

ChiPSoM – Child Protection for Social Media

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A. Introduction

Platforms for user generated content play a major role for children and young people using the Internet. Among the most famous and most relevant Internet services are Facebook and Youtube.

Concepts aiming at child protection have to consider the fact that the service providers usually do not offer any inappropriate content themselves. Instead, they only provide the framework or platform for such content, uploaded by the individual users. This is why users become providers and are therefore the ones primarily responsible for possible offences against child protection laws. The platform providers may be responsible, too, but only once they are aware of content being relevant with regard to child protection (cf. § 10 German Telemedia Law – TMG – which transposes Art. 14 sec (1) of the European E-Commerce Directive into national law).

B. Concept for Future Proof Child Protection

Many of the large UGC services have already implemented essential instruments for the protection of younger users on their platforms. Youtube, for instance, provides videos that are not accessible in “Safety mode” due to internal labelling and filtering. Other platforms provide similar features. Usually the providers follow a three-tiered approach here, distinguishing user generated content in suitable for all age groups, suitable for young people (e.g. 13 or 14 and over) and for adults only.

Depending on the kind of service and the provider’s decisions, different sources are taken into account for this internal classification (self-rating by the uploader, community ratings, internal report mechanisms etc.) and are implemented using different technologies. This is where ChiPSoM steps in.

C. MIRACLE Working Group ChiPSoM – Child Protection for Social Media

Within the framework of the MIRACLE project (www.miracle-label.eu), a technical pilot developing and implementing electronic interoperable age classifications and co-funded by the EC, the working group ChiPSoM (Child Protection for Social Media) has recently been established. The working group’s objective is to collect the various approaches currently being used by providers of social media platforms, to analyse the experiences which are being made and thus to be able to identify best practice solutions, eventually suggesting effective child protection measures for platform providers in the field of user generated content. These suggestions could serve as guidelines for companies in the future. The group will offer a proposal for a standardisation of electronic labels so that age labels of the individual systems will be machine-readable internationally. Where possible, potentials for the standardisation of content rating approaches on platforms for user generated content shall be identified.

ChiPSoM activities were started by the Hand Bredow Institute and the FSM, aiming for a continued dialogue with relevant industry stakeholders. Contact to companies exist through FSM membership, common projects (MIRACLE) and the active participation in relevant forums on the EU level (CEO Coalition to Make the Internet a Better Place for Kids, ICT Coalition, the EU Safer Internet Programme, Better Internet for Kids and Connecting Europe Facility).

The working group acknowledges that there is no technical one-size-fits-all solution due to different innovations, international differences in operating procedures and (often proprietary) standards, different evolutionary levels of implementation as well as their contexts and options. The existing – sometimes very promising – approaches rather need to be strengthened by further developing their potentials through technical interoperability.

When providing recommendations, this working group will distinguish between the process of age rating by users and the implementation of electronic labels consisting of such ratings. Here, the way content is being rated may very well influence the labelling technically. Therefore, overlapping fields and interdependencies between these two steps will be elaborated and then structured accordingly. This procedure aims at providing important basic requirements for easier adoption by platform providers.

One aspect in this regard is to give users the opportunity to classify content they upload in a way that complies with child protection laws. Such systems for user-based ratings need to be easy and intuitive. The same goes for the platform-wide implementation of such features by service providers.

On the long run, the aim is to provide more and more content with standardised electronic Meta information in order to develop sophisticated technical tools and features for child protection.

Against this background, the ChiPSoM working group is planning the following steps:

1. Stocktaking of approaches currently used in the field of user and community based ratings, the internal processing of these ratings by platform providers who provide content in categories based on the user's age; internal and/or external provision of that data, so it can be used for client-side child protection software or other service providers
2. Identification of state of research regarding effectivity, validity, hindrances and (unwanted) risks and side-effects of the use of users' ratings
3. Identification of best practices: development of a concept to collect the most reasonable options for users to rate the content they upload so it can be provided to right age groups; different solutions will be considered since different services require different approaches
4. Development of guidelines for providers: Based on the aforementioned steps, an international standard shall be developed, based on the MIRACLE specifications; this standard shall be available to platform providers and users to rate and electronically label user generated content. This aims at the technological harmonisation of electronic labels and shall encourage their use so they can be taken advantage of in cross-platform, cross-service and cross-border contexts. Third party services will also benefit from that data. In addition, existing standards and Meta data used for child protection purposes could be transferred into the ChiPSoM standard. On the long run, standardisation by W3C is a goal, too.

D. Goal

By standardising Meta data related to child protection to be used for user generated content and synchronising with the work of the MIRACLE pilot project, ChiPSoM wants to improve child protection on web 2.0 platforms. The approach is, apart from the data model to be used, platform neutral and interoperable. Through a concrete classification concept it provides best practices to be used by platform providers when they offer to their users legally compliant ways to distribute their content online. Using user generated Meta data which comply with international standards (MIRACLE), service providers will be able take reasonable and feasible measures for each platform. The technical standard is, in this respect, only the basis which allows different approaches. It therefore embraces a continuing segmentation of services.