



Cybersecurity and the Media

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Introduction

In the recent past, The cyberspace has touched almost everyone and everything. In spite of developments in cyber security--the body of technologies, practices, and processes designed to protect computers, programs, data, and networks from unauthorized access or attacks--cyber information and resources are never fully secured against cyber attacks. More recently, online social networks became wildly popular. "Social media represent "a group of Internet-based applications that build on user participation and allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content."



The media's portrayal of Cybersecurity

Media representations of cybersecurity often lean toward dramatization and simplification.

Especially in movies, TV shows, and news—frequently. Hackers are often the “villain or anti heroes,” pop culture often depicts hackers as lone geniuses or rebellious vigilantes. Shows like “Mr. Robot” glamorise hackers giving viewers a false idea of how real life breaches work.



Why This Matters

The way media portrays cybersecurity influences how society understands digital threats. While dramatization makes for compelling storytelling, it risks **misinforming the public** about the complexity of cyber defense. Accurate portrayals could help people appreciate the importance of cybersecurity beyond the "hacker vs. system" narrative.



Role of Misinformation

Misinformation in cybersecurity can be especially damaging:

- **False claims about breaches:** Misreporting the scope or source of a breach can cause panic or misdirected blame.
- **Confusion about protective measures:** Inaccurate advice (e.g., outdated password tips or misleading app recommendations) can leave users vulnerable.
- **Spread of conspiracy theories:** Some narratives falsely link cyber incidents to political agendas or fabricated threats, undermining trust in institutions.

While misinformation is a mistake, disinformation is the act of causing harm or an issue on purpose.



Impact on Public Perception

The way cybersecurity is framed in media affects how people think and behave:

- Cyber breaches increase fear and mistrust. Cyber crime that takes place upon something people trust can give a very unsure feeling if that software should be used again even when risk are manageable.
- Support for intrusive policies: Studies show that exposure to cyberattack narratives can increase public support for aggressive cybersecurity policies, sometimes at the expense of privacy

Example #1

A major example is the **Evolve Bank & Trust breach in July 2024**, where hackers exposed the sensitive data of **7.6 million customers**, including names, Social Security numbers, bank account details, addresses, and emails. The attack was linked to the **LockBit ransomware group**, and the stolen data appeared on the dark web. This incident severely damaged customer trust, leading many clients to reconsider their relationship with the bank and associated financial partners. While **millions were affected**, the **exact number of customers who discontinued using Evolve Bank & Trust is not publicly reported**. What we do know is that the breach triggered **large-scale litigation, settlements, and reputational fallout**.



Importance of Accurate Reporting

- Accurate reporting strengthens **credibility** of journalists, organizations, and institutions.
- Readers rely on truthful information to make informed decisions.
- Inaccuracies erode public confidence.
- **Inaccurate** reporting can cause **panic, financial loss, or harm** (e.g., false health or safety news).

An example of this would be in accurate reporting with voting or civics, this ensures that citizens have reliable facts to participate in civic life.



Final Thoughts

Cybersecurity is often dramatized in the media, which can raise awareness but also spread misconceptions. While movies and news stories highlight hackers and digital threats, they sometimes oversimplify the complex reality of cyber defense. Accurate and responsible reporting is essential to build public trust, reduce fear, and encourage informed decision-making. Ultimately, the media has the power to shape how society understands cybersecurity, making accuracy and balance more important than ever.



Citations

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