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Information Communication Technologies and Trafficking in Persons

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The Learning Network

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Information Communication Technologies and Trafficking in Persons

The development and advancement of information communication technologies (technologies) have revolutionized the way people communicate and share information. Technologies have made communicating and accessing information more efficient and effortless. Unfortunately, the benefits of technologies enable traffickers to more easily recruit, harm, and exploit victims/survivors without fear of being arrested and prosecuted. The purpose of this Brief is twofold: to summarize how technologies are used to facilitate trafficking in persons and to highlight how technologies are used to combat and prevent this serious violation of human rights.

The Use of Technologies to Facilitate Trafficking in Persons

Traffickers can exploit technology for their own illegal purposes. For instance, technologies offer traffickers anonymity. Prior to the internet, traffickers were forced to reach consumers and conduct business through underground networks. Due to the anonymity of the internet, both traffickers and consumers can conduct business online with minimal risk of being identified. The result is an increased market and consumption in the trafficking in persons industry. Individuals fearful of being identified, and potentially prosecuted for their involvement, can now access information and make connections anonymously from the safety of their own homes.[1] Pre-paid and disposable mobile phones are purchased without long-term contracts and personal identification or credit checks are not required. These phones are perfect communication tools for traffickers. They provide a high level of anonymity and make it more difficult for law enforcement to obtain incriminating evidence for prosecution.[2] Traffickers can use pre-paid, disposable, or pay-as-you-go mobile phones to text information, send photos, or communicate directly with consumers in real-time without the restriction of physical location. Traffickers can also use mobile phones and the GPS tracking systems to maintain constant contact and monitor the whereabouts of victims.[1,2] Further, disposable mobile phones can be programmed to transmit false identification.[1] The internet also offers communication tools for traffickers (see Table 1) to recruit victims, share information with consumers and other traffickers, and conduct financial transactions.[1] Like disposable phones, the internet offers a high level of anonymity through password protected sites, sending messages through 're-mailers' (identifying information on an email is removed and replaced with false information), or using websites or message boards that do not leave traceable transmissions or illegal materials to be discovered by law enforcement. The internet also provides an efficient mode for financial exchanges between traffickers and consumers. Online financial transactions can be completed very quickly and make and make tracking them difficult. The internet also allows 'virtual identities', which translates to anonymity, to send or accept money to specific accounts. Finally, technologies provide traffickers with new forums to recruit victims and advertise to consumers, including chat rooms, social media sites, and advertisement websites.[3] Traffickers may use websites and online classifieds (e.g., Craigslist) to advertise a fraudulent job (e.g., modeling, nannies, escort) to entice victims/survivors to leave home. They also may engage in social

media or chat rooms to establish relationships with potential victims/survivors and often make false promises as a method of persuasion. Online classified sites and social media sites (e.g., twitter) are used to post advertisements of victims/survivors to consumers usually using covert and deceptive language.[4] Traffickers may also use mobile phones to send photos of newly trafficked victims/survivors to potential consumers or regular clients.

Table 1 - Types of Internet Communication Technologies used by trafficker[3]

Newsgroups	Sites where users can exchange information
Web message and bulletin boards	A site to exchange information similar to a newsgroups but can be private and password protected
Websites and search engines	A set of related webpages served from a single web domain and programs that search documents or files from a database or network
Chat rooms	A site where users can exchange information in real time. Messages are not archived or stored and no log files are maintained
Peer to peer networks and file swapping programs	Used to share illegal material by finding and downloading files on online networks without leaving traceable transmissions
File Transfer Protocol (FTP)	Allows users direct access to another's computer hard drive to upload and download files
Encryption	Can be used to disguise the content of files
Mobile internet systems	A mobile device that provides wireless internet access (e.g., Tablet PCs)

The Trafficking in Persons industry seems to have benefited from the advancement of technologies by providing more effective, efficient, and anonymous ways for traffickers to recruit, advertise, and communicate with consumers and victims. However, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), governments, and other anti-trafficking organizations are using technologies to investigate, interrupt, and prosecute trafficking in persons, to raise awareness about the issue, and to support victims/survivors.[3]

Technologies and Investigating Human Trafficking

In July 2004, the Council of Europe's Convention on Cybercrime came into effect which provides procedural and investigative tools for law enforcers around the globe to prevent and combat all types of internet crime, including trafficking in persons.[3] In addition to this Convention, Interpol, the world's largest international police organization, made combating trafficking in persons one of its five key priorities. Interpol provides an intelligence

clearing house on traffickers to help identify international links in trafficking investigations and they have established a standardized format for exchanging information across the globe through their "I-24/7" communications system.[3] In response to recommendations made by the G8 Heads of State (the Group of 8 countries: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, U.S., and United Kingdom), the "Subgroup on High-Tech Crime" was established to help the eight countries investigate, prosecute, and prevent crimes involving ICTs.[3] In 2000, the United Nations sponsored a treaty against transnational organized crime titled the "Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)". Included in the UNTOC is the protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons. The UNTOC states that law enforcement and other personnel respond to trafficking in persons that has been committed through the use of modern technology and that all parties receive training on new technological advances and how to combat trafficking committed through the use of technologies.[1] Further, UNTOC states that nations must establish policies to regulate the internet due to its role in trafficking women and children[1] Computer-based e-training on identifying and responding to human trafficking is provided for law enforcement students. [3]

