

Online harms affect youth: growing threats and integrated responses

by Human Digital

“Gore sites¹ and online communities sharing graphic violent content are largely overlooked in online safety regulation and debate, despite being spaces where violent extremism, violent misogyny and a non-ideological interest in graphic violence converge.”

To date, easy access, limited age verification and an absence of regulation have left children – and young people – at significant risk of harm from these spaces. Addressing this risk requires an integrated response across child safety regulation, public health prevention and national security spheres. Responses could vary from policy and regulatory sanctions on those making ‘gore’ avail-

able, to platform engagement, content referral, and targeted disruption of illegal activity by operational or strategic communication means.

How real is the threat?

Although they are not usually the reason graphic violent content is produced in the first place, Gore sites are crucial to the persistence and propagation of harmful content online – and they enable more people to find, watch and share it. A growing body of evidence has highlighted the risk that unrestricted access to graphic violent videos and imagery poses to young people.²

Based on research carried out by Human Digital, Gore sites host significant volumes of unmoderated terrorist propaganda, bloody violence, abuse imagery and extreme pornography. Many of these sites are intentionally designed for the download

¹ "Gore sites" are online platforms that distribute graphic content, including images and videos, depicting real-life violence, injury, or death, often with limited or no moderation. In some cases, these platforms may also host and disseminate authentic audiovisual footage produced by violent extremist actors or associated with other forms of serious criminal activity, thereby amplifying the reach and impact of such content.

² <https://www.counterterrorism.police.uk/ctp-joins-five-eyes-partners-in-calling-for-whole-society-action-to-fight-growing-threat-to-children-posed-by-online-extremism/>

A photograph of a car accident scene. A white car is overturned on its side on a paved road. The car is engulfed in bright orange and yellow flames. Thick, dark grey smoke rises from the fire, filling the upper half of the frame. The scene is dramatic and chaotic.

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Strikingly, at the time this research was conducted, little to no content was prohibited by Gore sites. No sites had any effective age verification, paywalls or content warnings restricting access to children

or onward sharing of such material on social media. Despite online legislation in the EU, UK and other regions requiring platforms to implement baseline safety mechanisms, these sites fail to provide the types of barriers employed by tech platforms to protect their users – especially children.

Archives of cross-harm content can be easily found and navigated by curated lists, including tags such as “ISIS” and categories such as “terrorism” or “war”, that guide users directly to terrorist content.

Whilst themes vary across Gore sites, almost all feature what Human Digital calls “B.A.D. Content”: bloody violence, abuse and death. Graphic footage of fatal accidents, suicides, stabbings and shootings, self-mutilation, terrorist propaganda, animal abuse, and drug cartel murder videos are curated and shared specifically for their graphic nature. Advertisements for pornography sites are frequently observed via banner ads and pop-ups, and Human Digital have identified web traffic trends of people moving directly from pornography sites to Gore sites.

To analyse the accessibility of B.A.D Content, Human Digital assessed 24 of the most globally visited gore-related websites. The subsequent “Gore and Violent Extremism” report,³ published by VOX-Pol, found that search engines return millions of results for gore-related keywords, revealing thousands of terrorist-made videos, and evidence of extreme pornography, including mutilation and bestiality.

“Analysis of web traffic to these 24 websites shows an average of over 24 million total visits per month globally in 2026.”

Strikingly, at the time this research was conducted, little to no content was prohibited by Gore sites. No sites had any effective age verification, paywalls or content warnings restricting access to children. These findings provide evidence that Gore sites are currently overlooked by many law enforcement organisations, online regulators and industry moderation policies. Today, 13 of the sites still have no barriers to access, 2 required a simple ‘Yes/No’ over-18 verification question, 1 asked the visitor to decide whether they wanted to click through to the content, 6 were no longer active, 1 was inaccessible in the UK and 1 required a sign-up account for access. This data speaks to both the continued harm, volatility and resilience of the ecosystem.

“This ecosystem of these sites has the potential to cause real-world harm, ranging from national security threats to public safety hazards.”

As such, public health responses to support victims and young people exposed to Gore content are increasingly important.

