

# Security Analysis of Garmin watches

Miłosz Głowaczewski

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1	Garmin fitness watches . . . . .	3
1.2	Software description . . . . .	4
1.3	Testing environment . . . . .	4
<b>2</b>	<b>Related work</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Threat analysis</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1	Focus of the analysis . . . . .	7
3.2	Attack surface . . . . .	7
<b>4</b>	<b>Security of Connect IQ store</b>	<b>8</b>
4.1	Preliminary analysis . . . . .	8
4.2	App decompilation . . . . .	8
4.3	Static analysis . . . . .	8
4.4	Sniffing the traffic . . . . .	8
4.5	Network security, . . . . .	9
4.6	App sideloading . . . . .	10
<b>5</b>	<b>Security of third party apps</b>	<b>11</b>
5.1	App runtime . . . . .	11
5.2	Preliminary analysis . . . . .	11
5.3	Permissions . . . . .	11
5.4	Building process . . . . .	12
5.5	Signing . . . . .	12
5.6	Modifying the executable . . . . .	13
5.7	Simulator . . . . .	14
5.8	Communication between the watch and the phone . . . . .	15
<b>6</b>	<b>Fuzzing third party apps</b>	<b>17</b>
6.1	Environment setup . . . . .	17
6.2	Fuzzing solutions . . . . .	17
6.3	Fuzzing process . . . . .	17
6.4	Fuzzing results . . . . .	17
<b>7</b>	<b>Privacy</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>19</b>
8.1	Summary . . . . .	19
8.2	Future work . . . . .	19

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Garmin fitness watches

In the past years fitness trackers experienced a high growth in popularity. As the technology develops, the devices get more affordable and are able to track more metrics. While it improves the insights into health and fitness tracking, it also means that it collects more sensitive data about the users.

Garmin fitness watches can accompany the users day and night, being able to last even over a week on a single charge. The company has a wide range of options, having released over 100 different watches with third party apps support. The devices are equipped with a large number of sensors such as heart rate, pulse oximeter, temperature, gps, compass, accelerometer, gyroscope, altimeter, barometer, light sensor. This allows collecting and calculating an enormous amount of different sensitive metrics. As a result, the potential consequences of unauthorized access to the user's data are severe.

The watches can work independently, collecting and processing the data offline. However, Garmin offers an extensive set of software to improve the user's experience. There are multiple apps available for iPhone and Android phones to manage the watch and the data. This means that the data is being sent over a Bluetooth protocol from the watch to the phone. Additionally, Garmin encourages users to synchronize the data with their cloud.

In case the provided software does not fulfill users' requirements, it is also possible to install third party apps on the watch. Garmin maintains an ecosystem of tools for the developers to create apps and publish them in a Garmin store. It makes the watch extensible and more universal, but it also allows for a third party developer to gain access to some of the user data.

The described software offers a powerful toolset for the users to analyse their fitness data. However, it also creates a large number of possible vectors of attack. It is also important to notice that the Garmin software is not open source, which makes it more difficult to analyse the security of the software. Garmin provides a contact form on their website to report security vulnerabilities. Unfortunately, they do not offer a bounty program.

In this report, a broad analysis of different attack vectors has been performed.

Overall, during the analysis, the following privacy and security concerns were found:

- Garmin uses deprecated SHA-1 for app signing
- Android apps installed on the phone, without any permissions can detect that the user uses Garmin devices and the type of the device
- Communication between the third party apps and their companion apps are in plain text, available to all apps installed on the Android phone

- Permission system of the third party watch apps is not as well separated into different categories as it is in Android, iOS phones.
- Fuzzy testing suggests that it may be possible to escape the virtual machine running the third party apps.

## 1.2 Software description

Garmin provides multiple mobile apps to manage the watch and the data.

- Garmin Connect — the main app for managing the watch and the data.
- Garmin Explore — app for managing the watch and the data, focused on the offline usage.
- Garmin Connect IQ Store — app store for third party apps, that can be installed on the watch.

If the user decides to synchronize the data with the cloud, it is sent to the Garmin Connect services. Then it can be accessed through the website or the mobile app.

Additionally, Garmin has developed a proprietary programming language, Monkey C running in a virtual machine for creating third-party apps. The developers are provided with an SDK, containing all the necessary tools for creating and testing the apps. Monkey C language has an integration with Visual Studio Code through the extension. The apps can be tested either on a real device or on a simulator, provided with the SDK. There is an official documentation describing the development process.

