

Collaborative Learning Discussion 1

Codes of Ethics and Professional Conduct

Case Study: Malicious Inputs to Content Filters

The children's internet protection act (CIPA) has imposed that libraries and schools who are in receipt of the discounted internet scheme via the E-rate program are required to implement an internet safety policy (FCC, 2019). This policy is to protect children from accessing images of child pornography, obscene imagery and computer access which may be harmful to minors (FCC, 2019).

Impact on legal Jurisdictional and non-jurisdictional

Although it may seem adequate to have a centrally controlled blacklist, this also raises questions such as:

Ethically, who determines what is acceptable or not and can this be manipulated?

Professionally, are the blacklists that are implemented by the software maker held to a globally and legally accepted standard?

Will jurisdiction determine the level of access to various content?

Blocker plus decided to collect user input for refining their machine learning models and appear to have then blacklisted additional content such as climate change, vaccination and same sex marriages (ACM, nd). During the refining process, it appears that activists had taken charge and applied additional restrictions which go beyond CIPA's requirements. This answers one of our own questions of ethicacy "Who determines what is acceptable or not and can this be manipulated?".

Social issues

Although deduction reasoning and induction reasoning seem to have potentially warped the ethics of how the concept should be implemented, all parties exhibited an aim.

The aim of the activists seemed to have used a deductive approach to fit their social ideals created from their moral philosophy of beliefs which tries to form a normative and guiding behavior (Vanclay et al, 2013), which led to the additional blocking of other content that they felt was required.

Blocker plus had an idea to fulfill CIPA's requirements but then believed an inductive reasoning approach using machine learning and observing user activity would be the easiest way of creating a blacklist.

Professionalism of computing professionals involved

It appears that the management at Blocker plus have behaved unethically and unprofessional. Insufficient disclosure of the breach involving the machine learning model manipulation can have legal and professional consequences. The code of conduct put forward by the chartered institute for IT, indicates that sections 1b, 1c, 3d, 3e, 4a, (BCS, 2022), have not been adhered to by blocker plus. Dawson (2015) also states that children fall into the vulnerable group and therefore, it may be required to gain ethical clearance. Therefore, the schools and libraries have also fallen short ethically and professionally if they had not enquired about the potential user (children) data collection carried out by Blocker Plus during the machine learning model refining process.

Conclusion

It appears that an ethically illiterate position may have taken place from both CIPA and Blocker plus but from very different aspects. The idea that protecting children is applied by CIPA only if money is being exchanged as part of the E-rate program seems ethically wrong. Ideally, these requirements should be implemented legally in all areas where minors have access to technology and online content and not as a result of discount programs.

Blocker plus should have disclosed any breaches and concerns that they had with their model, especially considering that the model was built on user activity and remained collecting user data after the model had been rolled out, which may be illegal in many states, including california (CCPA, 2023). Ethical and data implications may have also arisen due to foreign citizens involved in the US schooling system (GDPR, 2018; CCPA, 2023; PIPL, 2023).

References

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