

The Effect of Technology on Human Trafficking

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Due: May 1st 2017

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Introduction

Technological advances have aided and revolutionized the world in many different aspects: they altered how we interact socially, how we consume goods, and how we lead our daily lives. In this current day and age, a world in which humans and technology are separate entities is unimaginable. Due to our increasing dependence on technology, its demand has been consistently rising. However, as Marian Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund, once said: "In every seed of good there is a bad." (Edelman) Technology has been benefitted criminals just as much as it has been benefitted the well intentioned people of the world. An area of crime which technology has proliferated is human trafficking. For an issue as complex and widespread as this one, technology has been a major tool in the fight for and against it. Human trafficking is a deep rooted issue with a long history, many causes and yet no clear single solution that affects millions of men, women and children internationally a year. Human trafficking has greatly evolved with the advancements in computing and mobile technology. However, technology gives traffickers more secretive methods to commit their crimes while at the same time, it offers the global anti-trafficking community opportunities to combat it. This issue challenges the proper use of technology which requires us to develop a persuasive plan of action for the future. By educating ourselves and those around us, we can play a role in the fight against human trafficking.

Explanation of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is just as much a national issue as it is an international issue that affects people of all ages, sexes, races and sexual orientations. In the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking Persons*, the United Nations defines human trafficking as:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (Article 3, paragraph a)

The United Nations divides human trafficking into three divisions - sexual trafficking, labor trafficking and the removal of organs. Sexual trafficking is defined as “the movement of individuals for the purposes of sexual exploitation” (WTLC). Labor trafficking, such as domestic servitude, is “the forced employment of someone as a maid or nanny who must perform duties such as cleaning, cooking and childcare with little to no wages”(WTLC). The removal of organs is when an individual is robbed of one or many of their organs to be sold on the black market or deep web. Commonly trafficked organs include kidneys and the liver. (UN.GIFT.HUB)

The Women's Transitional Living Center states that: “Human trafficking is a multi dimensional threat: it deprives people of their human rights and freedoms, it is a global health risk and it fueled the froth of organized crime.” This very tragic reality is a multi-billion dollar criminal industry with a yearly revenue of \$32 billion, making it the second largest criminal industry behind illicit drugs, according to UNICEF. Human trafficking is a low risk, high reward

crime where many of the countries from which trafficked victims originate do not have the proper laws set up to handle this dehumanizing crime, as stated by the UN.GIFT (Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking)

The United Nations estimates that there are currently 27 million people living in slavery around the world today. UNICEF reports that there are over 1 million children alone who are trafficked into the sex trade and about 30 million children who have lost their innocence and childhood as a result of sexual exploitation in the past 30 years. The U.S. State Department has estimated that between 600,000 and 800,000 people a year are trafficked across international borders, 80% of whom are women and children and 70% of the women and children are trafficked into the sexual industry. Among high-population areas with large immigrant populations, the United States is one of the largest destinations for sexual trafficking. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, New York, Florida, California, and Washington D.C. contain the highest concentration of trafficked persons. Within the United States, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that between 244,000 and 325,000 American youths are at risk for sexual exploitation where runaway and homeless youths are at the highest risk. In 2007, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services estimated that New York City alone harbors over 2,000 sexually exploited children under 18.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported that sexual trafficking is the most prominent form of trafficking in which women, young girls, and a small percentage of males are sexually exploited in exchange for money by wealthy individuals from that country or tourists. These victims have no economic freedom and end up in child sex rings, forced prostitution, pornography as well as other sex related occupations. Sexual trafficking occurs in a

wide range of environments such as secret brothels, fake massage businesses, online advertisements or street prostitution.(McLaughlin) These victims are subjected to the dangers of inhumane and potentially fatal conditions such as STIs, abuse, captivity and death. Victims become completely robbed of their dreams, security, dignity and selves and end up trapped in a vicious cycle in which they become addicts, prisoners, corpses or abusers themselves.(Ballon)

