

Google misleads kids and parents about apps, complaint filed with FTC says

December 20 2018, by Levi Sumagaysay, The Mercury News



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Accusing Google of misleading practices about kids' apps, nearly two dozen child- and consumer-advocacy groups on Wednesday asked the FTC to investigate the Android maker.

In a complaint filed with the Federal Trade Commission, the groups said many apps included in the Family section of Google Play engage in prohibited targeted advertising, show inappropriate ads and/or content, and use unfair or deceptive marketing practices, in violation of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act.

The groups also allege that many of the apps violate Google's own policies, and that the company knows but does nothing.

"Since Google receives one-third of the revenue from every app purchased and every purchase made within the app, it is in the company's interest to ensure that the apps are as lucrative as possible," the complaint said. "It is crucial that the FTC step in and take strong action in light of Google's substantial economic incentives for lax enforcement of its DFF (Designed for Families) criteria."

In response, a Google spokeswoman said, "Apps in our Designed for Families program have to comply with strict policies on content, privacy and advertising, and we take action on any policy violations that we find. We take these issues very seriously and continue to work hard to remove any content that is inappropriately aimed at children from our platform."

The complaint comes as Google and other [tech companies](#) face increased pressure over their ad-based [business models](#) and how they and third-party partners track online users.

The Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, the Center for Digital Democracy and 20 other groups that include parents, teachers and public health advocates submitted the complaint. The groups in October asked the FTC to investigate developers of children's apps, and now, according to a news release Wednesday, they're targeting Google because it is "one of the world's leading providers of content for kids online." Some of the same groups also signed onto a different FTC complaint in April, in

which they accused Google-owned YouTube of targeting children in violation of COPPA.

The 100-page [complaint](#) about children's apps cites studies by others as well as by the groups themselves. The groups identified some of the apps they found "problematic" because they send information to third parties, including Flurry Analytics. Flurry is owned by Oath, which earlier this month agreed to pay \$5 million to settle charges that its AOL ad exchange targeted ads at kids younger than 13 using personal data. That violates COPPA.

The groups also gave examples of inappropriate [content](#) and ads in some of the children's apps, including ads for beer and gambling, and games that pressured children into making in-app purchases.

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Citation: Google misleads kids and parents about apps, complaint filed with FTC says (2018, December 20) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-12-google-kids-parents-apps-complaint.html>

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