Multi-Stakeholder Forum

Charting a Collective Path Forward - June 2021



TECH COALITION

Tech Coalition First Annual Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF) The Unique Challenges of "Self-Generated" Imagery: Charting a Collective Path Forward

Summary Report

On 15 and 16 June 2021, the Tech Coalition (TC) held its first annual Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF) and brought together more than 120 attendees from 25 countries, representing the technology industry, civil society, government, and law enforcement. The event marked one year since the launch of Project Protect, the TC's five-part strategic framework for combating child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) online.

The Forum focused on a unique and pressing dimension of online CSEA: so-called "self-generated" or "youth-produced" imagery. This is a rapidly growing and complex CSEA phenomenon that current terminology struggles to adequately define and categorize. There is significant potential for harm relating to both the creation and distribution of such "self-generated" material. Images may be genuinely self-produced and voluntarily shared in the context of a trusted relationship between two teenagers. Images may also appear to be self-produced but are in fact the result of coercion or deception. Even images that are genuinely self-produced and shared may later be broadly distributed without permission.

The growing volume of "self-generated" imagery and the potential for significant harm presents a challenge to the entire online child protection ecosystem. In light of this growing threat, the Tech Coalition gathered key representatives of the online child protection community to move towards a common understanding of the issue and plot a collective path forward to reduce the potential harm and abuse related to this material.

Day One, 15 June

Sean Litton, the new Executive Director of the Tech Coalition, outlined multiple points of progress across the five pillars of Project Protect:

- Sharing information and knowledge across industry
- Investing in technology innovation
- Commissioning independent research
- Improving transparency and accountability, and
- Fostering collective action among all stakeholder groups

These points of progress include:

- Partnering with Thorn, the world's leading developer of technology to defend children from online sexual exploitation, and investing $1M in child protection technology innovation.
- Developing a fund alongside the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children to encourage research aimed at improving product development and policy understanding to tackle CSEA. The resulting Tech Coalition Safe Online Research Fund has received more than 120 applications, and grants will be awarded in the coming months.
- Working with Coalition members to tackle the problem of child sexual abuse imagery, convening over 100 experts to develop improvements to help prevent the dissemination of such abuse imagery on members' platforms.
- Launching new membership criteria to ensure Coalition members are willing to implement technical solutions, respect international policy frameworks set up to fight CSEA, and be held accountable for their efforts.

You can find further details on the Tech Coalition's newsroom.

Following the Project Protect update, attendees heard the vivid account of a survivor of online grooming and child sexual exploitation and abuse. This account served to cut through the obscurity of large statistics and ground attendees in the human reality of the issues being discussed. After listening to the survivor's story, attention turned to a research-focused panel that detailed the extent of the problem.

Framing the Issue: Insights from Research, Data, and Platform Experience

Three organizations – the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), Thorn and Facebook – shared data on the nature and scale of some recent challenges in the dissemination of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), providing attendees with valuable insights into the nature of the problem they are tackling.

The IWF began by sharing results from its 2020 annual report. Of the nearly 300,000 images that the IWF assessed last year, more than half (153,000) were identified as child sexual exploitation and abuse images. Strikingly, 44% of these contained "self-generated" material, a 77% increase from 2019. Moreover, the IWF reported that the issue affects children of all ages, finding material containing children ranging from 7 to 17 years old. In particular, many of the instances analyzed by the IWF in 2020 involved girls ages 11 to 13 depicted in their bedrooms or some other at-home setting. Once captured, the photos and videos can be recirculated for years after their original creation, continuing the cycle of harm for victims. See here for the full annual report.

After the IWF, Thorn presented the findings of their study examining youth attitudes toward "self-generated child sexual abuse material" (SG-CSAM). Thorn found that sharing sexually explicit imagery through sexting or sending nudes is increasingly common among young people, and children do not view it as fundamentally bad. In fact, 40% of teenagers agreed that it was normal behavior. Thorn also highlighted the risks of non-consensual sharing of images, noting that a third of teens surveyed had seen a non-consensually shared nude. Finally, Thorn shared that 60% of youth surveyed placed at least some blame on the victim if their images were leaked. This victim-blaming further disincentivizes reporting. See here for more information and to review the full report.