After a preliminary analysis, the following scripts and tools were found in the SDK:

- monkeybrains.jar - java archive, compiles and builds the project
- simulator - binary ELF file, simulates a chosen Garmin device
- monkeydo - executes Connect IQ executable on the simulator
- Other scripts: barrelbuild, barreldtest, connectiq, era, mdd, monkeyc, monkey-graph, monkeydoc, shell, monkeymotion

## 1.3 Testing environment

For the analysis the decision was made to use Linux operating systems as it is a popular choice in the system security community and a large number of materials use it. The chosen distribution was Kali Linux because it comes with already preinstalled toolset.

The testing is executed on the watch Garmin Fenix 7S Pro, released in May 2023. The third party applications are investigated when using Connect IQ 6.3 SDK, released in August 2023.

Garmin supports both Android and iOS phones for managing the watch. I focused on the Android version of the software. Android is more open and easier to analyse, and I did not have access to Apple devices.

For the purpose of the analysis, when Garmin watches are mentioned, this report focuses on Garmin Fenix watches series 7. Other devices may offer different hardware and software configurations.

## 2 Related work

Different attempts at the security analysis of Garmin software are available online. There were attempts to ethically hack a Garmin watch [6, 9], analyzing different vectors of attack such as the Garmin Connect website, watch communication, and third-party apps. However, they did not go deep into any of those topics.

Others tried to reverse engineer Garmin’s Virtual Machine and do a security analysis of the environment [5, 7]. They were able to get access to the firmware of the watch. With the help of unofficial documentation of the firmware format [8], they proceeded to reverse engineer the bytecode. During the analysis, they determined which parts of the code are responsible for the third-party apps’ execution. Thereafter, they found multiple vulnerabilities concerning the app runtime that have been disclosed to Garmin. Some of them affected over a hundred devices for around 7 years.

While they explored the specific topic deeper, there is still a long list of things that could be analyzed in more detail. Previous attempts used an available beta firmware for the analysis and used watches released over 4 years ago. Since then, many new models have been introduced as well as new firmware versions with new features and expanded developer SDK.

Considering the size of Garmin’s ecosystem and the number of different components, the existing, publicly available analysis is far from being comprehensive.

## 3 Threat analysis

### 3.1 Focus of the analysis

The amount of software, watch models, and the fact that firmware is being constantly developed makes it infeasible to cover everything in a single publication. I decided to focus on the analysis of the third party apps, as it is the most interesting topic and unique to Garmin devices. The previous research found multiple vulnerabilities in the third party apps runtime affecting over a hundred devices [5, 7]. Moreover, both of the articles mention that the analysis was far from being comprehensive. Even though Garmin software is a closed source, the researchers were able to find multiple problems in the runtime environment. This suggests it is worth investigating further, as there might be potentially more bugs in the software.

### 3.2 Attack surface

As the focus of the report is third party apps, the attack surface is limited to the apps and the store. More precisely, for the attack surface, I will focus on the installation of malicious apps. If the adversary is able to install a malicious app on the watch, it is possible to access sensitive user data and possibly tamper with it. There are two stages of the apps that need to be considered:

- Installation process
- Runtime

The watch is managed by the phone. Because of that, for the security of the watch, it is important to consider the security of the phone as well. Assuming that the phone itself is secure, the attack surface is limited to the Garmin mobile apps and the communication between the phone and the watch. The installation of the apps is handled by the Connect IQ Store. As such, the security of the store has to be analyzed.

The runtime is handled by the virtual machine, which is responsible for executing the bytecode of the apps. Garmin provides a limited set of APIs that the apps can use. When the user installs the app, they agree to the permissions requested by the app. In this case, it is necessary to analyze if the apps can break the contract and access data or perform actions that they are not supposed to.

## 4 Security of Connect IQ store

### 4.1 Preliminary analysis

Application allows the users to download third party apps to the watch. The user can select an app to install it.

Notes:

- the phone downloads the app
- sends it to the watch via BT

As the analysis of the Android application was not the main focus of the report, it does not go very deep. However, it was necessary to have a basic understanding of the app to be able to analyze the communication between the watch and the phone. This is described in the section 5.8.

