Opportunities and Challenges in Media and Information Literacy

HUMAN TRAFFICKING GOES ONLINE

Human trafficking in Asia going online

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Authors: Alistair D. B. Cook and Caitríona H. Heinl, RSIS

Human traffickers have an increasing number of targets online in Southeast Asia. The ASEAN region has a growing population of over 600 million — and internet users have doubled. Technology-facilitated trafficking is more diffuse and adaptive than initially thought, but online tools can also be creatively employed to counter cross-border trafficking.

The explosion in mobile phone usage in the region facilitates real-time communication and coordination by traffickers to recruit, harbor, transport, and provide higher numbers of victims for commercial sexual activity or forced labor.

This in turn broadens their horizon and increases their reach. The sharp incline in mobile broadband subscribers is also driving the explosion in global connectivity according to the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Levels of cybercrime are increasing as individual and organised criminal groups exploit new opportunities without the need for complex skills. For instance, online social media allows for new ways to facilitate people trafficking, distribution of child abuse material, and new avenues for recruiting victims.

Although ASEAN signed the Declaration Against Trafficking in Persons, Particularly Women and Children, no significant progress on implementing the Declaration has been made. In particular, this is because East Asian countries are a major source for long-distance, transregional trafficking. In the most recent UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, East Asia and the Pacific account for nearly 40 per cent of detected child victims. Also, victims from this region are the most geographically dispersed — found in more than 60 countries.

Trafficking networks seek children for illegal adoption, commercial sexual exploitation, drug trafficking and child labour. Children under 18 using social media platforms often fall victim to traffickers. In the first instance, a young person might receive a friend notification from an unknown person but still accept the request. They increase exchanges, agree to meet and after continued social media interaction they meet again. The child subsequently gets trafficked and this is how an estimated one quarter of children reported missing in Indonesia are thought to have met their captors on social media platforms like Facebook.

In February 2014, Chinese authorities rescued 382 babies and arrested more than 1000 people suspected of buying and selling young children online. This followed a six-month operation in which authorities were made aware of a website promoting private adoptions. Law enforcement authorities subsequently uncovered an online black market that connected buyers and sellers over four websites, online forums and some 30 groups on a popular Chinese messaging platform.

Law enforcement is increasingly improving and developing methods such as victim-identification databases and data mining/analytics to improve forensic processes. However, governments in the ASEAN region need a multi-pronged strategy that focuses on prosecutions, raises awareness, and involves the private sector. Singapore developed the National Plan of Action for 2012–15 which identifies a '4P' strategy of prevention, prosecution, protection and partnership.

Along with the exponential increase in people accessing the internet throughout Asia, digital activism will develop and grow. There have been several advances in anti-human trafficking responses, such as the US government's pro-active policy of combatting human trafficking and corporate social responsibility schemes. While most innovation in this field emanates from the United States and Europe, many realize the need to adapt these technological advances to the needs of people in Asia.

The Virtual Global Taskforce brings law enforcement agencies, NGOs and industry partners together to protect children from online child abuse. In 2012 Operation Endeavour — an Australian, UK, US and Filipino law enforcement effort through the Virtual Global Taskforce — used online tools such as data mapping to identify areas in the Philippines where child abuse material was transmitted. Operation Endeavour led to 29 international arrests, 11 of which were in the Philippines — dismantling an organized crime group that had coordinated the live streaming of on-demand child sexual abuse.

In October 2013, the Taken Campaign launched the first anti-trafficking mobile phone application to mark Anti-Slavery Day in London. In 2013, an anti-trafficking mobile phone application was developed by RedLight Traffic in the US. Along with the Polaris Project (a US-based NGO), the app provides users with potential trafficking indicators and red flags to identify victims, a 20-minute training exercise to recognise trafficking, an anonymous

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way to report suspected cases to local authorities, and a sharing tool to establish a local community network against human trafficking.

Also, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), UNODC and UNESCO joined forces in March 2014 to promote a global campaign, 'Your Actions Count — Be a Responsible Traveller'. The campaign was launched with private sector support from Marriott International and Sabre Holdings who will promote it to customers through their websites (Travelocity and lastminute.com), online booking tools, their TripCase mobile app and GetThere booking tool.

These types of multi-stakeholder initiatives are sustainable and raise awareness — so are particularly significant for the Asia-Pacific which is regarded as a source and destination area for trafficked persons. Several multi-stakeholder approaches in the US and Europe are using ICT to tackle human trafficking through the use of online petitions, data mapping and awareness-raising activities. It is difficult for law enforcement authorities and governments to tackle this threat alone. Therefore, meaningful collaboration between a range of stakeholders and public-private cooperation are essential to fight trafficking, and counter criminals' increasing use of ICT in Southeast Asia.

Alistair D. B. Cook and Caitríona H. Heinl are Research Fellows with the Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies and Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS) at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University

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GROUP TASK
A. After reading the article, answer the following guide questions:
Assign one member to answer one question, example member A will answer question number 1, member B will answer question number 2 and so on.
1. Was there progress in the fight to stop human trafficking after ASEAN signed the Declaration Against Trafficking in Persons, Particularly Women and Children?
2. What is the percentage of child victims of human trafficking in the ASEAN Region?
3. How does the Internet contribute to the increased number of human trafficking cases?
4. Do you think that the Internet can be used as a tool to victimize people? Explain your answer.
5. Suggest at least 3 ways to help stop human trafficking.

B. Mind Map
As a group, design a mind map about human trafficking going online. You may include the ways to stop human trafficking in your design.

Reminder: Submit your output in PDF. You can use any application available in designing your Mind Map.
Submission Date: December 13, 2021 – Monday