



Human Trafficking and the Digital World

The digital world has been identified as a possible haven for criminals. The **Dark Web** is a part of the digital world that is only accessible through special software allowing users and operators to remain anonymous or untraceable. The Dark Web has operated as an illegal underground marketplace that criminals exploit to carry out illicit activities. Online services and cryptocurrencies offer a high level of anonymity and the ability to operate from distant geographic regions that in person services cannot accommodate.

According to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), **Human Trafficking** is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or the use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability. The expansion and rise in the popularity of the digital world has enabled traffickers to grow and streamline operations; inviting more people to enter the trade.

Digital Methods Used by Human Traffickers

Virtual Currencies are increasingly used to facilitate human trafficking with numerous online sex marketplaces accepting and offering discounts to individuals who use these types of currencies. According to the US Department of State, there have been instances where drug cartels have been known to use cryptocurrencies to launder the proceeds of their illicit activities.

The anonymity offered by many cryptocurrencies coupled with the limited Know Your Customer (KYC) measures are ideal for criminals, as these create many challenges for law enforcement to identify and prevent illegal activities using cryptocurrencies.

A United Nations Commission of Inquiry highlighted that as far back as 2016, **social media applications** have allowed armed groups and fighters to set up online slave auctions and facilitate the circulation of photos and details of captured women. Applications like **WhatsApp and Snapchat** are used to lure and sexually exploit children and young adults. **Facebook, TikTok and Instagram** have also been identified as platforms used for human trafficking activities including to advertise victims for domestic servitude and forced labour. Law enforcement has described how individuals are trafficked through these platforms and are subjected to physical abuse, sexual abuse, food deprivation and the confiscation of their pay and travel documents.

Airbnbs are becoming increasingly popular to facilitate trafficking activities. They are useful as low key, anonymous places for sex trafficking where clients can visit as opposed to established hotels that require identification, credit cards and other information.

Human Trafficking and Legal Implications in the Digital World

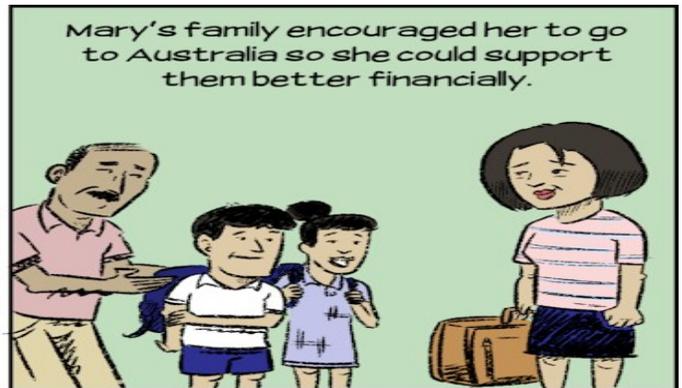
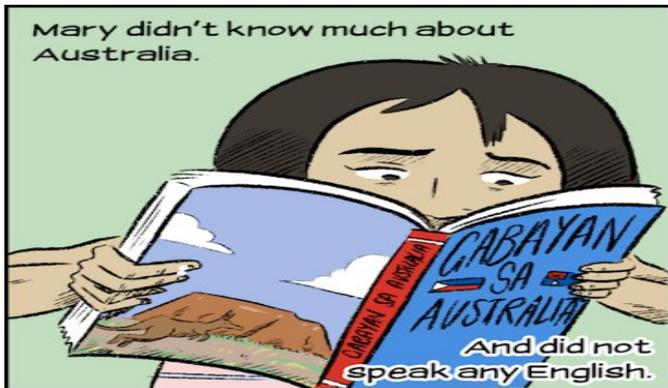
1. In 2023, a lawsuit was launched against Mark Zuckerberg and other Meta Inc executives for failing to do enough to stop sex trafficking and child sexual exploitation on Instagram and Facebook platforms. The lawsuit was filed by several pension and investment funds that own Meta's stock who believed that the Directors and leadership failed to protect the shareholders' interests by turning a blind eye to evidence of criminal activity being conducted on its platforms. A few years before, in 2019, Apple threatened to pull Facebook and Instagram access to its App Store over concerns linked to human trafficking.
2. In 2023, police were able to access and use images from Snapchat during an investigation which showed a 14 year old male being exploited. The photos led the authorities to an organized crime group which used the teenager as a runner to supply drugs. The messages showed that the minor owed the criminals money and they were pressuring him to repay. This formed a vital piece of evidence for the prosecution.
3. In 2022, the Texas Attorney General issued two (2) Civil Investigative Demands to TikTok, which launched an investigation into the platform's potential to facilitate human trafficking and child privacy violations.





Read the comic strip below and have a discussion!

1. Based on the information, what circumstances could have led to Mary being a victim of human trafficking?
2. What could Mary or her family have done to ensure her safety?



The Digital World As an Aid to Disrupt Human Trafficking

These same applications on the other hand, have been instrumental at times, in curbing or identifying instances of human trafficking. For example, a number of educational and informative videos have been uploaded to the TikTok platform showing potential traffickers making an approach to a group of women and discussing ways in which the traffickers may be targeting them.

Digital Identification and Verification and other technological advancements like facial recognition and reverse image searching can help to identify traffickers and victims on traffic cameras, hotel security footage and on social media platforms.



Possible Human Trafficking can be identified through appropriate customer due diligence.

When establishing a business relationship, FIs and DNFBPs should conduct due diligence to establish the anticipated activity or nature of business of a customer.

During the course of an existing business relationship, due diligence should be ongoing to assist in identifying deviations from anticipated activity or the nature of business or unusual/suspicious activity.

Any noted unusual/suspicious activities should be reported to the FIU.

References

- <https://www.wearethemis.com/uk/about/blog/human-trafficking-and-the-digital-world/>
- Humantraffickinghotline.org
- CFATF: Report on Human Trafficking and the Smuggling of Migrants.