### 4.2 App decompilation

I decompiled the app with JADX. The app is obfuscated.

I couldn't find any code that would be responsible for checking the certificate of the downloaded app. I was looking for keywords such as the library that was used during a build process, SHA1, RSA.

Probably there is not much of a point to check the certificate on the phone, assuming that the watch is doing it.

I didn't manage to find the code responsible for downloading the app.

### 4.3 Static analysis

### 4.4 Sniffing the traffic

To analyze the network security, I tried to sniff the traffic between the phone and Garmin servers. I decided to use mitmproxy<sup>1</sup>. When dynamically analyzing the app, there are two options. Either use an emulator or a real device. Emulator usually offers more flexibility and is easier to manipulate. However, it does not have access to Bluetooth, which is necessary to test the app. For this reason, I used a real device. - linux hotspot + mitmproxy - problem with certificates. Two options to solve the problem: - Rooted phone - Modify the app

The minimum supported Android version is 7. Those versions require root access to add certificates supported by applications. Another option is to modify the app to accept user added certificates.

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<sup>1</sup><https://mitmproxy.org/>



## Attempt 1 - Android Unpinner

Use Android Unpinner - <https://github.com/mitmproxy/android-unpinner>

The app starts when connected to mitmproxy. However, when trying to log in, it goes back to the welcome screen. **\*\*Not possible to log in\*\***.

## Attempt 2 — manually modify the apk and sign again

Using Apktool(<https://apktool.org/>) to unpack the app, modify, and pack again, align zip file and sign with a debug key.

After installing the app, there are some errors with missing resources. I did not investigate it further.

## Attempt 3 — only resign the app.

Just resigning the app with a debug key. The app starts, but when trying to log in it seems to work the same as the app from the attempt #1.

## Attempt 4 — use rooted phone

Short description about the root

## 4.5 Network security,

Based on the traffic that went through mitmproxy:

Used domains: - 'sso.garmin.com' - Qualys SSL Labs analysis: **\*\*grade B\*\***  
- server supports **\*\*TLS 1.1\*\*** - 'diauth.garmin.com' - Qualys SSL Labs analysis: **\*\*grade A\*\***

File Modification	Export	Interception	Request	Response	Connection	Timing
Path		Method Status Size Time				
http://connectivitycheck.gstatic.com/generate_204		GET 204 0 121ms	POST https://diauth.garmin.com/di-auth2-service/oauth/token HTTP/1.1			
http://play.googleapis.com/generate_204		GET 204 0 166ms	User-Agent: C1Q-Android-2.23.1			
http://connectivitycheck.gstatic.com/generate_204		GET 204 0 150ms	X-Garmin-User-Agent: com.garmin.connectiq/2.23.1; mobile-auth/7.6.1; samsung/SN-6908F/samsung; Android/33; Dalvik/2.1.0 (Linux; U; Android 13; SN-6908F Build/TP1A.220624.014)			
http://www.google.com/gen_204		GET 204 0 169ms	Content-Type: application/x-www-form-urlencoded			
http://connectivitycheck.gstatic.com/generate_204		GET 204 0 172ms	Cache-Control: no-cache			
http://www.google.com/gen_204		GET 204 0 151ms	Connection: keep-alive			
http://connectivitycheck.gstatic.com/generate_204		GET 204 0 167ms	Authorization: Basic 0g==			
http://play.googleapis.com/generate_204		GET 204 0 146ms	Content-Length: 216			
http://connectivitycheck.gstatic.com/generate_204		GET 204 0 125ms	Host: diauth.garmin.com			
http://play.googleapis.com/generate_204		GET 204 0 172ms	Accept-Encoding: gzip			
https://sso.garmin.com/sso/signin?service=https%3A%2F%2Fsso.garmin.com%2Fsso%2F... POST		200 2.6kb 1s	URLEncoded form			
https://sso.garmin.com/sso/js/postmessage.js?70210319		GET 200 606b 274ms	client_id:			
https://sso.garmin.com/sso/js/query/3.1.1/query.min.js?70210319		GET 304 0 273ms	service_ticket: ST-0188551-Ym1hYVlV3USq3K66Kr-cas			
https://sso.garmin.com/sso/js/son2.js		GET 304 0 272ms	grant_type: https://connectapi.garmin.com/di-auth2-service/oauth/grant/service_ticket			
https://sso.garmin.com/sso/js/consolelet3f5.js?70210319		GET 304 0 268ms	service_url: https://sso.garmin.com/sso/webid			
https://sso.garmin.com/sso/images/ajax-loader.gif		! GET 0 ...				
https://sso.garmin.com/sso/embed?ticket=ST-0188551-Ym1hYVlV3USq3K66Kr-cas		! GET 0 ...				
https://diauth.garmin.com/di-auth2-service/oauth/token		POST 500 359b 1s				

