

How Media Influences Our Understanding of Cybersecurity

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After watching the videos featuring real hackers breaking down hacking scenes from various movies and TV shows, I realized just how much the media has influenced and often distorted our perception of cybersecurity. From overly dramatic visual effects to lightning-fast typing scenes with no explanation, the entertainment industry has created a version of hacking that's more science fiction than reality. These fictional portrayals have shaped public understanding for decades, and they continue to affect how we view hackers and cybersecurity threats.

In older films and shows, particularly from the 1980s and 1990s, hacking was portrayed almost like a superpower. Movies like *WarGames* (1983) and *Hackers* (1995) showed young, rebellious characters tapping into powerful government systems with flashy interfaces, colorful 3D graphics, and no real technical explanation. These scenes were often accompanied by loud sound effects and overly stylized visuals that made hacking look like a video game. Hacking has very little to do with cool graphics or neon-colored command lines. It's typically about coding, problem-solving, and exploiting vulnerabilities through technical knowledge and patience.

One of the key takeaways from the hacker critiques in the videos is that real-life hacking is far less glamorous and much more tedious than what we see on screen. It often involves long hours of scanning for weak points, writing scripts, and using tools that are available to anyone with some technical knowledge. Social engineering, phishing, and password cracking are much more common attack vectors than the kinds of movie hacks where someone guesses a password in five seconds or gets into a network just by typing fast.

Some more recent portrayals have started to lean toward accuracy. For example, the series *Mr. Robot* has received praise from cybersecurity experts for its realistic depiction of

hacking. The show uses actual tools and techniques like Kali Linux, Raspberry Pi devices, and even real command-line code. It also takes time to show how much research, patience, and technical planning go into a successful hack. In one scene, a character even uses social engineering to gain physical access to a building, something real hackers do all the time. This kind of realism helps to educate viewers, even if they don't realize it.

Despite this progress, even modern media still tends to oversimplify the process. For the sake of pacing and plot, hacking scenes are often condensed into just a few seconds or minutes, when in real life it could take days or even weeks to penetrate a secure system. This leads to a warped perception of how vulnerable systems are and how capable hackers really are. It can also make cybersecurity professionals seem either like miracle workers or powerless victims, depending on the storyline.

The public's misunderstanding of cybersecurity because of media portrayals can have real-world consequences. When people think of hacking as something that only highly skilled "elite" coders do in dark rooms, they might not take basic precautions like using strong passwords or enabling two-factor authentication. On the flip side, some people may assume that no matter what they do, a hacker will find a way in leading them to ignore security altogether out of a sense of helplessness. Both mindsets are dangerous and stem partly from inaccurate media portrayals.

Over time, public awareness of cybersecurity has improved, thanks in part to real-life data breaches making headlines, like the Equifax breach, the SolarWinds attack, or ransomware attacks on hospitals and infrastructure. These events have made people more aware that cybersecurity is a serious, everyday concern and not just a Hollywood fantasy. As a result,

there's been more demand for accurate media portrayals, documentaries, and educational content around these topics.

In conclusion, the media still has a powerful influence on how people understand hacking and cybersecurity. While earlier portrayals were largely unrealistic and built more on fiction than fact, we are seeing a gradual shift toward greater accuracy in some newer productions. That said, there's still a long way to go. If the media continues to evolve in the right direction, it can help bridge the gap between fiction and reality, encouraging better digital habits and a more informed public when it comes to cybersecurity.

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