Human trafficking often starts in poor regions of the world such as Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa where people want to leave their impoverished homes in hopes of moving to developed countries where they dream of having brighter futures (Northeastern University). Traffickers and recruiters lure victims in a variety of different ways. Victims may be physically forced into being trafficked or offered deceitful opportunities regarding employment or marriages. Victims who voluntarily leave their home countries are often uninformed about the exploitation that awaits them. Other times, victims are manipulated into thinking that they will be given legitimate employment, a decent education, or a better life(Oster). The difficulty of securing authorized travel documents forces victims to rely on traffickers and seek out smugglers to successfully migrate them into first world countries using extensive coordinated transnational routes and forged passports or visas. Once the victims reach their destination countries, they are subjects of trafficking(Oster). The Polaris Project explains how most traffickers and victims share the same native and cultural background and as a result, traffickers are able to perceive the victim and their current situation. This gives the trafficker an enormous benefit considering the trafficker knows exactly what to say and how to manipulate them in order to exploiting their vulnerabilities. Furthermore, the Polaris Project describes how once the trafficker has earned the victims trust, they use a wide range of control tactics, from

physical to emotional, to ensure that they have complete dominance over their victims. These tactics include emotional and physical abuse, sexual assault, the confiscation of any form of identification, memorabilia from home or money, complete isolation and renaming victims.

These tactics are effective as they make the victims feel deprived, alone, and as if they have no other choice but to succumb to their fate. There are many factors and causes of human trafficking such as globalization, religious persecution, poverty, wars, famine, natural disasters, deportation, globalization and political turmoil.

Human Trafficking Before Technology

From the Babylonians in Mesopotamia to modern day, human trafficking has had a long history. Some of the oldest forms of enslavement are forced prostitution and slavery. As the most vulnerable victims, women and children have been subject to sexual trafficking for the longest time. In the 1400s, the European slave trade began in Africa and it expanded until the 1600s when many other countries started colonizing other countries in order to further develop their countries power. The African slave trade is the earliest form of global human trafficking with buyers from the American and European continents. The treatment and fate of these slaves were left to the discretion of their buyer. The trade in women started mostly in the 1800s but was highly prevalent throughout the 1900s. Men wishing to exploit these trafficked women and children would search for victims in underground newspapers or through word of mouth. The World Wars were terrifying times for women stuck in countries of war. According to the Rutgers University Campus Coalition Against Trafficking, Japan developed a system where women all across Asia were forced into sexual slavery to provide comfort for their soldiers. The Japanese government established “comfort stations” surrounded by barbed wires where these women were detained and Japanese soldiers had access to them. With escape impossible, the women were tortured, beaten and many died of disease, malnutrition and exhaustion. The World Wars did draw attention to the international trafficking and mistreatment of women so the United Nation, the United States and various European countries started passing laws, acts and agreements to attempt to suppress and prevent this. Despite these laws and attempts at reduction, there has been

a rapid increase since the 1990s in the number of women and girls being trafficked into the sex trade. (Rutgers University)

Ethical Stance on Human Trafficking

There is no doubt that human trafficking is a heinous crime and that those involved, either on the trafficking or the buying side, are vile and immoral humans. The traffickers, who gather and supply the trafficked victims, are equally as atrocious as those who use their buyers, or those who utilize the services being provided. It can be argued that those who use humans in such a manner are worse than those who provide humans because there would be no supply if there was not a demand. A controversial aspect is the role technology plays in the process and practice of human trafficking. The University of Southern California has done an extensive amount of research on human trafficking and the impact technology has on it. Networked technologies such as the Internet, cell phones, and social media have transformed people's daily interactions. As a result, many everyday operations have been altered. Since the commencement of the communication, computer and Internet revolution in the 1990s, technology's involvement in human trafficking has been growing (Ballon). In fact, many refer to technology as a “double edged sword” that can spawn as well combat human trafficking. On the good side, technology can be used to combat human trafficking considering that people are more informed today about the horrendous events that occur in the world relating to human trafficking. There is a significant amount of local and international organizations of all kinds that fight against human trafficking by assisting governments, running trafficking hotlines and running trafficking raids that arrest traffickers, buyers and pimps while saving victims. Using state of the art technology, data can be gathered, analyzed and used to detect and prevent trafficking while online activity can be traced

to the buyers. However, efforts to trace human trafficking online could easily interfere with one's Internet privacy and could result in lawsuits and asking questions about online privacy.

