

Facebook tried to buy spyware on iOS to track iPhone users

The reason is that Facebook's methods of collecting user data on iOS devices are not effective.

NSO Group, the group behind the 2019 spyware attack, announced internal documents in court, revealing Facebook tried to buy a spyware called 'Pegasus'.

Pegasus can be installed on a user's device after clicking on a seemingly innocuous link, after which the device will be cracked and downloaded malware to track or steal data.

The data stolen in the case of Facebook, is the sensitive personal data of the user. Includes all messages, photos, login information and entire location data history.



The NSO Group says it only sells its spyware to 'Government or sovereign government agency'. However, as revealed by CEO Shalev Hulio, two Facebook representatives approached NSO Group in October 2017, and asked to purchase the rights to use some specific features of Pegasus.

According to Vice's report, Facebook bought Pegasus spyware because of concerns that data collected from users of Apple devices is less efficient than Android. There have been a lot of previous reports about this, Apple devices always respect the security and restrict third-party software to collect user data.

According to court records, NSO Group said: *'Facebook representatives say Facebook is concerned about their method of collecting user data through Onavo Protect inefficient on Apple devices compared to Android devices. Facebook says it wants to use specific Pegasus features to monitor users on Apple devices, and is willing to pay for that monitoring.'*

Facebook allegedly proposed to pay NSO Group a monthly fee based on each user. However, the NSO Group claims to have refused to sell Pegasus spyware to Facebook.



Facebook has developed a software called Onavo Protect, which is considered a VPN software. Onavo Protect is primarily used to collect information from other applications that Facebook users install on their devices.

Onavo Protect was removed from the App Store by Apple in 2019, after it was found to violate security rules. Apple said that Onavo Protect has collected irrelevant data, for advertising purposes.

Interestingly, NSO Group has once attacked and installed the Pegasus spyware into Facebook's WhatsApp app, on iOS and Android devices. The NSO Group said it carried out the attack at the request of a country's government.

NSO Group said that Pegasus software can extract any data on the user's device. It can even get data from cloud storage services installed on the device, like iCloud or Google Drive.

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