Figure 1: Sniffed traffic

## 4.6 App sideloading

- can we install an app that is not signed up by the store? - app signed up only by the developer can be install through the cable, but not through the store - the watch is probably checking the certificate - it suggests that the Bluetooth API for app installation requires the app to be signed by the store - good thing

## 5 Security of third party apps

### 5.1 App runtime

The applications are intended to be run on a wide range of devices, with different hardware configurations. The execution environment needs to be able to enforce access control and isolation. Moreover, the devices are very limited in resources, which makes it difficult to adapt the existing solutions such as Java virtual machine. For those reasons, Garmin decided to create a custom virtual machine and a programming language.

However, creating a correct abstraction layer is a complex task. It creates a large attack surface, and it is challenging to ensure that the implementation is correct.

### 5.2 Preliminary analysis

The existing research analysed the bytecode of the firmware running on the watch. Unfortunately, the firmware is no longer available for download. There is a chance that it would be possible to reverse engineer the watch hardware and extract the firmware from the device. However, it would require an extensive amount of time and resources and is out of scope of this report. Another option would be to investigate the protocol used to download a new firmware version. It would require additional time and there is no guarantee that it would be possible to download the full firmware.

In the end, I decided to perform the analysis on the simulator provided by Garmin. As it runs directly on the computer, it is possible to perform a more in-depth analysis of the software such as dynamic analysis. The simulator is supposed to guarantee proper isolation, so escaping the sandbox would be a potential vulnerability. Additionally, there is a chance that parts of the code are reused in the firmware running on the watch and the findings would be applicable to the real device.

### 5.3 Permissions

Third party apps can interact with the watch by using the API provided by the SDK. The API is divided into several modules, each of them providing different functionality. Some of those functionalities can be considered sensitive, such as GPS location, heart rate, or access to the internet. Because of that, Garmin implemented a permission system, where different permissions grant access to different modules. The app has to define in the manifest file which permissions it requires, and the user has to accept them before installing the app. The system offers some granularity, and can give the user a general overview of what the app can do. However, some, potentially sensitive modules don't require any permissions. For example, the app can access some basic activity data such as heart rate, steps, calories without any permissions. Moreover, in February 2023, Garmin introduced

a new module: Complications. It is a publish/subscribe model that allows for the apps to publish different metrics, so that they would be accessible for any watch face. While it makes the access to different metrics more flexible and accessible, it also removes the granularity of the permissions. Every app can potentially publish very sensitive data, without the user being aware of it. Then every watch face can access all this data if it requests ‘Complications’ permission.

## 5.4 Building process

In order to understand the runtime environment, I started with the analysis of the building process. As it was mentioned, it is recommended to use Visual Studio Code with the extension provided by Garmin. During the compilation, the code is translated to mid-level intermediate representation (MIR). The files containing the representations could be used for better understanding of the final artefact.

Visual Studio calls the compiler, which is a jar file called *monkeybrains.jar*. The compiler is written in Java, which makes the analysis of the code relatively straightforward. Nonetheless, it is a complicated process consisting of several stages. For the analysis, I decided to use JADX decompiler<sup>2</sup>.

After loading the jar file, I noticed that a large part of the relevant code is not obfuscated. Then I proceeded to analyse the code. The following classes are of particular interest:

- `com.garmin.monkeybrains.compiler2.Compiler2` — main class responsible for the compilation process.
- `com.garmin.connectiq.common.monkeyc.AssemblerOpcode` — contains a list of instructions in the final bytecode.
- `com.garmin.connectiq.common.signing.SigningUtils` — class responsible for signing the app, described in more detail in the section 5.5.

Additionally, SDK provides a mapping of all API methods to the number values, which is probably some type of address.

I was able to find the code responsible for signing the application. It is described in more detail in the section 5.5.