Alternatively, finding women and children for illicit purposes has never been easier. The wide range of ways to scour potential victims such as social media posts, chat rooms or private conversations makes it easier for traffickers. They are able to easily detect and prey on, manipulate and abuse vulnerable children while buyers are able to physically distance themselves from these criminal transactions by hiding behind a screen. Traffickers advertise prostitution on websites such as Backpage.com via temporary ads that buyers scout out (Boyd). The company Thorn has found that sites such as Craigslist.com and Backpage.com are increasingly being used as tools to access human trafficking with 70% of survivors of child sex trafficking having been sold online.(Couch) Even though technology does make many aspects of human trafficking detectable, it has facilitated the demand for child sex trafficking (Seto). Realistically, technology cannot just stop advancing in order to prevent human trafficking. With or without these growths in technology and technology in general, human trafficking will unfortunately continue to occur.

Technology and Traffickers

As the range of communication technology continues to develop, it will become more accessible to people thus impacting human interaction. It is necessary to consider how technology is used both within the human trafficking process as well as the fight against it. According to the Polaris Project, the Internet has become the number 1 platform for traffickers, hustlers and customers to sell and buy women and children for sex. All of them are benefitting through advances in technology which has made it easier, cheaper and very profitable to coordinate business. These criminals are using new technologies in more complex ways to avoid detection and police interception of their communications. With commercial sex being extensively advertised on the internet and customers being quickly connected with victims through mobile technologies, traffickers are able to coordinate business swiftly while keeping a safe distance from the customer's.(Watson) The distance between the crimes and the traffickers provides a degree of anonymity which reduces the risk of being caught. Customers seeking to exploit women and children are able to shop online by browsing through pictures with an ease that was impossible before the Internet(Castells). The United Nations states that traffickers exploit victims through websites, chat rooms, file transfer protocol, which allows users to directly access another computer's hard drive to upload, and download files, peer to peer networks where illegal material can be found without leaving traces and mobile technology. According to *The Rise of Mobile and the Diffusion of Technology-Facilitated Trafficking*,

electronic forms of banking, such as Bitcoin and digital currencies, disguise financial activity and allow money to be moved rapidly in a short period of time. Advancements in technology have increased the ability to produce various counterfeit documents. The falsification of legal documents is occurring on such a large scale that more trafficked victims are being provided with false passports and visas. Technology is also used to facilitate the recruitment of victims. Young girls are lured somewhere or tricked on websites for escort services, dating clubs, job sites or marriage agencies. Victims with social media accounts could receive offers from traffickers to meet, date, marry or work. The mail order bride industry is very unregulated and can be used as a front for the recruitment of trafficking victims especially for women that live in extreme poverty where unemployment is high (Laterno). Since large crime organizations can afford to remain on the peak of technological advances, they heavily rely on technology to continue propelling their business.

Technology and the Good Guys

The criminals use a wide range of technological advances to increase their profit. Fortunately, the law abiding and moral people of the world can use technology to create tools against human trafficking by providing real time reports to authorities, educating people on the issue, and empowering communities to say no to human trafficking. The United States has an Office for Trafficking in Persons which runs a national human trafficking hotline and runs several training programs for those who want to get involved(Clawson). Nongovernment organizations, such as the Polaris Project, raise awareness among the public and policy makers using reliable statistics. The Polaris Project runs a national, toll free hotline where they receive information regarding trafficking, advocate for ore legislation and raise awareness about the issue. Technology can be harnessed to strengthen law enforcement as well as provide training resources and can be used to interrupt trafficking by ensuring travel documents are not falsified. Large companies such as microsoft are supporting anti trafficking initiatives in Asia-Pacific region to raise awareness(Cheney).