What national security risks do Gore sites present?

In 2024, searches for terrorist material on 24 Gore sites found over 12,000 non-unique examples of relevant content. Analysis suggests that the largest proportion of this media was produced by the Islamic State – including both graphic and non-graphic violent propaganda. Hundreds of examples of the Christchurch, Buffalo and Halle attack livestreams were also found, accruing hundreds of thousands of views in total.

³ <https://voxpath.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/DCUPN0751-Gore-Extremism-WEB-250704.pdf>



These videos are often uploaded by gore enthusiasts, creating repositories of historic and recent terrorist material. While Human Digital researchers uncovered only limited evidence that designated terrorist organisations were actively exploiting Gore sites, the presence of so many violent videos create pathways through which vulnerable users could be exposed to radicalising content.

In addition to prominent terrorist groups, the researchers have observed across social media how violent extremist groups and communities are sharing an increasingly diverse range of harmful content online, with members – often young – whose worldviews do not fit into established ideological categories. In the UK, since 2018, the Prevent Strategy has reported a rise in referrals of young people who do not adhere to a clear or

coherent ideology. Between 2023 and 2024, 66% of Prevent referrals belonged to categories which would have previously been subsumed under Mixed, Unclear and Unstable; 32% of those were under the age of 15.⁴ In some of these cases, a fascination with violence displaces a fixed ideology.

Incidents such as the 2024 Southport attack demonstrate the potential risk posed by individuals who display no clear ideological affiliation but nonetheless maintain a fascination with mass violence.⁵ Sir Adrian Fulford of the Southport Inquiry stated, “that the degrading, violent and misogynistic material which Axel Rudakubana was viewing online contributed to – and fed – his already unhealthy fascination with violence.”⁶

⁴ The category “Mixed, Unstable and Unclear” was broken down into 7 component categories in March 2024; <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/individuals-referred-to-and-supported-through-the-prevent-programme-statistics>.

⁵ Jonathan Hall KC, Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, identified 10 cases involving extreme violence that lacked a clear ideological driver in [Independent Review on Classification of Extreme Violence Used in Southport Attack on 29 July 2024](#) (13 March 2025)

⁶ See <https://www.southport.public-inquiry.uk/>

“Several recent UK terrorism convictions demonstrate an interest in Gore, often from a very early age and blended with extreme right-wing ideology, making it difficult to parse out the influence of ideology from violence fascination.”⁷

Following the shooting of Charlie Kirk, one popular Gore site crashed due to web traffic, which the site explained to be a result of people searching for the assassination video and creating new accounts. This increases exposure to ideological content for those visitors, regardless of their intent in seeking out gore.

How is this a public safety issue?

There have been multiple recent cases globally of individuals carrying out violent acts after engaging with graphic violent content on Gore sites, including what the National Centre of Missing and Exploited Children describe as “cross-genre” content.⁸ Similarly, since 2022 Human Digital has tracked the increasing prevalence of graphic violent and violent misogynistic content within and adjacent to violent, extremist online ecosystems. Often, this content exists as embedded videos displaying Gore site watermarks, including content related to the Com network – “online networks of predominantly teenage boys, dedicated to inflicting harm and committing a range of criminality”⁹ - and an orientation towards a fascination in non-ideological violence and ultra-sadism. Gore sites host content referenced within these harmful groups

and provide content stores through which abusive content can be shared and normalised. Accounts on select gore sites have also been implicated in direct off-linking to Com-affiliated group chats on messenger platforms, hence Gore sites acting as both a content repository and gateway into increasingly harmful and abusive online ecosystems.

Individuals emulating – or encouraging others to engage in – such violence have a clear and acute impact on their victims. These victims are often members of vulnerable communities, such as online discussion groups dedicated to eating disorders, depression, or anxiety, and are often young girls. In some cases, the only escape for a victim is to become a perpetrator themselves, sustaining a cycle of extreme violent content production and consumption.

In another example, a popular incel forum held over 2,000 posts directing users to gore-related websites, some of which advertised purchasable folders of videos of women being murdered. There is an acute risk to women and girls within many of the communities sharing links to Gore sites, both in terms of the victims within the content and the targets of violent attacks.

