A Secure Single Sign – On Scheme for Distributed Systems and Network

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Abstract: *Single Sign On (SSO) has been around for many years to provide a single authentication for rendering multiple services. For instance Google has been using its SSO approach to render various services in a distributed computing environment. This will enable legal users to have a single credential for accessing all services provided by an enterprise through its web application online. This will help end users to have advantages such as remembering only one login credentials for all activities. Chang and Lee's SSO scheme was improved recently by Wang et al. to overcome the drawbacks of the work of Chang and Lee. The credential hacking by malicious service provider and outsider hacking credentials are the two problems overcome in their research. Inspired by this, in this paper we attempted to build a prototype application that demonstrates the concept of SSO. The application has many services and multiple users with effective session management. The empirical results reveal that the prototype is able to provide secure SSO.*

Keywords: Information Security, authentication, distributed computing, SSO

1. Introduction

With the advent of distributed computing and its prevailing existence in the real world organizations are having virtual collaborations. Companies can have business collaborations so as to get maximum benefits. It is evident in all sectors like banking, insurance, e-Commerce and so on. Many organizations can collaborate to form chain of businesses. This way Supply Chain Management (SCM) came into existence. User authentication plays pivotal role in securing applications. Security mechanisms such as authentication, authorization, confidentiality, non-repudiation are important to have complete security to applications. However, authentication is a common practice in all real world enterprise applications. Recently due to the collaborations, the practice of using SSO became common.
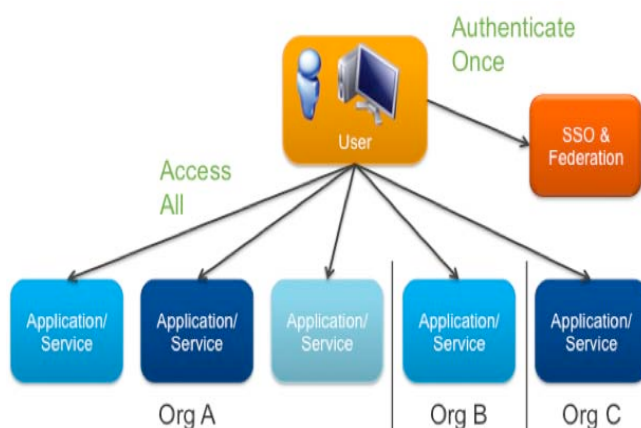
Figure 1: Schematic overview of single sign on

As can be seen in Figure 1, it is evident that the authentication takes place only once and user can gain access to multiple organizations and services through the federated SSO. This will be very convenient to end users as they do not need to remember and protect multiple credentials. Each organization and service does not need separate credential and a common credential can help in accessing all services of all organizations associated with the federation.

Many researches came into existence to study the feasibility and security strength of SSO. Many researchers such a Lee and Chang [1], Wu and Hsu [2], Yang et al. [3], Mangipudi and Katti [4], Hsu and Chuang [5] focused on security issues and SSO problems. The authentication problem has attracted many researchers in general computer networks [6], industrial networks [7] and RFID systems [8], [9]. In [10] SSO mechanism was introduced by the researchers where the credentials are used for short period of time. However, SSO scheme needs three important qualities such as credential privacy, soundness, and unforgeability. A generic SSO scheme was proposed in [11] while the zero knowledge (ZO) scheme was proposed in [12]. In [13] an SSO scheme was proposed by Chang-Lee. However, Chang-Lee scheme was proved to be insecure later. The reason behind this is that it causes impersonation attack, and credential recovery attack. To overcome this drawback Wang et al. [14] made security analysis on SSO in distributed environments.

In this paper we built a prototype application that implements SSO scheme to demonstrate the proof of concept. The proposed application has provision for working on attacks that are used to test the soundness of the SSO scheme. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section II provides review of literature on prior works. Section III describes the proposed system. Section IV presents experimental results while section V concludes the paper besides providing directions for future work.

2. Proposed System

The proposed SSO scheme is based on the mechanisms presented in [14]. The proposed SSO scheme has three phases such as initialization phase, registration phase and user identification phase. In the initialization phase security mechanisms are initialized. In the registration phase each user is given unique identity and each service provider is also given unique identity. These identities are used in the