Facebook then shared its analysis of the motivations behind those who choose to share child sexual exploitation and abuse imagery (CSEAI) online. Facebook broadly classified sharers into groups of "malicious" and "non-malicious" users. Malicious users were further divided into preferential, commercial, and situational offenders. Non-malicious users were divided into unintentional offenders, minor non-exploitative users, and situational "risky" offenders. While noting all online CSEAI should be combated, Facebook's taxonomy allows platforms and protectors to better understand and distinguish the complex levels of the issue at hand. See here for a more complete breakdown of Facebook's taxonomy.

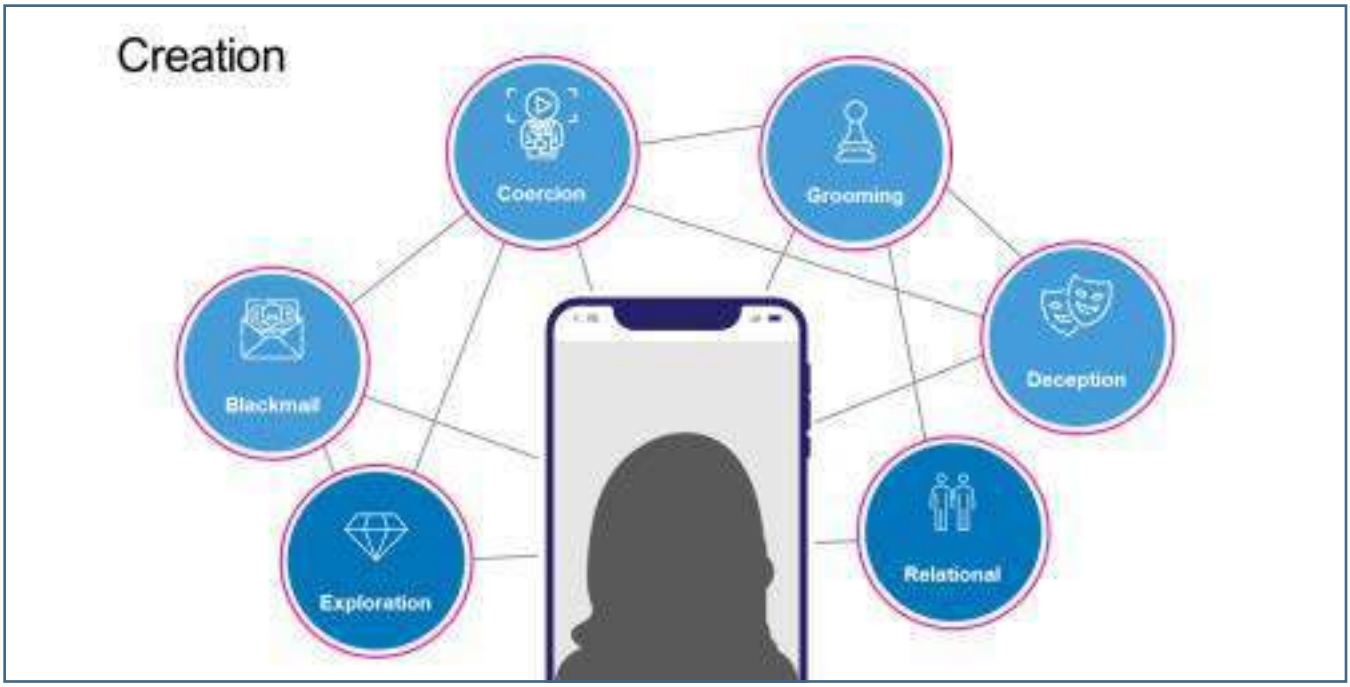
Impact on Existing Systems: Challenges and Opportunities
The Forum continued with a second group of experts representing law enforcement, the tech industry, survivors, and academia providing their unique perspectives on the key challenges and opportunities relating to "self-generated" imagery. The conversation centered around categorization, mitigation, and naming of CSEAI.

Law enforcement stressed the need for ESPs to provide greater context in their reporting. They also highlighted inadequacies in the statutes governing CSAM. Industry highlighted the technical differences between regulating photos, videos, and live streams. Broadly, these two stakeholders agreed on the potential value of differentiating reports based on severity. The survivor representative, supported by academia, questioned the practicality of differentiating reports and reiterated the difficulties of distinguishing between various degrees of coercion.

Academics discussed tools for mitigating CSAM, saying that AI and machine learning are the future of prevention but for now we should prioritize standardized video hashing and textual analysis. At the same time, academics acknowledged that technological solutions can only go so far. Finally, academics brought up the point that language matters, especially regarding the issue of reporting. Even the term "report" has been found to discourage children from reporting due to their sense that someone will get in trouble.

