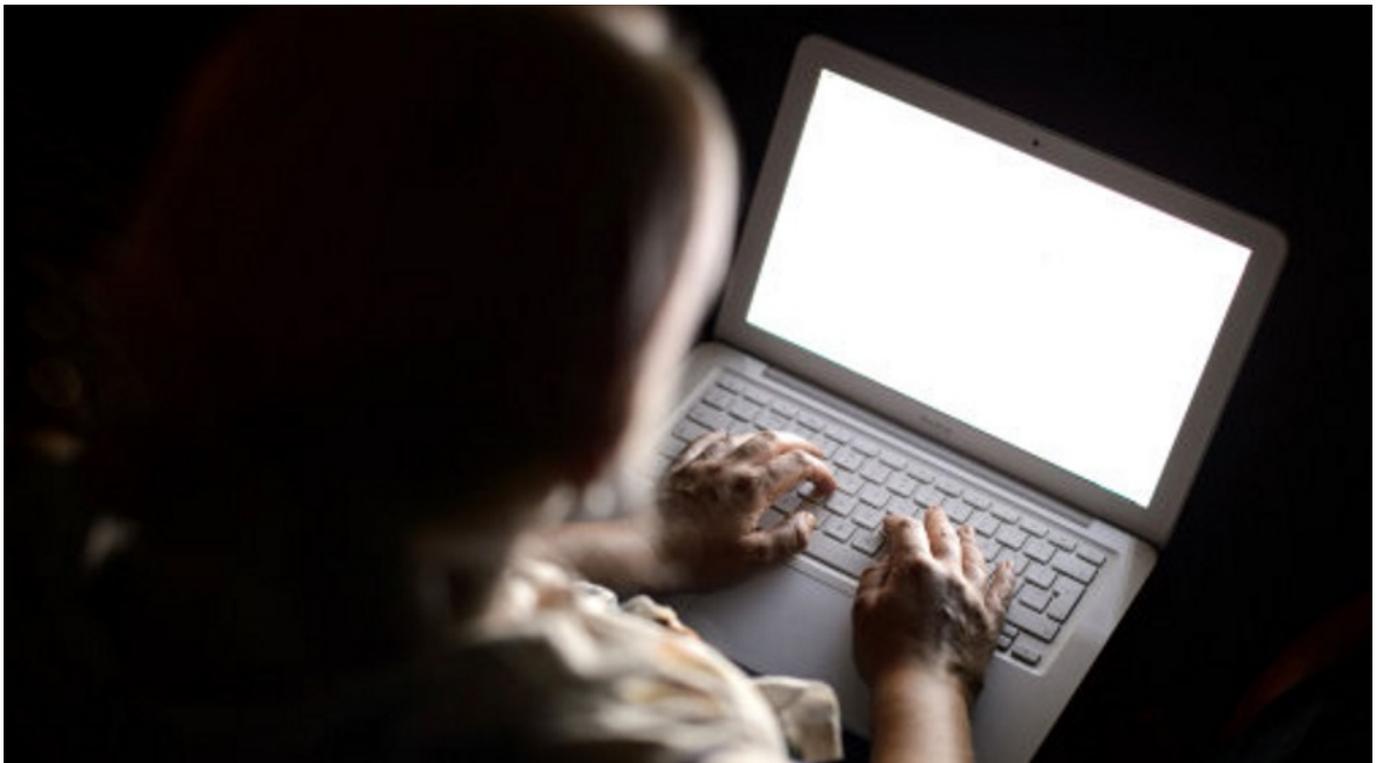# Online Radicalism: Time to take down prohibited content permanently

Written by Sir Ivor Roberts on 22 November 2016 in Opinion Plus
Opinion Plus

Online terror content could be dramatically reduced with the adoption by social media companies of simple, digital signature technology, argues Ivor Roberts.

eGLYPH technology is ready to deploy now | *Photo credit: Press association*

Deaths from terrorism in OECD countries increased by 650 percent in 2015 despite falling globally, as ISIS and Boko Haram suffered battlefield setbacks. Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden and Turkey all suffered their worst death tolls from terrorism since 2000, according to the index produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace.

Increasingly, ISIS messaging, whether from Abu Bakr al Baghdadi or his former spokesman, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, has stressed 'striking at home,' rather than travelling to ISIS held territory.

And followers have responded. A recent French investigation revealed that seemingly unrelated events - the murder of a French police couple in their home, the execution of a French priest during Mass and an attempt to detonate a car bomb near Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris - were all directed by a single ISIS recruiter operating from Syria or Iraq, 29-year-old French citizen Rachid Kassim.

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The tragedy of online radicalisation can no longer be denied. It is little wonder then, that governments are frustrated by the lukewarm response from social media companies to the proliferation of propaganda broadcast on their platforms, or the halting response to wholesale violations of the terms of service these companies so proudly promote.

The Counter Extremism Project (CEP), a non-profit organisation launched by former world leaders and diplomats and aimed at combating extremism, has been opposing the indifference shown by many of these companies since its formation in 2014. CEP has led the fight to get these worldwide social media giants to change their terms of service to outlaw those supporting terror or advocating violence.

But having policies and enforcing them are two different things. While Facebook, Twitter and others take down prohibited content, the current process is slow, user dependent, often quite random, and temporary.

Given the sheer volume of content uploaded and shared each day around the world, CEP has found another way forward after entering into a partnership with Dartmouth College Computer Science Professor Dr Hany Farid, to develop a technology called eGLYPH, that quickly, efficiently and consistently identifies and removes images, video and audio recordings that violate the terms of service of these companies.

Ready to deploy now, eGLYPH is based on technology developed by Dr Farid almost a decade ago that is today used to identify and remove images of child pornography online.

When a person identifies an image, video or audio recording for removal, eGLYPH extracts a distinct digital signature from the content. This signature is then used to find duplicate uploads across the Internet. When matches are found, the companies then determine if the content violates their terms of service and should be removed.

If Internet and social media companies adopted the eGLYPH technology, the incentive to produce and distribute images of beheadings, and other acts of murder and violence would be dramatically reduced, given the certainty of their being permanently eliminated. CEP intends to eliminate the "worst of the worst," content that is clearly prohibited and has helped spread terror and spur

radicalisation around the globe.

On November 13, we paused to remember the victims of the horrific attacks in Paris one year ago. But there will be many more attacks unless we do all we can to give voices of moderation and tolerance a chance to be heard, support those who are dedicated to preventing radicalisation and take all reasonable steps to protect public safety.

Pressuring Internet and social media companies to run the eGLYPH software is the least we can do to honour those who have lost their lives, and the families that must cope with these indescribable tragedies.

About the author

Sir Ivor Roberts is a member of the European Advisory Board of the Counter Extremism Project and a former British Ambassador to Yugoslavia, Ireland and Italy

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