further communication. In the user identification phase, each user has to deal with resource access based on the underlying security mechanisms. Between user and service provider there is a series of communications as part of user identification as presented in Figure 2.
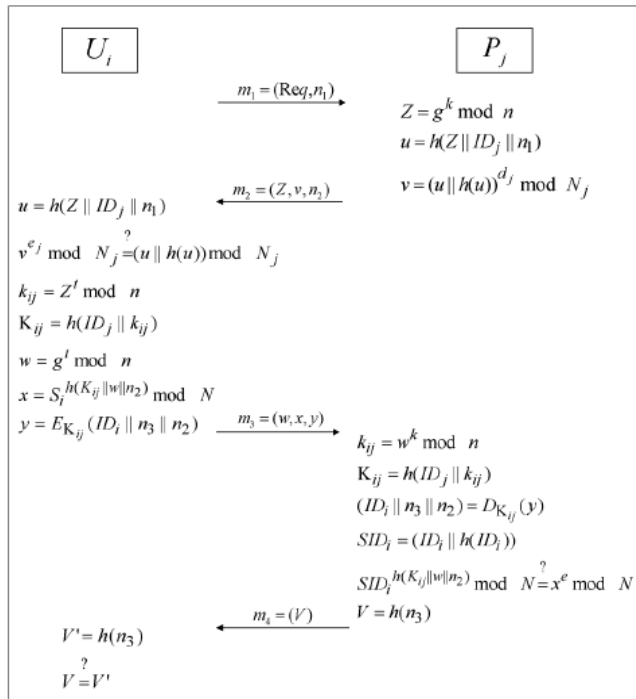

Figure 2: User identification phase [14]

As can be seen in Figure 2, it is evident that the user identification is carried out between two phases as part of the scheme. The scheme facilitates secure communication between two parties and thus it becomes part of the SSO scheme.

3. Implementation

We built a prototype application that demonstrates the concept of single sign on. The proposed scheme has been applied to an application where multiple parties are involved and multiple services are provided with SSO scheme.
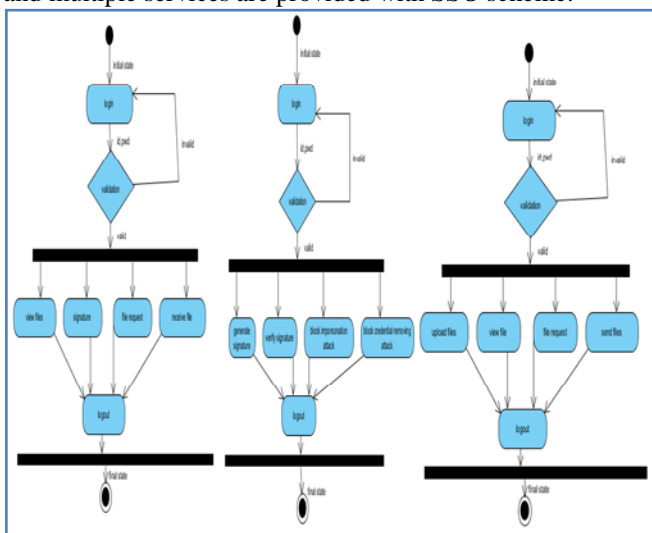

Figure 2: Activities of various users of the application

As can be seen in Figure 2, it is evident that the application has provision for various users such as normal user, SCPC user and service provider. The normal user has provision for various operations after SSO process. They include viewing files, signature, file request, receiving file and logging out. The SCPC user has provision for activities like generating signature, verifying signature, block impersonation attack, block credential removal attack and logging out. The service provider user has provision for operations like uploading files, viewing files, requesting for files, sending files and logging out. Before implementing these activities in web application besides implementation of SSO scheme backend schema was identified through normalization process.

3.1 Prevention of Man-in-the-Middle Attack

The proposed system provides solution for Man-In-The-Middle attack. This attack is generally launched by an adversary who can inject messages into a communication channel, modify existing messages or even eavesdrop messages. This is possible when attacker finds unencrypted WI-FI communications between them. The attack scenario is presented in Figure 3.
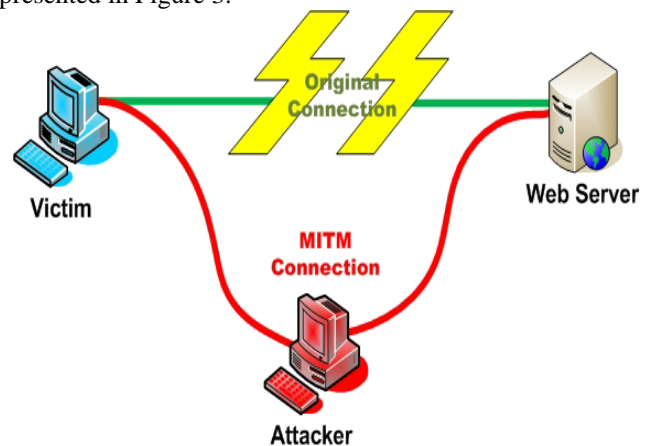

Figure 3: Illustrates man-in-the-middle attack

The proposed solution has prevention for the attack as it ensures strict authentication and authorization procedures as part of the SSO procedure. The secure communications among parties involved in conversation are initiated with fool proof security measures that do not allow attacker to succeed in man-in-the-middle attack. The attacker will not be able to gain access to the network in order to inject messages into the network.

