varying ages who only have loose and/or newly formed relationships.

Email providers such as Gmail also have a long-standing practice of reviewing messages to weed out spam and to target ads.

Those are reasonable uses of data mining technology, but it's disconcerting to find what might be yet more intrusive forays into allegedly private messages.



Thus, it's a bit of a relief to learn that Facebook later clarified the privacy issue, saying that "absolutely no private information" is exposed in the private-message-derived Like inflation:

Absolutely no private information has been exposed and Facebook is not automatically Liking any Facebook Pages on a user's behalf.

Many websites that use Facebook's 'Like', 'Recommend', or 'Share' buttons also carry a counter next to them. This counter reflects the number of times people have clicked those buttons and also the number of times people have shared that page's link on Facebook. When the count is increased via shares over private messages, no user information is exchanged, and privacy settings of content are unaffected. Links shared through messages do not affect the Like count on Facebook Pages.

At any rate, the integrity of the Facebook Like counter has been in question for a while.

It came up again last week, when well-Liked pages began to sag as [Facebook swept out bogus Likes](#) gained via malware, compromised accounts, duped users or purchased bulk Likes.

Unfortunately, the fact that Facebook registers URLs shared in private messages means that we're now all potentially contributors of unintended likes.

It means that sharing a link that outrages, disgusts or appalls the sender will result in that website's Facebook Like counter going up.

Researching hate groups? Discussing corporate malfeasance?

Be prepared to add to your subjects' Facebook counter glow, whether you want to or not, if you send URLs via private Facebook conversations.

If you're on Facebook, and want to learn more about security and privacy issues on the social network, consider joining the [Naked Security Facebook page](#).



Private stamp, courtesy of Shutterstock

Tags: data mining, Facebook, page Likes, private messages, scanning

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8 Responses to Facebook scans private messages to inflate the "Like" counter on websites



Cathy Moore Pritchett · 900 days ago

I would like to share this on Facebook to warn my friends but there's no Facebook share button. How do I share?

0 0 Rate This



Dawn Jasmann · 899 days ago

Cathy, you can share ANY website on Facebook just by highlighting the address in the address bar, copying it, then pasting it in the status update box on your Facebook page. It's that simple. :)

P.S. I usually comment about what I'm about to share BEFORE pasting the website address into my status update box. That way my comment gets seen on top of the address. For example:

Check out this website. I think you'll find it as interesting as I did.
<https://nakedsecurity.sophos.com/2012/10/08/facebo...>

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[Reply](#)

 **Richard** · 899 days ago

If you "Like" Naked Security on Facebook, they post links to these articles on there, and then you can easily share them.

 0  0  Rate This

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 **Doc** · 899 days ago

Copy & Paste the Link to FB.

 0  0  Rate This

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 **aLikeable Guy** · 899 days ago

So, if you send a link along with a comment "This is the stupidest thing I have ever seen." It gets "Liked" ?

Awesome.

 1  0  Rate This


[Reply](#)

 **Yitzchok Mickler** · 898 days ago

I have a Facebook sharing button on this page. Look at the end of the article just before "How likely are you to recommend Naked Security to a friend or colleague?"

 0  0  Rate This

[Reply](#)

 **davepeterson1** · 898 days ago

I've lost count of the times failbook does evil sleazy things like this, it's so INFURIATING.

 0  0  Rate This

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 **nikhil** · 898 days ago