

'SPY' TOYS FACE COMPLAINTS FROM EU, US WATCHDOGS

BRUSSELS: EU and US consumer watchdogs announced yesterday they are filing complaints against a clutch of smart toys that can "spy" on children and their homes, for allegedly breaching privacy and data protection laws. The complaints target smart toys My Friend Cayla, i-QUE Intelligent Robot and Hello Barbie, according to the European Consumer Organisation BEUC and US groups like the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC).

Complaints are being filed with French and other European authorities as well as the US Federal Trade Commission. Internet-connected Cayla and i-QUE, manufactured by Los Angeles-based Genesis Toys, hook up with a user via a phone or tablet while Hello Barbie links to the internet through Wi-Fi, said the consultancy Bouvet on behalf of the

Norwegian Consumer Council. Hello Barbie is not sold in Europe.

"By purpose and design, these toys record and collect the private conversations of young children without any limitations on collection, use, or disclosure of this personal information," EPIC and other US watchdogs said in their complaint, which they say "concerns toys that spy." "The toys subject young children to ongoing surveillance and are deployed in homes across the United States without any meaningful data protection standards," they said.

"They pose an imminent and immediate threat to the safety and security of children in the United States," they added. BEUC, citing the study commissioned by the Norwegian Consumer Council,

expressed security concerns. "With simple steps, anyone can take control of the toys through a mobile phone. This makes it possible to talk and listen through the toy without having physical access to the toy," it added.

It alleged the terms breach the EU Unfair Contract Terms Directive and the EU Data Protection Directive and possibly the Toy Safety Directive. "Anything the child tells the doll is transferred to the US-based company Nuance Communications, who specialises in speech recognition technologies," it said. "The company reserves the right to share this information with other third parties, and to use speech data for a wide variety of purposes," it said. "The toys are embedded with pre-programmed phrases, where they endorse dif-

ferent commercial products," BEUC said.

EPIC and the other US groups like The Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood urged the trade commission to investigate the collection, use and disclosure of the data. They called for the body to halt Genesis' alleged failure to give enough notice of its information practices and stop its retention and use of children's personal information. They also asked the commission to halt Genesis' failure to use "reasonable security measures" for bluetooth connections for Cayla and i-Que. They urged the body to investigate and prevent US-based Nuance from using children's speech data to improve products and services sold to military, government and law enforcement agencies. — AFP

TECH COMPANIES MOVE TO TARGET TERRORIST PROPAGANDA ONLINE

WASHINGTON: Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube are joining forces to more quickly identify the worst terrorist propaganda and prevent it from spreading online. The new program announced Monday would create a database of unique digital "fingerprints" to help automatically identify videos or images the companies could remove.

The move by the technology companies, which is expected to begin in early 2017, aims to assuage government concerns - and derail proposed new federal legislation - over social media content that is seen as increasingly driving terrorist recruitment and radicalization, while also balancing free-speech issues.

Technical details were being worked out, but Microsoft pioneered similar technology to detect, report and remove child pornography through such a database in 2009. Unlike those images, which are plainly illegal under US law, questions about whether an image or video promotes terrorism can be more subjective, depending on national laws and the rules of a particular company's service.

Tool of radicalization

Social media has increasingly become a tool for recruiting and radicalization by the Islamic State group and others. Its use by terror groups and supporters has added to the threat from so-called lone-wolf attacks and decreased the time from "flash to bang" - or radicalization to violence - with little or no time for law enforcement to follow evidentiary trails before an attack.

Under the new partnership, the companies promised to share among themselves "the most extreme and egregious terrorist images and videos we have removed from our services - content most likely to violate all our respective companies' content policies," according to a joint announcement Monday evening.

When such content is shared internally, the other participating companies will be notified and can use the digital fingerprints to quickly identify the same content on their own services to judge whether it violates their rules. If so, companies can delete the material and possibly disable the account, as appropriate.

Most social media services explicitly do not allow content that supports violent action or illegal activities. Twitter, for example, says users "may not promote violence against or directly attack or threaten other people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, dis-

ability or disease." "We really are going after the most obvious serious content that is shared online - that is, the kind of recruitment videos and beheading videos more likely to be against all our content policies," said Sally Aldous, a Facebook spokeswoman.