3.2 Backend

MY SQL is used for backend. MY SQL is an RDBSM that is meant for storing the data generated by the proposed application. There are many tables for managing data being generated by the application including the tables that deal with SSO credentials. File management, user management and SSO related credentials are stored in corresponding tables. These tables are accessed from frontend application in order to demonstrates the SSO mechanisms, the attacks on the SSO scheme and other genral operations of the applications as required.
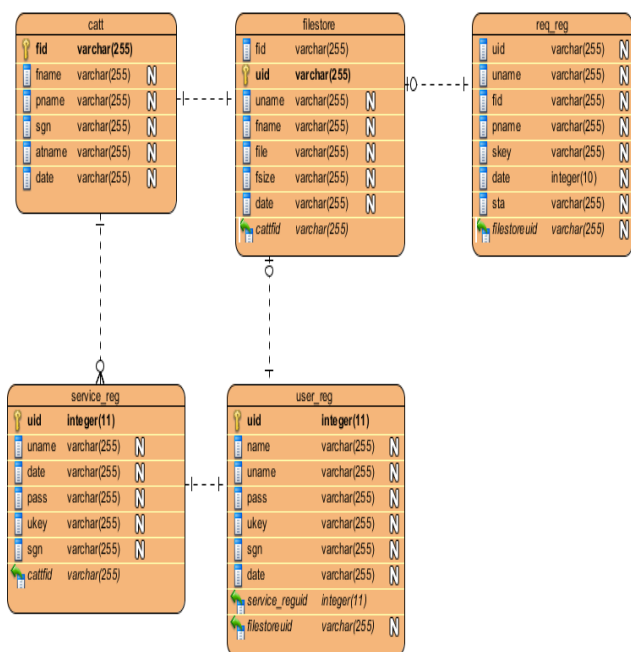
Figure 3: Backend schema

As can be seen in Figure 3, it is evident that the backend schema has several tables and each table contains related attributes. The schema has been normalized in order to have compact tables that provide clear storage provisions in the backend.

3.3 Prototype Application

We built a prototype application that interacts with backend as per the user needs. The application is built in Java technologies like Servlets and JSP. JDBC is used for interacting with the MY SQL and the application is meant for dmeonstratign the normal operations and also the soundness of the SSO scheme in the presence of various attacks. UI for SCPC user is as presented in Figure 4.
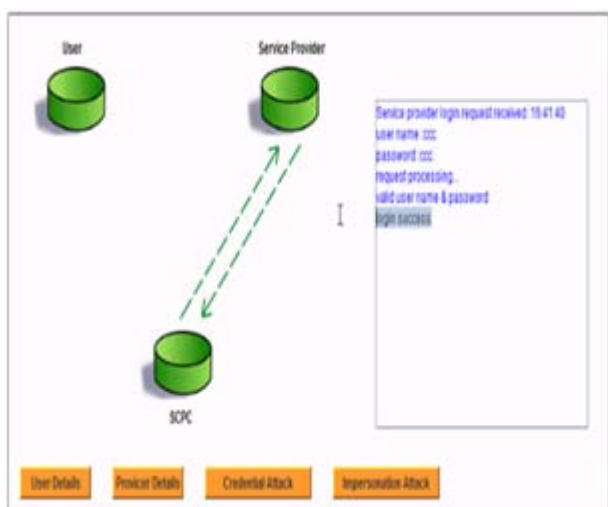

Figure 4: UI for SCPC user activities

As can be seen in Figure 4, it is evident that the SCPC user can perform activities like viewing user details, provider details, and testing the soundness of the SSO scheme by

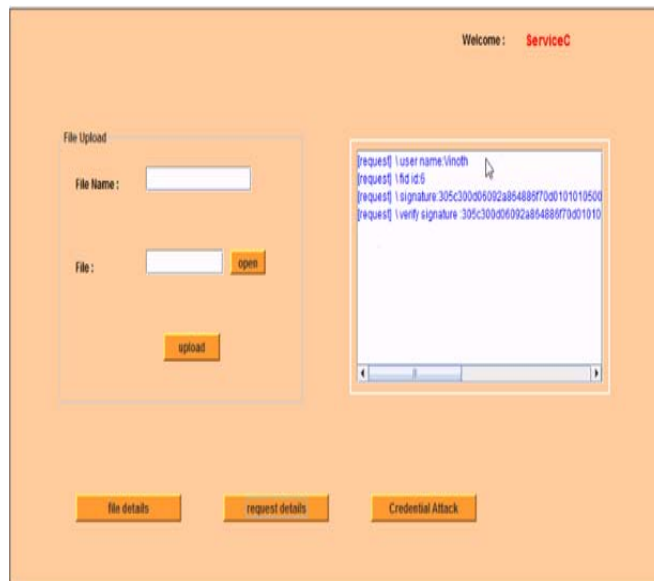launching attacks such as impersonation attack and credential attack.

