

Subject: **Advisory - Social Engineering - WhatsApp Smishing (Spam) Messages (Advisory No.37)**

1. **Background.** **Social Engineering** is the Most efficacious technique that can successfully lead to sensitive information compromise / stealing and launching cyber-attacks, WhatsApp has more than 2 billion users across the globe and **phishing over WhatsApp (Smishing)** is becoming one of the commonly used Social Engineering tactic. Recently, it is observed that **Smishing messages (offering spam gifts etc)** are spreading through **WhatsApp**. Such Smishing messages can be used by Cyber threat actors to launch cyber-attacks or gain sensitive information like OTP (**One Time Password**), **banking information** and Personally Identifiable Information (**PII**). Therefore, recommendations / preventive measures at **Para 3** must be adopted to avoid falling prey to cyber-attacks.

2. **Potential Risks.** Following risks are involved while **clicking** on the **links** received in the Smishing messages: -

- a. **Personal Contact List** may be exposed that may affect other people in chain procedure.
- b. Other personal information like **email address** may be publically exposed that can broaden attack surface for Cyber espionage.
- c. **User location** may be compromised through IP address that can further lead to targeted Cyber-attacks.

3. **Recommendations**

a. **Launching Complaints against Smishing Messages to PTA.** To block Smishing / unsolicited communication, always block spammer's cell number on WhatsApp and text messages. In addition, following guidelines may be used: -

- (1) Type spammer's cell number, followed by space, paste the received message; and send **SMS at 9000**.
- (2) Smishing call / sms blocking facility is available by calling 420 or by dialing \*420#.
- (3) Launch online complaint at **complaint@pta.gov.pk**.
- (4) Toll Free Number **080055055** & Fixed Line Number **0519225325** may be used for launching complaint.
- (5) Complaint can also be submitted by Post Mail at the address: -

**CPD, PTA HQ, Sector F-5/1, Islamabad.** In-person visit at this address may also be paid to report the complaint.

b. **General Preventive Measures**

- (1) **WhatsApp**

- a. **Smishing message** can be easily identified as it contains content that apparently seem **urgent, providing some gifts/ shocking news** or requiring receiver to **spread the message among others**.
- b. **Never click on forwarded links**. To surf links of known websites, always type them manually.
- c. Always **delete Smishing messages** (when received) to **avoid further spreading**.
- d. Never **forward, click or view link or photo** received on WhatsApp from unknown numbers.
- e. Always install and regularly update reputed antimalware solution on both Windows/ Android phones.

(2) **Email / Social Media / Other Apps**

- a. Never share email addresses, passwords or sensitive information on forwarded / spam links. Requests for personal or financial information must always be avoided.
- b. One-Time Password (OTP) **must never be shared with any one** as it can compromise two-factor authentication.
- c. **It is mandatory to apply 2x factor authentication** on all email, social media and banking accounts.
- d. Do not install unnecessary plugins on browsers except Adblock and Adblock plus.

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