Christopher White at Microsoft Research developed the Memex search program for DARPA, which provides advanced Internet search capabilities that help secure conviction of criminals. Google's search engine barely scrapes the surface of the Internet while Memex reaches the deep web which is estimated to be up to 500 times larger. The deep web is a place for traffickers, terrorists and criminals to interact while keeping them out of sight(Boyd). Those who want to access the deep web must download special software which also ensures that they will

remain untraceable. Memex scours the Internet in search of information about human trafficking such as advertisements used to lure in victims and promote exploitation. Memex has given the government, military and businesses new ways to analyze and interact with data being pulled from the deep web. (Zetter) The NYPD has a new human trafficking response unit which uses DARPA's Memex search tool. Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance Jr has said "Memex helps us build evidence based prosecutions, which are essential to fighting human trafficking." (Greenemeier)

At the *Vienna Forum to Fight Human Trafficking*, the United Nations pointed out that Interpol is the largest international police organization with 186 member countries participating to fight crime globally with trafficking as one of its top five priorities. Technology entrepreneurs from the Silicon Valley have helped develop new weapons against human trafficking. Software is being developed to help law enforcement investigate online trafficking activity. Andrew Philpot from the University of Southern California Institute for Information Services is building software that looks for specific keywords and analyzes facial images. This information is put through algorithms to potentially identify underage girls and map the movements of suspected victims.

There are many mobile apps that have been developed to help prevent this crime. Ban Human Trafficking is an app that aims to educate users about the issue and teach them about possible signs of trafficking (Redlight Traffic). Traffic Cam is an app that helps everyday people get involved in the fight against human trafficking without intervention. Users take pictures of their hotel rooms, upload them to Traffic Cam and these pictures can be cross-referenced with online images to help identify where victims are being roomed and exploited, therefore helping

authorities identify routes that traffickers take when shuttling people around the world. Traffic Cam has about 1.5 million images and has been able to compile a full databases of hotel and motel room photos which is a popular option for traffickers(Swanner). Ashton Kutcher's company Thorn supports Project Vic which is a collaborative effort between the FBI, Department of Homeland Security and the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children to bring victim identification to the forefront of investigations. Realistically, technology alone will not solve cases or end human trafficking, but it helps.

Plan of Action for the Future

We all have to play a role in the fight to end trafficking. From raising awareness to bringing the criminals to justice, we all must take action now to prevent millions of hopeful and innocent victims from being dehumanized and enslaved. There are many anti-trafficking measures that can be taken by individuals, communities, cities and countries such as discouraging sex tourism, intercepting potential victims, cooperation between transit and destination countries, targeting the sex trade and battling traditional practices. Any efforts to reduce the prevalence of all kinds of human trafficking should not only address the supply but the demand as well. As the demand for sex with children increases, the profit that traffickers receive has also increased. This makes it vital to educate yourself and the public about issues concerning human trafficking as well as being able to identify the signs to report it. Inadequate knowledge of human trafficking fails to identify victims and report the crimes. We need to improve our knowledge of its nature, the underlying conditions, as well as the profiles of traffickers and victims in order to take the right steps to combat human trafficking.

Conclusion

Human trafficking was morally wrong 200 years ago with the slave trade and it is still morally wrong today. It continues to be an international issue that every country in the world is affected. According to *Policing Transnational Crime and Corruption*, the number of victims affected by this crime is reaching epidemic proportions and the amount of money this industry generates will continue to rise unless steps are taken to address it and the role technology plays to benefit the crime. While technology is crucial in identifying, preventing and combating human trafficking, it is not enough(Haken). The fight against human trafficking requires international cooperation, continued technological advances and daily support from those who want to help.

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