What might an integrated response look like?

The threat posed by the converging harm sets visible on Gore sites – and across social media – presents short - and long-term public safety and national security risks that demand an internationally aligned response from UN Member States, law enforcement agencies, and regulators. An effective shared strategic vision would set preventative and responsive objectives into a coherent

⁷ See Felix Winter, 2025 at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/clvj2g5l1g2o> and Vincent Charlon, 2023 at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ceke1el177xo>

⁸ <https://newsroom.co.nz/2024/03/27/nz-teen-arrested-with-trove-of-violent-sexual-and-terrorist-content/>

⁹ <https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/news/sadistic-online-harm-groups-putting-people-at-unprecedented-risk-warns-the-nca>



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framework combining policy and regulation, platform engagement, content referral, and targeted disruption of illegal activity. Such a framework should avoid fragmented cross-sector action and the duplication of effort, seen within the “whack-a-mole” responses to violent extremism on mainstream social media. Recent studies have shown that an outcome of pornography sites requiring more robust age verification when accessed by UK IP addresses has been that many in the UK now watch content on ‘unregulated’ pornography sites. This relates to convergent harm spaces such as Gore sites which advertise and share web traffic referrals with pornography sites, including those that are unregulated and unmoderated and contain violent, harmful sexual material.¹⁰ In addition to direct engagement with and regulation of Gore site owners, both search engines and mainstream

social media platforms could be tasked with limiting the discoverability of these Gore sites, particularly by youth.

“Technology and data analytics will be central to enabling an internationally coordinated response to Gore sites.”

Stakeholders require insights to understand both how and why young people encounter and engage with such content, to help guide the formulation of harmonised policies, strengthen cross-border regulatory cooperation, and ensure that interventions are both targeted and proportionate.

¹⁰ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/unregulated-sites-porn-uk-age-verification-b2895231.html>

This intelligence can tailor communications campaigns to deter or direct young people away from harmful content, including educating them on the legal, ethical and psychosocial risks it can pose. As an online harm set,

“research has highlighted the potential long-term impact on individuals who view extreme violence,¹¹ including chronic and long-term mental health implications.”

Unlike the small number of violence-inspired attackers whose actions gain widespread coverage, the chronic and cumulative impact of Gore sites on a larger group of vulnerable viewers can go unnoticed in wider policy discussion. There is also increasing evidence of the impact of vicarious trauma and other harms among professionals working on Gore content, caused by viewing graphic and violent material.¹²

A comprehensive approach to the impact of Gore sites and graphic violent content online should include clear guidance on how to work with victims, perpetrators, and viewers of violent content. Beyond digital responses, educational programmes could be delivered for intervention practitioners so they can better support children and young people and build an evidence base of successful approaches to support and protect children who become victims of this new, but growing, cross-harm threat. Significantly, the long-term effect of exposure to B.A.D content will need to be monitored. It is currently not known what impact the exposure to violent content online from a young age will have on the citizens of UN member states, including its future police officers, military personnel, teachers, and politicians.

Ultimately, innovative and informed responses are urgently needed to help those children and young people already exposed to Gore sites and protect them from exposure to this content in the future.

About Human Digital

This article was produced by researchers at **Human Digital**, a division within M+C Saatchi World Services who develop data-led understanding and recommendations to combat online harms, including violent extremism, violence fixation, misinformation, and the exploitation of emergent technologies, for example, AI, cryptocurrency and Web3. The team consists of analysts, data scientists and engineers working collaboratively with subject specialists from across academic disciplines.

¹¹ Nicklin LL, Swain E, Lloyd J. Reactions to Unsolicited Violent, and Sexual, Explicit Media Content Shared over Social Media: Gender Differences and Links with Prior Exposure. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2020 Jun 16;17(12):4296. doi: 10.3390/ijerph17124296. PMID: 32560142; PMCID: PMC7345319.

¹² <https://www.swansea.ac.uk/law/cytrec/projects/reassure/>



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