[DE] Youth protection body publishes report on search engine filter mechanisms

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On 21 August 2020, the *Kommission für Jugendmedienschutz* (Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Media – KJM) published a report entitled "Search engine filter mechanisms". The report, prepared by jugendschutz.net on behalf of the KJM, studied the security settings of Germany's two most popular search engines, Google and Bing. It concluded that, even when security settings were activated, children and young people using both platforms could easily come into contact with content that could harm their development, especially through search results relating to violence, self-harm and extremism.

As Germany's central supervisory body for the protection of minors in private broadcasting and telemedia, the KJM had commissioned the study in order to find out how seriously search engine providers were taking their responsibility to protect children and young people from harmful images and video content. Both of the search engines that were assessed offer a 'SafeSearch' function designed to filter out harmful content. A total of 28 concepts linked to Islam, right-wing extremism, violence, self-harm and pornography were compared and investigated. Both search engines performed well with pornographic content, which was generally filtered out when security settings were activated. However, search results linked to violence, self-harm and extremism were displayed without any modification. Furthermore, Bing also displayed URLs that had been classified by the *Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Medien* (Federal Review Board for Media Harmful to Minors – BPjM), even though both search engines had agreed, as part of the regulated self-regulation system set up in Germany, not to display sites listed by the BPjM. However, these search results were removed when Bing was notified.

Measures to prevent the circumvention of youth protection systems were also inadequate, since children and young people could activate and deactivate safe search settings themselves in some situations. However, youth protection software automatically activated SafeSearch on various services.

The report concludes that both search engines must do more to protect users from harmful content. Automatic recognition and filtering must be enabled for content showing violence, extremism and self-harm in particular. In addition, search engines should provide references or links to help and information sites. Such references are already provided for abuse-related searches. The report also

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mentions the possibility of improving the ranking of educational websites.

Pressemitteilung der KJM vom 21.08.2020

https://www.kjm-online.de/service/pressemitteilungen/meldung/jugendschutz-einstellungen-von-suchmaschinen-im-fokus-der-medienaufsicht

KJM press release of 21 August 2020

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