Treading a fine line: protecting children in online social networks

Penny Duquenoy
Patrick Watson

Middlesex University

Presentation outline

- General description of the project
- The technology, ethics and user part
- Tensions: protecting public, protecting privacy
- Scope of the project
- Considering ethics in the design processes
- Preliminary issues

The Project

A. The technology part
   - Developing technologies that …
     - Identify paedophiles using chat rooms to 'groom' children
     - Identify paedophile communities sharing child abuse images

B. The 'ethics' part
   - Identifying the ethical issues, feeding concerns into the technical development

C. A user interface part?

For the technologists …

- What the technology will do …

The project will develop natural language analysis techniques to help identify paedophiles from chat logs and monitoring mechanisms that can be non-invasively attached to file sharing systems for identifying the distributors of child abuse media.

Tensions: public protection -v- individual privacy

- Finding the right balance … is it possible?

- Viviane Reding thinks so (May 2009):

"We also need to find the right balance between our security needs and the legitimate desire of users to protect their privacy. In this domain, the technological and scientific experts have to work hand in hand with the policy makers."

Scope ...

- Working with UK law enforcement agencies to "support policing activities"

- Trialled on secondary data already held by UK law enforcement and highlighted as suspicious

- Aim: to provide a filtering mechanism to find relevant 'suspicious' cases for further investigation

Considering ethics ...
... and the design process

- Aim: to gather stakeholder feedback on the issues of concern
- Stakeholder's – who?
  - Internet Service Providers
  - Law enforcement agencies (and their personnel)
  - Suspects (who may be offenders)
  - Victims (children)
  - General users

Feeding back into the design

- Practical challenges
  - Technology development approach
  - Synchronisation
  - Refining the problem
  - Changing requirements

Ethics, stakeholders, priorities

- Law enforcement priority to protect children (with whatever means?)
- ISP's – need to protect their liability
- ICT professionals – willing to trade-off for benefits (in social networks)
- Users – are they interested?
- Privacy advocates – what?   **?**

Preliminary issues

- Privacy, should it apply in this context? To what level? Can a balance be achieved?

- [Technological] Interpretations of suspicious behaviour ... on what rules/premises?

- Fitting in with working practices, recognising limitations and constraints

Overall

- At the general level the project provides the opportunity to:
    - Understand the views of different stakeholders
    - Consider priorities and values inherent in monitoring technologies
    - Raise awareness re tensions
    - Provoke deeper consideration regarding the impact of technologies we have the capability of developing today.

Further information

Further discussions on "ethics aware software design" :

Rashid, A., Weckert, J., Lucas, R. "Software Engineering Ethics in a Digital World" Editors' Introduction, in Computing Now, published by IEEE Computer Society, June 2009.

http://www2.computer.org/cms/Computer.org/ComputingNow/homepage/2009/0709/T1_CO1_SoftEngEthics.pdf

ISIS project:
http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/computing/isis/