One daunting task for law enforcement officials is identifying and investigating cases of trafficking in persons. Often law enforcement will investigate online classified ads looking for keywords or codes that indicate potential trafficking cases. However, research has indicated that it would take one person approximately 32 hours to review all the ads posted for one week in only one classifieds website. Therefore, due to the overwhelming work involved, law enforcement agencies need to use technology to help make the process of identifying trafficking cases more efficient. Current research is looking into using new technological tools to help law enforcement investigations.[4] A good first step in conducting an investigation is using an automated data collection tool that can review a large number of advertisements and flag keywords that suggest potential trafficking cases. This automated search reduces the pool of advertisements that a law enforcement agent will have to filter through. Face recognition technology is being developed in order to track photos of victims/.survivors across multiple websites and mapping technologies are used to extract location-based information to locate potential victims/survivors mentioned in ads. Law enforcement may also utilize crowdsourcing technologies which enable groups to send information that can help with an investigation.[4] For example, a program can be developed where the public can text or email about places where they know trafficking occurred. This information can be placed on a map to help track trafficking cases or identify high-risk areas. An example would be the Rapid Report & Response (R3) mobile system discussed below.

Technologies and Interrupting Human Trafficking

Often trafficking in persons involves transporting victims illegally across borders with falsified legal documents such as a passport or visa. Unfortunately, the advancement of technology has made it easier for traffickers to produce these false travel documents. However, new technology is being developed that will help create new types of identifying documents that are difficult to falsify because they rely on bringing up information stored in a database that traffickers are unable to access rather than information that is provided on

the document itself.[3] One example is the "False and Authentic Document" (FADO). This image archiving system verifies documents efficiently and effectively and provides prompt notification to authorities when a falsified document is identified. The FADO database contains images of false and forged documents; images of genuine documents; summaries on forgery techniques; and summaries of security techniques. Further, modern technology is used when creating new passports that will make forging the document more difficult. Specifically, to prevent falsifying documents, passports now use special dye, unique seals, data imprinting, identifying numbers repeated on each page by lasers, machine-readable code, and a digital image of the passport holder.[3]

Technologies and Prosecuting Human Trafficking

On a global scale, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has adopted the "online directory of competent national authorities" in order to help with the prosecution of traffickers. The online directory assists national authorities in accessing contact information for their fellow law enforcement officials in most countries around the world. This password protected online directory provides a means of communication and information sharing on the legal requirements for cooperation between countries (e.g., extradition of persons, transfer of sentenced persons).[3]

On a smaller scale, law enforcement agencies can use technology to obtain evidence against traffickers that will help in their prosecution. Law enforcement and anti-trafficking organizations often use mobile phones as a way of identifying, tracking, and prosecuting traffickers. Law enforcement agents have described mobile and smartphones as an "evidentiary gold mine" because they can contain critical information or data (e.g., corroborate relationships between traffickers and victims/survivors, provide geolocation or movement of victims/survivors) that can be used to prosecute traffickers.[2] For those traffickers who are less technologically-savvy, law enforcement may be able to obtain identifying and incriminating information from chat rooms, social media sites, and websites, especially if the traffickers are not familiar with how to cover their tracks online.

Although increasing aware, many law enforcement agencies at the local and national levels lack comprehensive technological training and basic technological resources.[2] A concern is that developing countries will not be able to meet the costs of maintaining and supporting new technology strategies in order to interrupt and prevent trafficking across borders and/or that local law enforcement will not receive appropriate training or the basic equipment needed to properly investigate and prosecute trafficking cases.[2,3]

Using Technology to Raise Awareness, Share Information, and Elicit Change

The internet provides a global soapbox where individuals, communities, groups, and organizations can share information and raise awareness on human trafficking. Often these websites describe the issue, list services for survivors, and provide further resources. Due to the global scope of the internet, anyone with access can view these websites. Some examples of Canadian websites on human trafficking are: www.endhumantrafficking.net (Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking); www.freethem.ca (Free Them!); and www.pact-ottawa.org (PACT-Ottawa: Persons Against the Crime of Trafficking in

Humans). Often anti-trafficking groups and organizations will use social media platforms (e.g., Facebook) to create online groups to share information and expand their reach.[2] PACT-Ottawa created a Facebook page that currently has 150 page 'likes'. Raising awareness and sharing information on human trafficking can also be done by blogging. A blog is a discussion or information website that typically displays posts or entries in reverse chronological order. Any person can create a blog online for free. An example of a blog that discusses human trafficking is Hope for the Sold (www.hopeforthesold.com). Hope for the Sold is a blog created by a Canadian couple passionate about ending human trafficking. The blog shares information, resources, films and events on human trafficking in Canada and across the globe.

