Assignment 2: COPPA and CIPA

Kwaku Adomako

School or Institution Name (University at Place or Town, State)

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Internet and communication technologies have evolved at a much faster rate than anticipated. New and improved means of communications are being developed regularly. Most of the communication technologies are based on the underlying infrastructure of the internet. As the internet itself was not designed with much security in mind, any service being offered over the internet infrastructure is not secure as well. Exponential penetration of mobile devices and social media technologies have brought many challenges for governments and parents to keep kids safe while online (Gros & Hancock, 2011). To protect the privacy of kids and provide them with security against digital dark arts an act known as the child online protection act was introduced in 1998. The purpose of the act was to ensure that the content available commercially via world wide web technologies that are not appropriate for children must be blocked. In general implementation, any website considered to be inappropriate for children was considered to be illegal.

At the same time of implementation of COPA, another act known as children’s online privacy protection act was also implemented in 1998. The act was aimed at blocking the unethical behavior of web analytic companies and websites to collect personal information. As the internet technologies were evolving, most of the websites require the personal information to provide customized services. The COPPA act directed worldwide websites based in the United States to ask for parental permission before collecting information from kids under the age of thirteen (Wexelbaum, 2015). The information collected by online web forms and instant messaging forums can be used for criminal purposes. To be in compliance with the COPPA act, websites must verify the age of the person accessing the website before serving the web content to the end devices. It was thought to protect children against online fraud activities.

With the advancements in communication technologies, the internet has evolved from a network of millions of connected devices to the billions of connected devices. New services were being introduced at a greater pace than anticipated. A new act known as the child internet protection act was introduced in 2001 to fortify the previous regulations. CIPA required that all of the libraries and educational institutions receiving funds from the federal government must block pornography websites in their institutions. It was required by such institutions to use content filtering services (Miller, 2016). The difference between the two acts was that the COPPA act was only limited to the collection of information but the CIPA act was about blocking certain content. In COPPA act a minor was the person under the age of 13. It was due to the fact that a 13-year-old kid may not understand the purpose of a web service requesting sensitive information.

In order to be compliant with COPPA, act websites started asking for parental conformation before serving the content to the requesting user. Some websites started using shady practices to verify the age of an individual accessing the service such as asking kids for credit card details of their parents. The act was criticized rigorously because of the shady behavior of some websites (Langub & Lokey-Vega, 2017). It was more harmful if the websites were asking for credit card information. As the criminals can use the same tactics to trick minors into providing credit card information. It was criticized by the parents as well as the children were falling prey to online fraud campaigns. Due to technical difficulties, the act was considered to be impractical. However, the CIPA act was aimed at protecting children from accessing pornography. The act also received criticism from parents and internet activists that it is restricting free speech.

Although both of the acts were efforts from the government to protect children against digital dark arts, they failed to achieve their purpose. Parents were not able to educate their children about the parental warnings displayed by the COPPA compliant websites. In modern days the rise of virtual private networks has technically made the CIPA act useless. As the restrictions imposed by the content filters can be bypassed using virtual private networks. The fact that most of the VPN and proxy tools are available free of charge and without age verification has made the situation even worse than before. The acts were not updated and implemented by observing the developments and future trends of communication technologies (Wexelbaum, 2015). Both of the acts need to be revised in the provision of the latest communication channels. Enforcing loosely defined acts will cause more harm than good as the internet activists will consider them as an attempt to control the internet. Criticism on these two acts, awareness among children, and their access to the latest communication technologies have limited the CIPA act to schools only.

It is not possible for the government to pass any legislation that simply restricts access to a certain type of content as it will be considered an attack on free speech. Comprehensive regulations must be made and implemented by the government. Previous legislation and acts are criticized mainly as they can block access to the content that is required for research and development purposes. Moreover, the restrictions imposed by them can be bypassed easily making them obsolete (Stanton & Taylor, 2008). There is a high probability that the acts will be revised as per the modern communication requirements and technical assistance will be defined for their implementation as well. It is necessary to revise the legislation as the cases for child pornography and online fraud campaigns targeting innocent kids are increasing exponentially not only in numbers but in complexity as well.

References

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Stanton, D., & Taylor, J. B. (2008). *The first attempt of legislators to protect juveniles on the Internet is the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998, or COPPA. COPPA defines juveniles as children aged 13 or under. It makes it unlawful for “an operator of a website or online service directed to children […] to collect personal information from a child in a manner that violates the regulations [set by the Act]”(Children’s). Numerous companies have been fined using COPPA, and so have set up*.

Wexelbaum, R. S. (2015). *Censorship of online LGBTIQ content in libraries*.