CHILDHOOD

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Stella Polaris Summit

Using AI to Combat Child Sexual Abuse

On June 17, 2024, World Childhood Foundation organized the Stella Polaris Summit in Stockholm, a groundbreaking conference dedicated to exploring the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in combating child sexual abuse. This event brought together 150 invited guests, including international experts, corporate representatives, and key stakeholders, with many sessions streamed to a global audience of 200 pre-registered stakeholders. The conference underscored the urgency of leveraging AI technologies to safeguard children and fostered critical dialogue across sectors traditionally siloed in their efforts.

Background

Child sexual abuse is a global issue that has devastating consequences for its victims. The prevalence of child sexual abuse is alarmingly high, with an estimated one in four girls and one in six boys experiencing some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18. The detection and prevention of child sexual abuse is a complex and challenging task that requires the cooperation of multiple agencies and stakeholders.

In recent years, the field of artificial intelligence (AI) has seen explosive development, significantly impacting various sectors. This surge in AI innovation has created a global momentum that inspires hope for solving complex problems, yet it also stirs fears over potential misuse and ethical implications. One crucial area where the link to AI is rarely highlighted is in combating child sexual abuse.

In June 2021, World Childhood Foundation launched the Stella Polaris project - a Swedish AI hub to coordinate, encourage and intensify AI-related initiatives to combat child sexual abuse. Wanting to highlight research, commitments and tools developed in ongoing collaborations and initiatives, as well as lessons learned, the Stella Polaris Summit was organized. The ambition was to gather stakeholder groups that usually do not meet; both those already working specifically on AI or prevention of child sexual abuse, and those working in other areas who can learn more and contribute to this societal challenge. The aim is to contribute to an increase of actors and resources focused on fighting child sexual abuse.

Objectives

- **Stock-taking on AI's Role in Combating Child Sexual Abuse:** Explore the current state and potential of AI in preventing child sexual abuse, aiming to provide a comprehensive overview of achievements and challenges in integrating AI solutions for child protection.
- **Fostering Networking for Collaborative Innovation:** Encourage the formation of new partnerships and the strengthening of existing collaborations across disciplines, fostering the development of innovative AI strategies in the fight against child sexual abuse.
- **Mobilizing Action and Implementation:** Focus on actionable outcomes, urging participants to apply AI technologies and insights gained from the conference to initiate real-world interventions aimed at safeguarding children.

Outcomes

The summit featured a series of plenary and parallel sessions that delved into pressing issues, from the prevalence of child sexual abuse to the emerging challenges posed by AI-generated abuse material. Key sessions addressed the ethical and legal complexities surrounding AI's use, the implications of AI in detecting and preventing abuse, and the critical role of data in driving these solutions. The session on *Darknet Case Studies* offered real-world insights into the application of AI for navigating and analyzing darknet forums, while *AI for Good* highlighted the corporate sector's leadership in protecting children. The conference also highlighted significant gaps between technical and legal perspectives, presenting a unique opportunity for follow-up.

The discussions were enriched by contributions from notable speakers such as Staffan Truvé of Recorded Future, Anders Ynnerman, professor of scientific visualization and program director at Linköping University and WASP, and Rickard Sandberg, Associate Professor at the Stockholm School of Economics.

Additional key stakeholders included representatives from university law departments, the Swedish Defence Research Agency, and various tech companies. This convergence of expertise fostered engaging, sometimes provocative and controversial discussions, and inspired potential collaborations across disciplines. The broad participation underscored the critical importance of cross-sector dialogue in tackling the multifaceted issue of child sexual abuse, demonstrating how collective efforts can lead to new solutions.