The internet is also used to widely publicize and disseminate public education campaigns and online training initiatives on human trafficking. One well known global awareness and education campaign is Not For Sale (www.notforsalecampaign.org). This campaign increases awareness and knowledge about human trafficking through a variety of materials available from their website including a map which allows website visitors to document cases of known human trafficking around the world. The British Columbia Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons and Public Safety Canada developed an online training course to help service providers identify, protect, and assist persons who may have been trafficked. *Human Trafficking: Canada is Not Immune* (www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/octip/training.htm) contains four training modules: defining human trafficking; Canada's response to human trafficking; how to recognize a trafficked person; and how to help a trafficked person.

A very common form of social activism is the use of petitions. With the introduction of the internet, social activists can reach a broader group of people that share similar ideals and are willing to share their voice in order to encourage change. One popular social activist site is Change.org. With over 25 million users, this website provides a platform for people to gather together behind a cause to demand accountability and inspire change. Many of the online petitions on Change.org relate to human trafficking and it ranks among the 12 "top causes" featured. In fact, in 2010, Craigslist shut down its "adult services" section in response to pressures from several anti-trafficking organizations, including a petition signed by more than 10,000 Change.org members.[2]

Social awareness and activism in preventing human trafficking is now starting to take place on mobile phones. For example, Prevent Human Trafficking (www.preventhumantrafficking.org) has created the Rapid Report & Response (R3) mobile system. If someone suspects human trafficking is taking place, she/he can text a message that will be securely routed to the nearest first responder who will go to the site of the report and look for evidence of the incident. If the first responder confirms that the trafficking incident occurred, she/he will send a text that will create a red dot on a digital map and alert the nearest enforcement agents. The agents will then attempt to intervene in the potential human trafficking incident. The intervention will be digitally mapped by a blue dot. This map will appear on the Prevent Human Trafficking website to allow for people to track human trafficking cases. If the enforcement agents are not successful in their attempt to intervene, they can text a message and the blue dot will be replaced with a black dot. However, if the enforcement agents are able to successfully

resolve the incident, the black dot will be replaced with a green dot. The R3 will generate useful tracking data that will help NGOs and government agencies intervene and prevent human trafficking more effectively. The R3 is being tested in Thailand with the intention of expanding it to other countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, India, and eventually other parts of the world (http://preventhumantrafficking.org/mobile-app/). Another example of a mobile phone service that raises awareness of human trafficking is Free2Work developed by the Not For Sale Campaign (www.free2work.org). Free2Work is a mobile phone application that provides information on forced and child labour related to particular companies and brands. Specifically, Free2Work rates companies on how labour trafficking relates to their supply chain practices in terms of company policies, transparency and traceability, monitoring and training, or worker rights. Free2Work assigns each company a grade based on the found rating. The Free2Work app allows consumers to look up the overall grade of specific companies and support those that have a zero tolerance for forced labour.[4]

Technology is constantly evolving and providing traffickers with new opportunities for exploitation. However, these same technologies used by traffickers can become a powerful tool to combat trafficking in persons. In order to keep pace with the rapid evolution, it is important for counter-trafficking responses to maintain constant vigilance and assert the use of technology in the strategy to prevent human trafficking. Equally important is the need to be cognizant of the potential benefits and unintended negative consequences to victims/survivors. To this end, The Center on Communication Leadership and Policy developed five guiding principles for future technological interventions in trafficking in persons:[2]

1) The ultimate beneficiaries of any technological intervention should be the victims and survivors of human trafficking;

2) Successful implementation of anti-trafficking technologies requires cooperation among actors across government, nongovernmental, and private sectors, sharing information and communicating in a coordinated manner;

3) Private-sector technology firms should recognize that their services and networks are being exploited by traffickers and take steps to innovate and develop anti-trafficking initiatives through their technologies and policies;

4) Continuous involvement and research is necessary to ensure that tools are user-centric and refined over time to most effectively respond to shifts in technology and trafficking; and

5) Technological interventions should account for the range of human rights potentially impacted by the use of advanced technologies.

[1] Vitale, K. (2012). Barricading the information superhighway to stop the flow of traffic: Why international regulation of the internet is necessary to prevent sex trafficking. American University International Law Review, 27(1), 91-131.

[2] Latonero, M., Musto, J., Boyd, Z, Boyle, E., Bissel, A., Gibson, K. & Kim, J. (2012). The rise of mobile and the diffusion of technology-facilitated trafficking. Los Angeles, CA: USC Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership & Policy.

[3] United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT). (2008). The Vienna forum to fight human trafficking Background Paper: Technology and Human Trafficking. Retrieved March 21, 2013 from: http://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2008/BP017TechnologyandHumanTrafficking.pdf.
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