The White House praised the joint effort. "The administration believes that the innovative private sector is uniquely positioned to help limit terrorist recruitment and radicalization online," said National Security Council spokesman Carl Woog. "Today's announcement is yet another example of tech communities taking action to prevent terrorists from using these platforms in ways their creators never intended." The new program caps a year of efforts to tamp down on social media's use by terrorist groups.

Lawmakers last year introduced legislation that would require social media companies to report any online terrorist activity they became aware of to law enforcement. The bill by Sens. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif, and Richard Burr, R-NC, was criticized for not defining "terrorist activity," which could have drowned government agencies in reports. The bill was opposed by the Internet Association, which represents 37 internet companies, including Facebook, Snapchat, Google, LinkedIn, Reddit, Twitter, Yahoo and others.

Partial automation

The bill came days after Syed Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, went on a shooting attack in San Bernardino, California, killing 14 people and injuring 21 others. A Facebook post on Malik's page around the time of the attack included a pledge of allegiance to the leader of the Islamic State group. Facebook found the post - which was under an alias - the day after the attack. The company removed the profile from public view and informed law enforcement. Such a proactive effort had previously been uncommon.

Twitter moved toward partial automation in late 2015, using unspecified "proprietary spam-fighting tools" to find accounts that might be violating its terms of service and promoting terrorism. The material still required review by a team at Twitter before the accounts could be disabled. "Since the middle of 2015, we have suspended more than 360,000 accounts for violating Twitter's policy on violent threats and the promotion of terrorism," said Sinead McSweeney, Twitter's vice president of public policy. "A large proportion of these accounts have been removed by technical means, including our proprietary spam-fighting tools." — AP



TAKE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OUT OF THE BOARDROOM, AVAYA TO INDUSTRY LEADERS

DUBAI: Digital transformation (DX) projects will fail if they aren't embraced at all levels of the organization, Avaya, a global leader in business communications software, systems and services, told delegates today at the Avaya ENGAGE event in Dubai. The four-day event is bringing together senior executives, industry leaders, technology innovators and key decision makers from different industry sectors to help them achieve their digital transformation objectives.

With organizations globally facing challenges to evolve digitally and move agilely in today's competitive markets, CEOs are increasingly putting digital transformation and customer engagement at the top of their corporate agendas. However, as many as 84% of DX projects fail to achieve their objectives, according to research, with many organizations failing to secure the required levels of "buy-in" from their workforce, partners and customers.

"In today's digital business world, just about every organization, company and industry sector has access to digital technologies - the gap now is between the "haves" and the "have mores": those organizations that are using their digital capabilities more effectively to innovate and transform their operations. We are seeing a new digital divide: the DX divide," Nidal Abou-Ltaif, President, Europe, Middle East & Africa and Asia Pacific, Avaya, told delegates in his keynote presentation today at Avaya ENGAGE.

Organizations need to ensure that DX projects are supported by the workforce, and that the workers have the right training, tools and technologies to properly implement them, Abou-Ltaif said. DX projects also need to deliver the differentiated experiences that customers are looking for, and that will encourage them to do more business with an organization. Companies also need to understand that DX projects are extremely complex, involving change at all levels of the organization. Accordingly, organizations need to be aware that these can't be delivered alone, or by a single vendor, requiring them to create an open environment to drive innovation. Abou-Ltaif highlighted in his keynote, companies that are succeeding in their DX objectives:

Emirates NBD: This bank is leading the regional banking sector for innovation, with a customer-centric strategy that places delivering superior customer experience at the heart of all DX initiatives. Emirates NBD is committed to the digitization of banking in the UAE by delivering innovative solutions for customers' everyday banking

processes, making it the leading digital bank in the Middle East. The bank has also successfully embraced technologies like analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) to create the blueprint for banking in the future.

dnata: One of the world's largest air services providers and a member of Emirates Group, dnata has embarked on a DX project with Avaya to transform its customer experience. Avaya Private Cloud Services (APCS) is helping to create a seamless, personalized experience for dnata customers and partners and across every communication platform in the customer journey, as dnata continues to lead the transformation of the travel experience

58 - well ahead of our competitors - demonstrates the depth of our commitment to delivering the right customer experience," Abou-Ltaif concluded.

Avaya ENGAGE, taking place now at Atlantis the Palm, Dubai, has brought together more than 1,500 senior Avaya executives, industry leaders, technology innovators and key decision makers, from more than 70 countries. Bringing together Avaya customers and partners from across the Asia-Pacific, Europe, Middle East and Africa (AMEA) regions under the same roof for the first time ever, Avaya ENGAGE is delivering invaluable insight into key technology trends and the opportunities they represent.



