

Google accused of manipulation to track users

Seven European consumer groups filed complaints against Google with national regulators Tuesday, accusing the internet giant of covertly tracking users' movements in violation of an EU regulation on data protection.

The complaints cited a study by the Norwegian Consumer Council that concluded the Internet giant used "deceptive design and misleading information, which results in users accepting to be constantly tracked."

Council official Gro Mette Moen charged that "Google uses extremely detailed and comprehensive personal data without an appropriate judicial basis, and the data is acquired by means of manipulative techniques."

Complaints against Google were filed in the Czech Republic, Greece, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovenia and Sweden.

They are based on the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which took effect in May.

Google is accused of tracking users' movements via its Location History and Web & App Activity applications, which are built into all Google accounts.

"For users of mobile phones with Android (operating systems), such as Samsung and Huawei phones, this tracking is particularly difficult to avoid," the Norwegian council noted.

According to the internet site Statcounter, almost 70 percent of European mobile phones run on the Android system.

"Location data can reveal a lot about a person: real time movements, frequently visited places, daily routines, interests, etc," the Norwegian complaint said.

"Constant location tracking and aggregation of location data over time can be used to build very detailed profiles of individuals and to infer religious beliefs, political leanings, and sexual orientation, among other things," it added.

Monique Goyens, director general of The European Consumer Organisation said: "Google's data hunger is notorious but the scale with which it deceives its users to track and monetise their every move is breathtaking.

"The situation is more than alarming. Smartphones are being used for spying on our every move."

The Dutch organisation Consumentenbond insisted that "this tracking must stop."

Google responded by saying that "Location History is turned off by default, and you can edit, delete, or pause it at any time. If it's on, it helps improve services like predicted traffic on your commute.

"If you pause it, we make clear that—depending on your individual phone and app settings—we might still collect and use location data to improve your Google experience."

Explore further: Google sued for unwanted tracking of phone locations

Read more at: <https://phys.org/news/2018-11-google-accused-track-users.html#jCp>