How are the Dark Web markets structured?

Reason of structure

The marketplaces on the Dark Web sell a variety of illegal goods. To get the right goods to the right customer, these marketplaces are structured in a similar way to normal - non Dark Web - online markets such as eBay or Amazon. All items are divided into main categories like ' drugs', 'services' or 'weapons'. Every main category can also branch out into subcategories and those subcategories can in turn be divided again. This way, you get a very structured, hierarchical marketplace where goods are easy to find. However, this also means it is easier for other parties like the government to analyse what products are offered. If the police are searching for a criminal selling a particular type of drugs, the separation in categories can be used to track down the seller more easily. This is exactly what law enforcement is trying to achieve, and together with Interpol and TNO they are working to find a way to divide new posts on forums into the hierarchical category structure.

Division of categories

Every marketplace has its own unique list of categories of products it sells. Not all marketplaces provide a place for sellers to offer anything they want. Furthermore, a lot of marketplaces have a high number of drugs compared to all other categories. This seems to be the case on the Dark Web in general.[1]

Agora

For our research, we first started working with a scraped dataset with sellers descriptions of offers on the Agora marketplace from 2014. This marketplace had a hierarchical category structure like described above. The division of each main category can be seen in figure 1. The graph clearly shows that the drugs category is by far the largest. The division in all subcategories on Agora is shown in figure 2.

---

[1] https://www.thedarkweblinks.com/darknet-market-list/