## 5.5 Signing

Garmin requires that the apps are signed to be installed on the watch [2]. The app has to be signed by the developer with their private key. In order for the app to be updated, it has to be signed with the same key. When the store has approved the app, it is additionally signed with the store signature.

The described process enforces that the app can be updated only by the developer having access to the original private key. Additionally, when the app is

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<sup>2</sup><https://github.com/skylot/jadx>

downloaded from the store, the watch can verify that it has been approved by the store.

Based on the analysis of the compiler, class `SigningUtils` is responsible for signing the app. It uses `java.security.Signature` class to generate the signature. The signing algorithm uses SHA1 hash of the bytecode that is signed with a private RSA key. The key is 4096 long, which is more than recommended. For the signing, conventions described in PKCS #1 v2.2 are used [3, 4]. The pseudocode of the signing algorithm is presented in the listing 1. Store signature is generated in a similar way, does not include the modulus and exponent, and uses a different magic number. The store probably uses the public key in the developer signature to verify and save it after the first upload of the app.

```
def sign_with_developer_signature():
    app_bytes = read_prg_file()
    app_bytes, terminator = remove_terminator(app_bytes)
    signature, modulus, exponent = compute_signature(app_bytes)

    dev_signature = bytearray()
    dev_signature.append(MAGICNUMBER)
    dev_signature.append(signature_lenght)
    dev_signature.append(signature)
    dev_signature.append(modulus)
    dev_signature.append(exponent)

    signed_app = bytearray()
    signed_app.append_all(app_bytes, dev_signature, terminator)
    write_prg_file(signed_app)
```

Listing 1: Signing algorithm, developer signature

SHA-1 is no longer considered secure against well-funded opponents. NIST formally deprecated use of this hash function in 2011. In 2020 there was a paper published demonstrating a chosen-prefix collision attack. A potential vector of attack would be to create a malicious app with the same hash as the original app. At the current state of the art, there is no viable solution to find a collision to a given hash for a chosen prefix. However, the function has been already broken and in the upcoming years new attacks might be discovered.

## 5.6 Modifying the executable

To perform dynamic analysis of the virtual machine, it is useful to be able to edit the executable. However, after changing the bytecode, it is necessary to sign the executable again. With the knowledge gained from the previous section, I created a kotlin script that signs the app again.

The code follows the same instructions as the original method in listing 1. The only difference is that the old signature is replaced with the new one.

To verify that the script works correctly, I created a simple app that prints a message in the console. Then I modified the bytecode to print a different message and signed the app with the created script. After installing the app on the watch and the simulator, the new message was displayed. When trying to install the app without the new signature, the watch and the simulator would display an error message.

## 5.7 Simulator

Garmin SDK provides a simulator for testing the apps. It is used by the Visual Studio Code extension to run the apps. I found the executable in the SDK bin folder. The file starts with ELF header, which means that it is a binary executable file. To analyse bytecode, I decided to use Ghidra<sup>3</sup>. It is free and open-source software for reverse engineering.

After loading the file, a list of assembly instructions is displayed. Fortunately, Ghidra has an option to analyse and decompile the code to C.

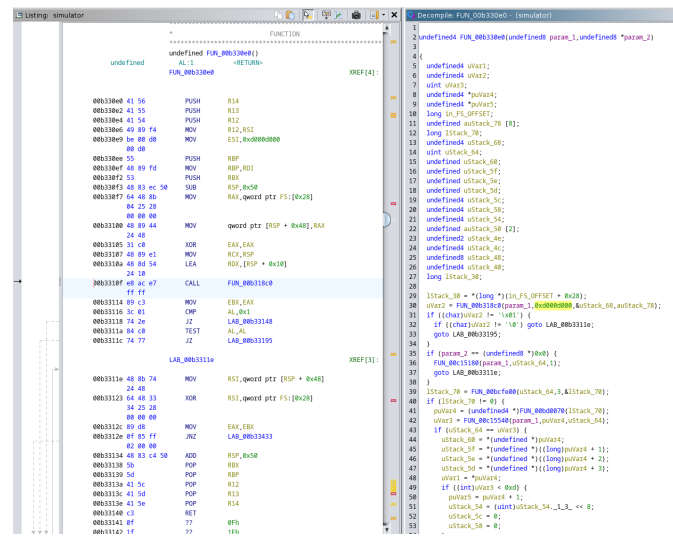


Figure 2: Simulator decompilation

The header of the third party apps is tagged with value '0xD000D000' [5]. Searching for it in the simulator binary reveals two references.

