

SNAP MAPS - DO YOU KNOW WHO KNOWS WHERE YOU ARE?

Category: Commercial Law, Media and OTT, Privacy Law, Infosec, and POPIA
written by Yashoda Rajoo | August 16, 2017



Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram are some of the most popular social media platforms today. One thing they have in common is that they track your location, sometimes without you even being aware.

Snapchat is incredibly popular amongst the younger generation. It allows individuals to send images and videos to each other that disappear after a certain amount of time. On 21 June 2017, Snapchat launched a new feature called "Snap Map". This feature allows users to broadcast their location on a map to their contacts, or complete strangers if you choose to share your location publicly.

This update has received a great deal of backlash due to the accuracy of the geographical information it shares. Whilst your location-sharing is turned off by default, it's a good idea to make sure that you don't mind people knowing your every move before you turn location-sharing on. This is because the app tracks your location in real time, and even allows for details such as street names to be seen.

However, Snapchat released a statement in reply to all the criticism it received, and explained that the new features default setting is "Ghost mode", which stops the user's location from being broadcast. Therefore, the user has to manually enable the function. Though this safety mechanism is in place, the feature was launched without a detailed explanation; leaving user's unaware of precisely how it works.

Additionally, in terms of Snapchat's privacy policy, they state that "*When you use our services, we may collect information about your location. With your consent, we may also collect information about your precise location using methods that include GPS, wireless networks, cell towers, Wi-Fi access points and other sensors such as gyroscopes, accelerometers and compasses.*" Snapchat further states that "*We may share information about you if we reasonably believe that disclosing the information is needed to:*

- *comply with any valid legal process, governmental request, or applicable law, rule or regulation.*
- *investigate, remedy, or enforce potential Terms of Service violations.*
- *protect our, our users' or others, rights, property and safety.*
- *detect and resolve and fraud or security concerns.*"

Snapchat's privacy policy is vague, and leaves much to be desired, what's even more concerning is that Snapchat is regulated by US law. The Protection of Personal Information Act ("**POPIA**"), states that any personal information collected cannot be shared with other jurisdictions unless their privacy laws offer equal or greater protection than POPIA. US privacy laws offer much less protection than POPIA does as US law does not have a dedicated legislation dealing with the protection of personal information, instead it covers the protection of personal information in a piecemeal fashion. Consequently, when using Snapchat, you are affording yourself less protection than you're actually entitled to by turning your location sharing on.

While it may be exciting to "snap" to your friends and share fun moments, platforms such as Snapchat are public and this means that you are sharing snapshots with strangers, which is potentially dangerous. We therefore recommend turning-off your location – or else you will be sharing more than you anticipated.