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1 in 5 Facebook users have snooped on a friend's account: UBC study

Reasons for snooping range from playing a harmless prank to malicious attempts to hurt someone's reputation or delete irreplaceable photos.

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One in five Facebook users admit to having snooped in another person's account, according to a new study by UBC researchers.

By: **Jen St. Denis** Metro Published on Thu Jan 19 2017

Your friends — or frenemies — could be sneaking a peak at your Facebook account, and their motivations could be more sinister than you think.

University of British Columbia researchers conducted a survey of 1,308 adult Facebook users in the United States found that 24 per cent, or one in five users, had accessed the accounts of friends, romantic partners or family members. The survey also found that 21 per cent of users reported being the victim of a snoop.

Sometime the snooping was for innocuous reasons, like to replace a friend's profile picture as a joke. But other times the snoopers had darker motives: to find out whether a romantic partner was cheating, to damage the victim's social reputation, or to delete messages and photos that were meaningful to the victim.

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Usually the snoop was able to get access to the victim's Facebook account because the victim had kept their computer logged on or had shared their password with the snoop at some point in the past.

"Jealous snoops generally plan their action and focus on personal messages, accessing the account for 15 minutes or longer," said computer science professor Ivan

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Beschastnikh, one of the authors of the report, which was funded by Canada's Office of the Privacy Commissioner.

"And the consequences are significant: in many cases, snooping effectively ended the relationship."

The researchers note that many Facebook users value ease of access over security: it's a pain to log out and log back in, so many people simply keep their account logged in. The report authors observed that most of the victims adopted better security after the experience, so "educating users about the social insider threat might motivate them to adopt more secure practices."

But Facebook also doesn't track "passive account activity," like someone browsing through private message history for a long time.

"The existence of such a log would also act as a deterrent, as many attackers in our stories noted that they carried through with the attack because it would not be discovered," say the UBC researchers.



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