Figure 5: UI for service provider user

As can be seen in Figure 5, it is evident that the service provider user can provide various operations like uploading files, viewing file details, requesting details and even launching credential attack for testing the soundness of SSO schme.
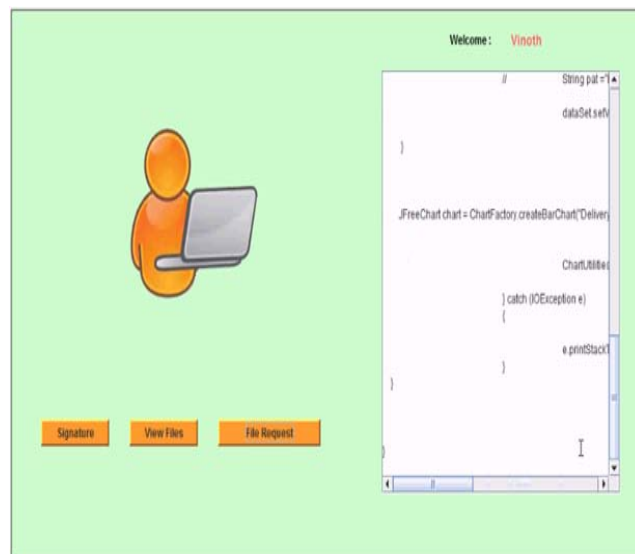

Figure 6: UI for normal user

As can be seen in Figure 6, it is evident that the normal end user can have operations like viewing files, making file request and so on. These operations are performed by end user after due SSO process and with single sign on users can perform various operations and jump to related services as well.

4. Experimental Results

Experiments are made in terms of testing the soundnesss of the proposed application. Two attacks such as credential attack and impersonation attack are made around 100 times and the average prevention capabilities are recorded. The

results of the proposed application are comkpared with existing solution. The results are presented in Figure 7.
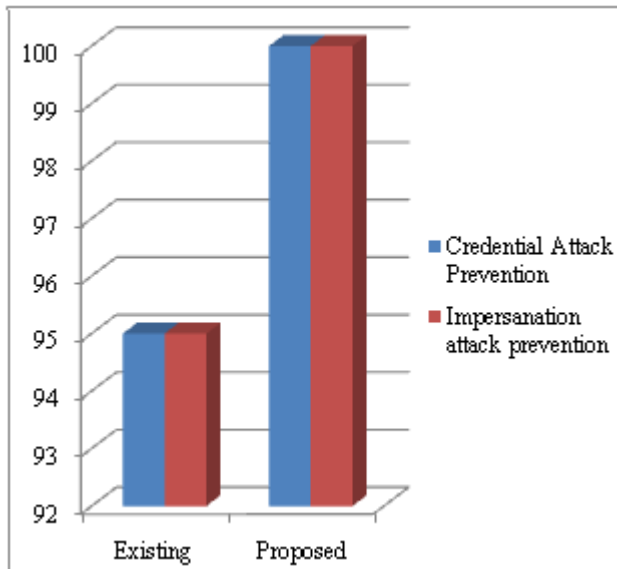

Figure 7: Attack prevention capabilities of proposed system

As can be seen in Figure 7, it is evident that the proposed SSO scheme and the application demonstrates the soundness of the technique. There is 100% security evident with respect to the SSO scheme implemented in this paper while the existing solution is vulnerable to credential and impersonation attacks.

5. Conclusions and Future Work

In this paper, we study the soundness of SSO schemes. SSO allows users to have single credential to have provision to visit multiple sites or to perform multiple activities. This will help in distributed computing environment to gain access to multiple service providers. This can avoid remembering many credentials as well. Single credential authentication has its advantages but when the credential is compromised, security is lost. Therefore it is essential to ensure that the credential is not disclosed. In this paper our focus was on making review on the SSO schemes and building a new SSO scheme that overcomes the drawbacks of existing scheme. The existing scheme was proved to be inefficient with attacks such as credential attack and impersonation attack. We built a prototype application to implement the SSO scheme and also demonstrate the soundness of SSO scheme for accessing multiple services using a single credential. In future we intend to implement SSO to real time applications.

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