Nidal Abou Ltaif, Avaya Engage

industry globally. "Organizations need to democratize digital transformation: a top-down from the boardroom approach won't work if it doesn't engage the people it is supposed to help. DX projects should be: user-defined, bringing together customers, employees, and partners; and platform-driven, with organizations creating an ecosystem for innovation. Avaya is committed to helping organizations achieve their DX objectives, and we are working closely with many customers across different industry verticals to help them achieve their goals. Our industry-leading Net Promoter Score of

Visitors to Avaya ENGAGE will be able to learn more about Avaya's successful transition into a software and services-led company, while improving operating performance. In October, the company reported preliminary fourth-quarter results that exceeded guidance, with year-on-year growth in Contact Center, Network and Cloud & Managed Services, and adjusted EBITDA as a percentage of revenue of nearly 30 percent - a company record. FY16 also represented the most innovative year in Avaya's history, featuring 16 product and solution launches, many of which are being showcased at Avaya ENGAGE.



NEW YORK: A Facebook logo is displayed on the screen of an iPad. — AP

DRIVERLESS CARS SCOOT AROUND NISSAN PLANT, TOWING VEHICLES

YOKOSUKA: Nissan Motor Co is testing self-driving cars at one of its plants in Japan that can tow vehicles on a trailer to the wharf for loading on transport ships. The Japanese automaker thinks the technology will, in the long run, save costs and boost efficiency. The tests also can add to knowledge needed to take such autonomous driving onto public roads. Nissan executive Haruhiko Yoshimura said the automaker hoped to use the technology throughout the Oppama plant by 2019, and in overseas plants in the future.

During a demonstration yesterday, a Leaf car with no one inside scooted along the road, pulling a trailer with three other Leafs on it, stopped properly for other vehicles, and then veered into a parking lot. But one vehicle ran into trouble, refused to move and was not able to take part in the demonstration. Kazuhiro Doi, a Nissan vice president, acknowledged such glitches showed a challenge unique to the technology. "If there are drivers, they can take action," he said. "Mechanical operations are all there in a driverless car."

Nissan, which makes the March subcompact,

Infiniti luxury models and the Leaf electric car, now has just two of the self-driving Leaf cars. For all the vehicles produced at the Oppama plant to be towed in a driverless way, five more such vehicles are needed, according to Nissan. People still

had to get inside each of the towed vehicles to drive them to the proper wharf, but Nissan hopes that as self-driving technology advances cars will drive themselves into the ships, up the plank on their own. — AP



YOKOHAMA: Nissan Motor Co's "Leaf", with no one inside, pulls a trailer with three other Leafs on it, during a demonstration of the automaker's Intelligent Vehicle Towing system at Nissan Oppama plant. — AP

CHINA USERS COMPLAINING OF COMBUSTIBLE IPHONES

SHANGHAI: Several Chinese iPhone users have claimed that their handsets caught fire or exploded, according to a Shanghai consumer watchdog which called on tech giant Apple to address the complaints. Fresh on the heels of Samsung's worldwide Galaxy Note 7 safety fiasco, the state-run Shanghai Consumer Council said it had received eight reports in recent months of iPhones that spontaneously combust while being used or charged. The report, seen on the council's website, was posted Friday.

It quoted one woman as saying her iPhone 6s Plus exploded in August, shattering the screen and leaving the battery and back of the phone blackened. Apple provided the woman with a new iPhone but did not address the cause of the incident, the report said. "Apple should be responsible for consumers" and deal with complaints in a timely manner, the council said. "A large amount of consumer complaints

are not solved effectively."

The council said it has received a six-fold surge in total complaints against Apple in the past two months, including sudden shutdowns of the iPhone 6 and 6s even though batteries still have enough power. The council did not make clear where the complaining iPhone users were located. Apple last month offered to change iPhone 6s batteries for Chinese users who complained of what the company called "accidental shutdowns."

The offer was effective for handsets made between September-October, 2015. At the time iPhone insisted the shutdowns did not constitute a safety problem. AFP was unable to immediately obtain a response from Apple in China over the consumer watchdog report. Samsung suffered a severe blow over its Galaxy Note 7's woes. The huge South Korean electronics manufacturer was forced to recall some 2.5 million units. — AFP