Facebook and Microsoft battle child porn

May 21 2011

The Facebook website is displayed on a laptop computer on May 9, in San Anselmo, California. Facebook and Microsoft on Friday formally unveiled an alliance to ferret out child porn and those that share such images at the world's leading online social network.

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Facebook will use PhotoDNA technology developed by Microsoft and Dartmouth College computer science professor Hany Farid to search for matches to pictures in a National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) database.

"We think this is a game changer and we are thrilled to be a part of this partnership," Facebook assistant general counsel Chris Sonderby said in

broadcast streamed at the social network.

PhotoDNA has evaluated more than two billion digital pictures at Microsoft services, finding 1,000 matches on SkyDrive and 1,500 matches through Bing image indexing, according to Microsoft Digital Crimes Unit associate general counsel Bill Harmon.

"It is very efficient technology and will not slow down a network," Farid said during the live-streamed presentation.

"It has scanned over two billion images without a single false positive."

PhotoDNA will scan the hundreds of millions photos uploaded daily to Facebook, blocking pictures recognized as child porn and, hopefully, leading police to the sources, according to Sonderby.

If caches of such imagery are seized, new pictures will be "fingerprinted" and made part of the PhotoDNA net, according to NCMEC chief executive Ernie Allen.

"This is a problem that is global in nature," Allen said. "We think with Facebook we will be able to identify perpetrators preying on kids all over the world."

The California-based social networking service is reported to have more than 600 million members around the planet.

"Facebook is becoming a model for the entire Internet industry," Allen said, who expressed hope that pressure would be put on other online services to employ the child-porn-detecting technology.

PhotoDNA will also be scouring Facebook uploads for pictures of children reported missing, since youths tend to stay connected with

friends at the social network even if they are dodging family, according to police.

"Facebook joining us is just a fantastic step forward," Harmon said in the webcast.

"We plan to keep deploying and hope more partners and make this really big and help children in a large way."

Each month Facebook users share more than 30 billion pieces of content including pictures, news stories, blog posts, and Web links, according to Microsoft.

"Identifying graphic child pornography in a sea of content like that is a daunting task, but PhotoDNA is helping to find the proverbial needle in a haystack," Harmon said in a blog post.

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Citation: Facebook and Microsoft battle child porn (2011, May 21) retrieved 20 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2011-05-facebook-microsoft-child-porn.html