

CYBERWARFARE

Week 9 Reading Summary

The article “*The Dark Web Dilemma: Tor, Anonymity and Online Policing*” by Eric Jardine emphasizes the purpose and importance of anonymity in today’s politically active world. It goes through the concept of Dark Web and tools such as Tor and DuckDuckGo, explaining mechanisms used to maintain anonymity while browsing. The article is written keeping in mind the legal and ethical aspects and encourages a system of **online policing** over these anonymous and encrypted networks to prevent illegal cyber crimes, abuses, and bullying from taking place.

The illegal aspect of the dark web has been a concern for central and state governments of several countries. The concept of anonymity via Tor is what has made the existence of the dark web possible. One of the highlighted statements in the article reads, “anonymity opens the door to abuse” (Jardine, 2015) because it encourages cyber criminals to carry out their malicious activities without getting tracked or noticed. This is achieved because Tor operates with the help of several volunteer servers or computers that aid in an indirect connection from the source user to the destination server and vice-versa, thus making it difficult to track the requests. Moreover, it operates over an encrypted network. This is a concern or hurdle for the agencies that track malicious online activities. However, the article mentions Tor as a ‘dual-use technology’ indicating that it has good sides as well to it, depending on its usage. Unlike liberal countries, it does more good than harm in highly repressive countries such as China and Russia, where citizens safely “want to exercise their rights to free speech and freedom of information” (Jardine, 2015).

With the rise of illegal online businesses, networks, and services growing recently on the dark web, it wouldn’t make sense to ban the use of Tor or any other anonymity-providing technology. The article considers that, “a more realistic way forward is to focus on actively policing the network” (Jardine, 2015) to bring down the criminals operating them. One such famous example is ‘Silk Road’ which was a very lucrative online store on the dark web just like Amazon, Ebay, or Craigslist, that sold illegal items and services ranging from banned drugs to assassinations-for-hire. It used cryptocurrency for payments to maintain its online anonymity. However, it was taken down by the government agency (FBI) in a short period of time after they exploited a bug on the store’s login page and located the actual server’s IP address. Many improved clones of it emerged later on, but they were eventually shut down as well. This is much similar to an offline / physical world where the police try to take down a criminal and new criminals keep emerging, but the fight continues.

Moreover, according to the article, coordination among nations with respect to sharing information about online threats and illegal activities will be helpful. Especially due to today’s borderless cyber world, most of the illegal activities taking place will often be located on servers outside the particular country’s jurisdiction. Hence, cooperation and coordination will be essential to safeguarding the internet and maintaining good use of the internet.

What surprised me?

The story of the girl mentioned in the article surprised me. Reading the texts and messages, I was astonished to see the extent people can go to bully someone on the internet without any fear because they are being safeguarded by anonymity.

Another statement that caught my attention was that, “Russia, a six on the political rights scale, has offered \$110,000 to the person or organization that can crack the encryption and anonymity of the Tor network (BBC 2014b).” (Jardine, 2015). This also goes on to show the highly repressive nature of the government over its citizens.

Questions?

1. Due to easy anonymity and the ability to impersonate anyone, is it illegal to pretend to be a police officer online?
 2. Can VPNs be used as alternatives to Tor to browse anonymously? Why or why not?
 3. Under what circumstances would you want to maintain your anonymity in a liberal country excluding operating illegal services?
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Works Cited

Jardine, Eric, The Dark Web Dilemma: Tor, Anonymity and Online Policing (September 30, 2015). Global Commission on Internet Governance Paper Series, No. 21, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2667711> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2667711>