Day Two, 16 June

Sean Litton presented the TC's revised set of visuals representing the "self-generated" issue. These graphics, revamped following the TC workshop held in April, were intended to capture the problem-space and outline a sampling of the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders. The TC expects these visuals to continue to evolve as both the issue and our collective approaches to it mature.



Getting to Work: Breakout Sessions

Day Two was largely spent in breakout groups where participants were assigned a specific task around the "self-generated" issue:

- Three groups took on the difficult task of developing an appropriate and comprehensive name to better facilitate communication between various stakeholders, appropriately distinguish "self-generated" CSEAI, and move away from language that may increase "victim-blaming" sentiment.
- One group set out to formally define and categorize the different types of "self-generated" imagery.
- Three others crafted initial priorities for the three primary stakeholder groups: the technology industry, government and law enforcement, and civil society.

After nearly two hours of brainstorming, discussion, and debate, a "lightning round" report-out segment to the plenary session concluded the event. Following the three proposed names for the issue, attendees voted on their preferred name: **"Perceived First-Person Child Sexual Abuse Material"** (PFP CSAM). This moniker, most participants agreed, avoided inadvertent victim-blaming (i.e., "self-generated") and covered both production and distribution, irrespective of context or intent. The other two proposed names were "Youth-Produced Child Sexual Abuse Material" and "Child Sexual Abuse Material – Self-Produced."

The group devising a definition also sought to frame its contribution in a non-judgmental way, while being factual and considerate of possible future appropriations, including regulatory, educational, or enforcement efforts. The group acknowledged that it struggled with the concept of "consent" on the part of the child to both production and sharing. Participants saw value in formulating a "simple definition" that could subsequently incorporate additional aggravating factors. Acknowledging that further development and wordsmithing could have continued, the definition arrived at was:

Proposed Definition:

Sexualized visual depictions of a child that are generated without the full knowledge, consent,* and participation (for example, coercion, blackmail or grooming) of the child and without the physical presence of an instigator AND/OR that may have been originally voluntarily produced by the minor child, but then is distributed to or shared with others without the child's full knowledge and consent.*

* Consent should not be limited to legal capacity to consent to sexual activity in any particular jurisdiction, but should reflect the age-appropriated state of mind of the subject and should take into account if the generation was coerced.

Industry Priorities

As for the three groups focused on sector-specific priority-setting, industry was first to present its chosen priorities:

1. Reduce uploads of "self-generated" content;
2. Reduce solicitation of "self-generated" content;
3. Reduce redistribution of youth imagery; and
4. Reduce barriers to reporting.

Government and Law Enforcement Priorities
Based on their unique position and responsibility, Government and law enforcement identified the following priorities for Industry:

1. Implement machine-learning tools to better prioritize content via grooming filters, noting the need for a standardized format for reports;
2. Work with tech companies to develop clear policies and advanced technology related to having images removed; and
3. Improve collaboration on a global scale among government, law enforcement, and tech companies to communicate governments' and law enforcement's needs as the end-users of tech company reports. This was seen as particularly important for smaller and newer platforms.

Civil Society Priorities
The civil society group recommended the following priorities for their sector:

1. Work collaboratively to make reporting accessible, empowering, and transparent;
2. Prevent/end the victimization/re-traumatization of children, and improve appropriate survivor and educational programs; and
3. Amplify the voices of victims/survivors to educate and inform other sectors.

Conclusion

In concert, these three topics of discussion produced a common and comprehensive manner in which we can discuss the important issue of Perceived First-Person Child Sexual Abuse Material. They also created a rough roadmap for stakeholders to follow as we work to eradicate this particular form of CSEAI. While further forums will certainly be needed, this event was undoubtedly a positive step in the right direction.

The Tech Coalition believes that there is extraordinary power when government, industry, civil society, and survivors work together to protect children from online sexual exploitation and abuse. In these multi-stakeholder forums, the Tech Coalition seeks to promote authentic dialogue that builds trust among different stakeholders, increases understanding, and identifies practical steps forward that all parties can collectively take together. We want to express our sincere appreciation for the time and dedication that all stakeholders gave to this two-day conversation. It is our sincere hope that this conversation and the priorities identified will drive progress across all sectors.

If you have any questions or wish to be included in future multi-stakeholder dialogues hosted by the Tech Coalition, please contact admin@technologycoalition.org.