

Panel: Nordic comparative criminology: A novel five-country study on drug dealing on social media.

The aims of this panel is to generate knowledge on the development of social media drug markets. Five Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland) participated in the project 'Nordic Drug Dealing on Social Media' (NDDSM) in order to get a comparative perspective. The panel is financially supported by the *Scandinavian Research Council for Criminology (NSfK)* with the aim of highlighting novel research agendas stemming from the blooming Nordic criminological research.

With the rise of cryptomarkets for illicit drugs, a growing academic interest in dark web drug dealing has followed. However, online drug distribution is not isolated to the dark web as services on the clear web historically have offered a variety of substances, and continue to do so. Additionally to the researched open markets on e.g. research chemicals, legal highs, and prescription medicine, we have identified a rise in the use of social media platforms for distribution of illicit drugs. Little is yet known on how widespread such selling is, to what extent different social media platforms are involved, or which modus operandi are used.

The project data consists of 107 semi-structured interviews with sellers and buyers across the 5 countries, as well as three months ethnographic research on national social media. Here, we will present results relating to the questions addressed in the project:

- 1) What similarities and differences exist within and between countries? A descriptive presentation of social media drug dealing, trying to identify possible differences related to criminal justice and culture within each country.
- 2) How to do qualitative research in online drug markets while balancing participants' anonymity with data reliability? An exploration of online qualitative research using online ethnography and encrypted textual based messaging applications for semi-structured interviews.
- 3) What is the relationship between clear web social media and dark web drug dealing? Digital drift between cryptomarkets and social media drug markets, as well as online-offline drug dealing.
- 4) How do sellers succeed in online drug dealing? From street capital to digital capital: minimizing risk by acquiring the right kind of knowledge and experience.

#### Short bio of presenters:

*Jakob Demant* holds a Ph.D. in Sociology and is associate professor at Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. He has published more than 50 journal articles on the subject of crime, alcohol, drugs, and cryptomarkets. Demant is project leader on the NDDSM project.

*Silje Anderdal Bakken* is a PhD-student at the Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. She worked as a research assistant on NDDSM, in charge of data collection and analysis. Her main field of research is online drug markets, substance use, and criminology.

*Atte Oksanen* is professor of social psychology at the University of Tampere, Finland. Oksanen's research focuses on emerging technologies and social interaction. He has published in a variety of areas including youth studies, drug and alcohol research, and criminology.

*Helgi Gunnlaugsson* is professor of Sociology at the University of Iceland in Reykjavík. Gunnlaugsson's main research interests include criminology, penal policy and the problem of drugs and alcohol in society. His articles have appeared in numerous journals in Europe and the United States.

Short bio of discussant:

*Dr. Bina Bhardwa* is a research fellow at the Institute for Criminal Policy Research, University of London. She wrote her PhD in Sociology about legal and illegal drug use, the use of digital technologies and policing in three dance settings. She has also been working on other project related to social media and crime, and night-life, and is now on a project about organized crime and fraud.

Paper 1 - Social media drug dealing: Differences in modus operandi and perceptions of risk  
Social media has become leading internet based aids for communication. People across the world use social media sites/applications like Facebook, SnapChat, and Instagram on a daily basis. It should therefore be of no surprise that the same mediums are used in drug trade. But to what extent, and how is it used? In this paper, we present findings from the first multinational study (as far as we know) on drug dealing in social media. We ask how social media is used in drug dealing and how the different modus operandi relate to perceptions of risk.

In Denmark, Iceland and Sweden, drug dealing takes place very openly in dedicated closed Facebook-groups, where sellers announce their goods with pictures, descriptions and contact information. Instagram was also used in Sweden. In Norway and Finland, the ethnographical approach did not give much result, the interviewees rather talked about a wide use of SnapChat, Wickr, Messenger and other one-to-one communication applications. Despite the differences of use, social media is clearly a common aid in the drug dealing business. The variation seems to be heavily linked to perception of risk. While the Danish and Icelandic participants do not worry about being caught while openly dealing or buying drugs under both fake and real Facebook profiles, the Norwegians and Fins rather prefer closed, private conversations. To understand the use of social media in drug trade is important to adjust drug policies to how dealing takes place today.

Paper 2 – Doing qualitative research in online drug markets: how to balance participants' anonymity and data reliability

Internet has become an important channel for crime, among them drug dealing. This has led to a development of new, digital methods. This paper focuses on textual based semi-structured qualitative interviews, asking how to ensure participant anonymity within digital methods in criminology. Further, how does the anonymity relate with data reliability? Data consists of 110 semi-structured interviews with online drug dealers and buyers over encrypted messages, as well as research notes.

Interviewing through encrypted applications is useful, especially on illegal or sensitive topics. It ensures anonymity and protection for both the interviewee and the interviewer. However, there are challenges that should be considered. Some of the risks with such asynchronous communication, is lack of closeness and misunderstandings due to lack of tone of the voice and facial expression. Keeping a polite and curious tone throughout the interview seemed to get the interviewee to open up. Other interviewees answered shortly just to get the gift card. The biggest challenge we met was when we were unsure if the interviewee had participated before with a different username, which happened among the few recruited through discussion forums. In this paper, we will discuss the challenges we met, along with possible solutions.

Paper 3 - Digital drift between cryptomarkets and social media drug markets

The Internet has become an important channel for drug dealing. Cryptomarkets have shown to dramatically raise in volume since the appearance of Silk Road. And the legal spice dealing on the clear web has been addressed in a number of studies. In this paper, we look at how and with what perceptions do drug dealers move between different forms of digital markets?

One finding is a combined use of both cryptomarkets and social media. Cryptomarkets are used to source drugs that are hard to get, or at a better cost. When a crypto-buyer has obtained the drugs, social media is used to communicate the possibility to buy. A detailed and partly coded message or picture is used to communicate with friends, acquaintances, or strangers. This combination of using encryption technology and open applications is quite surprising, considering a high variation of security.

Digital drift between online markets leads to a fusion of roles across marketplaces. Most commonly, drug buyers on the dark net turned into dealers on social media. Drift within and between buying and selling drugs has been a central concern in non-digital drug dealing. Boundaries that seems even lower online. In order to provide a foundation for an informed drug policy, it is necessary to include a wide range of explanations. One of them being today's digital practices and how these are changing basic social communication and roles, also in concern of drug dealing.

Paper 4 - From street capital to digital capital: Successful dealing in online drug markets

Cryptomarkets and social media drug dealing markets make use of multiple technologies to be secure (e.g. TOR, PGP-encryption, cryptocurrencies, SnapChat, Wickr, fake Facebook profiles). In off-line drug dealing, street capital is critical to become a successful. In this paper, we will research how online drug dealers produce and use operational security (OPSEC) practices as a field specific digital capital.

The interviewees from cryptomarkets report on having spent months in learning encryption and checking out markets and sellers. In social media drug markets, dealers choose to heighten their security by communicating through encrypted messaging applications, by using VPNs to access open social media, or having fake profiles when dealing on Facebook, Instagram or SnapChat. To protect themselves, sellers and buyers in digital drug markets have to achieve a specific form of digital capital, namely OPSEC capital. OPSEC capital is not only a requirement to stay safe and to keep their business secure, but also to succeed in these markets.