



Summary: Redefining Online Safety Workshop

Facilitators: Kim Sanchez & Adam Thierer

A brainstorming workshop to identify the key elements of what we mean by online safety, with a report back at the end of the conference

In FOSI's first ever workshop, a group of conference attendees facilitated by Kim Sanchez and Adam Thierer tackled a fundamental problem in realm of online safety: Defining in concrete terms what is meant by "online safety" at all. The workshop began with Adam noting that the discourse of online safety for the past decade has focused on the dangers of the Internet, especially the Three P's of "porn, pedophiles and predators." To his and FOSI's knowledge, the goal of a safe Internet for all was left ambiguous. With that in mind, the moderators began to take words from the audience on what came to their minds when thinking of "online safety."

The list was long with over 50 words being voiced. In general, they fell into two types. The first type included items that have been the focus of the online safety discussion so far i.e. the dangers. They included: vulnerabilities, porn & predation, content, privacy, security, reputation & control, public & permanent content, freedom from surveillance

The second and much more numerous type included words that are more positive in nature, such as: digital literacy & digital citizenship, life skills, critical thinking, skeptical thinking & agency, competence, control, & heightened self-awareness, responsibility, accountability & ethics, compassion & empathy, confidence & trust, resiliency & maturity, graduated independence

After this push of ideas, Kim and Adam guided a discussion to hash out some of the more ambiguous and contentious differences among the audience members' definitions. Questions of the centrality of risk in the definition of online safety, of to what degree the definition should focus on certain groups like children, of where responsibility lays in keeping the internet safe, and of if specific skills are more important than general principles were raised among many more questions. In the end, much progress was made in getting a better sense of what is meant by "online safety." Though no one pithy definition was produced, the workshop moderators were able to condense the discussion and components of a potential definition into the following phrases:

"Minimizing risks & maximizing benefits"

"Enabling you to do the things you want to do"

"Taking timeless values and applying them to whatever is new"



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“Living life well online”

“Providing the tools for safe, effective communication and interaction”

“Helping people be confident online”

“Reducing the harm of digital challenges”

“Doing things online safely, effectively, responsibly”

In conclusion, it is evident why a definition had yet to be given. Online safety is a large and complicated issue as well as long term endeavor. Focusing on its positive aspects instead the dangers can only help us get closer to realizing its definition in practice, no matter what it may be in principle.