

HUMAN TRAFFICKING ONLINE: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING AND ONLINE CLASSIFIED SITES

A Project of the USC Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership & Policy

***"The time has come to harness the power of technology to go after those using it to enslave others,"
California Attorney General Kamala D. Harris***

Human Trafficking Online: The Role of Social Networking Sites and Online Classifieds presents a comprehensive examination of the role of social networking sites and online classified advertisements in facilitating human trafficking and delivers recommendations for developing technological innovations to monitor and combat trafficking.

The Issue

Human trafficking is a grim reality of the 21st-century global landscape. While traditional channels of human trafficking remain in place, online technologies allow traffickers to exploit a greater number of victims across geographic boundaries. This report documents evidence of sex trafficking via online channels, whereby traffickers use the Internet to recruit and advertise victims on online classified and social networking sites.

This report examines whether online technologies can be leveraged to provide actionable, data-driven information in real-time to those positioned to help victims.

Using Technology to Combat to Trafficking Online

Human Trafficking Online presents preliminary results from research in developing technological tools to assist law enforcement and anti-trafficking efforts. Online data collection, basic computational linguistics, and data visualization were explored as a means of narrowing the pool of potential sex trafficking cases. The report also discusses a number of existing technologies that can be repurposed for anti-trafficking efforts, including photo recognition, mapping technologies, crowdsourcing, and mobile phone applications.

The report offers recommendations for future action by a range of actors, including those in government, the private sector, NGOs, service providers, and academia.

The following guiding principles are intended for those seeking to employ technology as a means to combat human trafficking:

- (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.
- (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.
- (4) Continuous involvement is necessary to ensure that tools are refined to effectively respond to shifts in technology and trafficking.
- (5) Technological interventions should account for the range of human rights potentially impacted by the use of advanced technologies.

The Initiative

The USC Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership & Policy's Technology and Trafficking Initiative was created to study the current use and broader implementation of communication technologies in the fight against human trafficking and modern slavery.