

Short Message Service (SMS) Bombing

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Some people have recently received hundreds of **One Time Password (OTP) messages** from food delivery platforms **within a span of few hours.**



[Ref- Indian Express]

What is Short Message Service (SMS) Bombing?

- **SMS Bombing** is where a **user's number** is **bombarded** with a large number of **messages** or **OTP calls** within a very short period of time.
 - **Examples:** SMSBomber, BombItUp, and TXTBlast
- This is done with a **clear intention** to harass a user and **disrupt** the normal **working** of a **device**.
- These pranks are run using **freeware** and **Android Application Package (APK) files**.
 - **APK file** is the file format for **applications** used on the **Android Operating System (OS)** that contains data including software program's code, assets, and resources.
- SMS Bombing can serve different purposes like **trolling**, **cyberbullying**, or **diverting** the **target's attention**.
- The websites use **vulnerable Application Programming Interface (API) points** of other firms that send OTPs and texts to **legitimate** users for **login**, **password reset**, etc.
 - API is a code that **enables two software programs** to **communicate** across **multiple channels**.
- The attackers **exploit APIs** by making **GET** or **POST requests** with their scripts which **automates** message sending and perform SMS bombing attacks.

SMS bomber tools:

- Users need to **enter** the **number**, and **value** (number of messages to send), hit the **submit button**, and wait until the **success alert** is received.
- Such apps or websites does **not** have a **proper privacy policy** or terms of service and call itself a **tool for fun**.
- It has the **potential** to **create immense harm** by **incessant** messages as a nuisance for the **targeted persons**.
- The terms of service state its use only on **friends** and **family** and with the **consent**, but there is **no way** for **monitoring**.

Legal provisions in India:

Indian Penal Code (IPC):

- **Section 268:** Bombarding of SMS even after activating **Do Not Disturb (DND) service** on phone number is a form of **harassment** and **nuisance**.
- **Sections 378 and 420:** It is considered a **trap, bait**, and **criminal act** of **theft, cheating** and **dishonesty** inducing delivery of property.

Information Technology (IT) Act 2000:

- **Section 43-A:** Telecom operators and corporates should implement **security safeguards** to **protect personal data** of their clients who are at **risk** of **phishing scams**.
- They shall be **liable** to **pay damages** in the form of **compensation** to the **victims**, for causing wrongful loss to them, including **invasion** of **privacy**.

Prevention:

- **Protection of number:** Some websites provide users the to **protect** a **number**, once it is saved in the **protection list**, it **cannot** be used for SMS bombing.
- **Anti-SMS Bombers-** tools that **automatically block** the incoming messages from a particular sender if an OTP or same SMS occurs **more** than **three times**.
- **Security by firms:** Users can reach out to the **security teams** of the **firms** from whom they have received the messages.
 - This might help the firm to **patch** the **vulnerable API** and make it **impossible** for attackers to **misuse** it.