New Application Allows Users to Control Access to Tweets

RIVERSIDE, Calif. (www.ucr.edu [1]) -- Twitsper, a new application created by computer science graduate students and professors at the University of California, Riverside's Bourns College of Engineering, allows Twitter users to control who can view their tweets.

Android mobile phone operating system users can download Twitsper for free from:

http://twitsper.cs.ucr.edu [2] or from the Android Market.

Indrajeet Singh and Michael Butkiewicz, Ph.D. students in computer science and engineering, created Twitsper, the name based on a combination of Twitter and whisper. Srikanth Krishnamurthy, a professor of computer science and engineering, and Harsha V. Madhyastha, an assistant professor of computer science and engineering, assisted the students.

Twitsper is very user-friendly, allowing users to reuse their social connections on Twitter. The researchers made this design choice instead of developing a new social network with privacy controls because reconnecting with their friends would be too cumbersome for users.

Once downloaded, Twitsper enables users to create lists comprising subsets of their followers. After a list is created, the creator and others on the list can send tweets back and forth that only they can see. To ensure the privacy of users, a tweet sent by any user on the list is only received by other members of the list who follow the user.

If no list is selected, the user's tweet behaves just like a normal public tweet broadcast to all of the user's followers, or, if your account is public, to the entire world.

Since user privacy is the primary objective of Twitspers' creators, all personal information is exchanged between the user's mobile phone and Twitter's servers. Twitsper's servers only see the unique name of the list and identifiers for messages sent to the list.

Before the development of Twitsper there was no way for Twitter users to limit which of their followers could see any of their tweets, even if they set their account to be private.

"We believe that the right level of privacy differs from one person to another," Singh said. "The best person to choose this balance is the end user. We provide them with a convenient tool to do so, without breaking the pre-existing system."

The researchers focused on Twitter because of its lack of privacy controls. Their implementation of Twitsper attempts to hit the right balance between user privacy and Twitter's commercial interests.

"Twitter is not just reduced to a dumping ground for encrypted messages exchanged between users," Madhyastha said.

They hope their work will eventually be incorporated into Twitter. They also want to use the same model to add similar privacy controls on other social networks, such as Facebook and blogs.

Twitsper started last spring as a project in Krishnamurthy's wireless networking class. At the time, Singh read a story about the web site pleaserobme.com, which is devoted to the potential danger of using Twitter to post where you are. Singh thought posting your location could be useful, but only to a select group of followers you might want joining you at that spot. After talking to Butkiewicz, a class project was born.

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Source URL (retrieved on *05/23/2013 - 4:30am*):
http://www.wirelessdesignmag.com/news/2010/11/new-application-allows-users-control-access-tweets?qt-most_popular=0

Links:
[1] http://www.ucr.edu
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