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Real-time Video Streaming and its Security Concerns

By Dymples Leong

Synopsis

The recent real-time broadcast of an attack on a French police commander on Facebook Live has raised concerns that others may be inspired to emulate such attacks in future, highlighting the ever-growing security conundrum for social media companies.

Commentary

THE RECENT attack of a French police commander and his partner by Larossi Abballa, an individual known to French authorities as an Islamist extremist and the simultaneous screening of the attack on Facebook Live, was the first instance in which the video of a terror act was live streamed on a social media platform.

Such an attack has once again turned the spotlight on social media platforms and their abuse by certain individuals for various nefarious purposes and the renewed calls for social media companies such as Facebook to do more to reduce the avenues and platforms for hate speech and terror.

Going Live

Initially open to celebrities and media practitioners, Facebook Live was expanded for all users in March 2016. Used by many from politicians sharing snippets of their lives with supporters, to podcasting political debates and companies promoting content marketing efforts, Facebook Live allows users to broadcast live videos to followers,

in real-time. Research from Facebook demonstrated that the amount of time users spent viewing live videos was 3 times more than a video that was not broadcast live.

While Facebook's idea of live videos is not novel (with competitors such as Periscope and Meerkat being among the early market adopters), live streaming videos is appealing to many companies and individuals; having the potential to connect, discuss and interact with 1.65 billion active users worldwide on Facebook enables the domination of the 'attention market'.

Videos that are broadcast cannot be edited or moderated, providing followers a sincere, honest, emotional and 'raw' aspect of content, as opposed to commercialised content curated videos. Users are able to track the instantaneous reactions of followers, providing an online video experience that is both engaging and immersive.

Facebook, the 'Online Global Police'

Facebook has shown much commitment in removing offensive and violent content (such as content that glorifies or celebrates violence or terrorism) that infringes on their terms of service. Such posts are usually flagged and reported by users within the online community, with platform providers removing offensive content within 24 hours of a report being made. Experts agree that Facebook is one of the leaders in taking decisive action in responding to flagged posts.

Having earned praise for its commitment to actively remove accounts which promotes terrorism, providing tools to counter violent speech online and by working with authorities, governments and the public are pressing for more. Governments have pressured the company into releasing all online activities of terrorists; and victims of terror attacks have attempted to file lawsuits against companies such as Facebook, Google and Twitter, for allegedly allowing terrorists to use the platforms as tools for extremist activities.

Although the chances of success for such requests are slim it reflects an increasing series of questions and concerns about the role of tech companies and their participation against terror, and the constant urging by governments that tech companies can and should do more in monitoring, assessing and removing content related to offensive and violent content online.

Dilemma of Live Streaming

Live streaming videos present a different dilemma. Incidents of violence are becoming increasingly common on live-streaming sites. In May this year a woman in France broadcast her suicide in real time on the live-streaming video site Periscope as she threw herself in front of a moving train, and a teenaged girl was accused of broadcasting her friend's alleged rape on Periscope.

Unlike a television network, the same attributes of Facebook Live's popularity limits the company from identifying, disrupting or removing offensive or undesirable videos before it goes live. While Abballa's video was removed and profile account

deactivated by the company, what is not known is the number of people who had viewed the video before its deactivation.

The video, while removed from Facebook, continues to be circulated and shared on closed sites and private channels in other mediums. There are also concerns that others may be similarly inspired to broadcast future attacks in like manner, creating further conundrums for social media companies.

The inclusion of children in ISIS Nusantara propaganda outreach is indeed worrying as it marks a progressive milestone for ISIS' ultimate realisation of a relentless and unforgiving world that would rob the children of their own innocence.

The Future is Video

Following the aftermath of the Paris shooting, Facebook stated that it was in the midst of expanding its live video review team, exploring the review of video broadcasts that are viral before they are flagged by users, and investigating the possibility of using AI (Artificial Intelligence) tools to interpret and classify live videos in real time.

While these measures will not ultimately deter individuals from abusing the platform's tools for nefarious purposes, it does create significant barriers to these videos from garnering greater publicity and becoming viral, significantly reducing reach and denying these individuals the global attention they crave.

The tech industry is increasingly shifting focus to find ways to enhance video offerings such as incorporating machine learning and neural algorithms on various platforms. Facebook has predicted that the written word will be rendered obsolete on the platform, with video trouncing it as the go-to communication on the web. With Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg believing that the future of the social media platform lies in video, it seems like the debate of protecting freedom of expression and ensuring that the platform remains a safe and secure avenue for users will only intensify in the years to come.

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