From this point, it would be theoretically possible to analyse the code and reverse engineer the virtual machine. However, doing it without any documentation, where the names of the functions and variables are not known would be very challenging.

<sup>3</sup><https://ghidra-sre.org/>

As it is not possible to do it in a reasonable amount of time, I decided to focus on fuzzing the virtual machine. This is described in the section 6.

## 5.8 Communication between the watch and the phone

Garmin has multiple apps for managing the watch and the data. As such, it is interesting to analyse the communication between them and the watch. I analyzed the Manifest files in Connect IQ Store and Garmin Connect apps. Both of them use Bluetooth permissions to connect with the watch. Additionally, they define Garmin custom permissions as can be seen in the figure 3. The permissions have set protection level to 'signature'(0x2), which means that only apps signed with the same key can use them. They are used to be able to receive specific broadcasts, probably to communicate with themselves. It is a functionality provided by Android and should offer an appropriate level of security.

```
<permission
    android:name="com.garmin.android.apps.connectmobile.permission.RECEIVE_BROADCASTS"
    android:protectionLevel="0x2" />

<permission
    android:name="com.garmin.android.apps.connectmobile.permission.RECEIVE_THIRD_PARTY_BROADCASTS"
    android:protectionLevel="0x2" />
```

Figure 3: Declared permissions by Connect IQ Store

When it comes to third party apps, they can communicate with the phone by using the API provided by the SDK. Garmin created SDK for Android and iOS that allows to create a companion mobile app for the watch app. They created an example of watch and Android app that communicate with each other<sup>4</sup>. The Android SDK uses Broadcasts under the hood to communicate with Garmin Connect app. It allows the programmer to query for available Garmin devices connected to the phone. Then it is possible to establish communication with the chosen app on the watch.

The first thing that can be noticed is that the SDK is able to get a list of all Garmin devices connected to the phone without any permissions. They use Broadcasts that are available to all apps. This creates a potential privacy issue, as any app can get the information if the user has a Garmin device connected to the phone. Moreover, it is possible to get the information about the device, such as the model name.

Another issue is that the communication between the app on the watch and the companion app is not encrypted. The SDK offers a function to register a listener for events from the watch app, given the app ID. However, when looking at the implementation, it is a wrapper around the Broadcasts. It is possible to register

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<sup>4</sup><https://github.com/garmin/connectiq-android-sdk>

a listener for all events from all apps. This means that any app on the phone can listen to the messages from any watch app. I did not find any mention that would warn the developers about this issue.

Following this finding, I decided to test this hypothesis. I created a simple watch app that sends a message to the companion app. Then, based on the SDK, I created an Android app that listens to all messages from all watch apps. When I installed both apps, the Android app was able to receive the messages from the watch app with the information about the origin.

Having this information, I proceeded to investigate if it might be an issue for existing apps in the store. Firstly, I looked into Spotify and Komoot apps. Both of them are very popular and have a large number of downloads. They have a full version of the app available on the phone and a companion app on the watch. However, they do not use the SDK provided by Garmin. Instead, they connect to their servers directly. It might be because it was easier to implement, or because they wanted to have more control over the communication.

Then I tried to find apps that use the SDK provided by Garmin. I found a developer 'r.485' that has published multiple apps in the store with the companion app on the phone. However, when I installed the apps, they did not work correctly.

At this point, I decided to stop the investigation. While it is a privacy issue, I could not find any apps that it would affect.

As Garmin already uses custom permissions for communication between their apps, I wondered why they did not use it for the SDK. According to Android documentation, [1] it is possible to send broadcasts that can be only received by apps with specific permissions. It is also possible to define a custom permission that can be requested by other apps. However, custom permissions have to be already defined when such an app is being installed. Because of that, it is probably not a viable option for Garmin.



## 6 Fuzzing third party apps

### 6.1 Environment setup

### 6.2 Fuzzing solutions

### 6.3 Fuzzing process

### 6.4 Fuzzing results

## 7 Privacy

## **8 Conclusion**

### **8.1 Summary**

### **8.2 Future work**

- Investigation into the findings from the fuzzy testing
- Further analysis of the mobile Garmin apps
- Reverse engineering of the firmware/virtual machine

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