

Canada privacy watchdog taking Facebook to court

April 25 2019



In this March 29, 2018 file photo, the logo for social media giant Facebook, appears on screens at the Nasdaq MarketSite, in New York's Times Square. Ireland's privacy regulator says it launched its eleventh investigation into Facebook over the social media giant's recent revelation that left hundreds of millions of user passwords exposed. The Irish Data Protection Commission said Thursday, April 25, 2019 that it opened a statutory inquiry this week into Facebook after the company notified it about the security lapse. (AP Photo/Richard Drew, File)

Canada's privacy czar said Thursday that he is taking Facebook to court after finding that lax practices at the social media giant allowed personal information to be used for political purposes.

A joint report from privacy commissioner Daniel Therrien and his British Columbia counterpart said major shortcomings were uncovered in Facebook's procedures. It called for stronger laws to protect Canadians.

The commissioners expressed dismay that Facebook had rebuffed their findings and recommendations.

Facebook insisted it took the investigation seriously. The company said it offered to enter into a compliance agreement.

The Canadian report comes as Ireland's privacy regulator is investigating Facebook over the company's recent revelation that it had left hundreds of millions of user passwords exposed.

The Canadian probe followed reports that Facebook let an outside organization use an app to access users' personal information and that some of the data was then passed to others. Recipients of the information included the firm Cambridge Analytica.

The app, at one point known as "This is Your Digital Life," encouraged users to complete a personality quiz but collected much more information about those who installed the app as well as data about their Facebook friends, the commissioners said.

About 300,000 Facebook users worldwide added the app, leading to the potential disclosure of the personal information of approximately 87

million others, including more than 600,000 Canadians, the report said.

The commissioners concluded that Facebook broke Canada's privacy law governing companies by failing to obtain valid and meaningful consent of installing users and their friends and that it had "inadequate safeguards" to protect user information.

Despite its public acknowledgment of a "major breach of trust" in the Cambridge Analytica scandal, Facebook disputes the report's findings and refuses to implement recommendations, the commissioners said.

"Facebook's refusal to act responsibly is deeply troubling given the vast amount of sensitive information people have entrusted to this company," Therrien said. "The company's privacy framework was empty."

Therrien reiterated his longstanding call for the Canadian government to give him authority to issue binding orders to companies and levy fines for non-compliance with the law. In addition, he wants powers to inspect the practices of organizations.

The office of Innovation Minister Navdeep Bains, the Cabinet member responsible for Canada's private-sector privacy law, said the government would take concrete actions on privacy in coming weeks.

Facebook Canada spokeswoman Erin Taylor said the company was disappointed that Therrien considers the issues unresolved.

"There's no evidence that Canadians' data was shared with Cambridge Analytica, and we've made dramatic improvements to our platform to protect people's personal information," Taylor said.

"We understand our responsibility to protect people's personal information, which is why we've proactively taken important steps

toward tackling a number of issues raised in the report."

If the application to Federal Court is successful, it could lead to modest fines and an order for Facebook to revamp its privacy practices, Therrien said.

Also on Thursday, the New York State Attorney General's Office announced that it is investigating the company's unauthorized collection of the email contacts of 1.5 million users. Facebook has previously acknowledged that it unintentionally uploaded the contacts.

The Menlo Park, California, said it is "in touch with the New York State attorney general's office and (is) responding to their questions on this matter."

© 2019 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Canada privacy watchdog taking Facebook to court (2019, April 25) retrieved 30 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-04-canada-privacy-watchdog-rebukes-facebook.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--