Sticky Associations in Illicit Drug Networks: Quasi-Experimental study into Persistent Drug Recommendations on Snapchat

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Abstract

Norbert Elias used playing cards as an analogy describing the continuously shifting webs of mutual dependencies among the actors that form social figurations. While figuration theory has been fruitfully applied to the darknet drug trade, recent studies applying actor-network, distributed agency, and assemblage theories steered our attention to non-human actants, specifically to the agency of platforms, technological features, and drug policies. Marking the 15th anniversary of the first academic publication on cryptomarkets, this paper is aimed at exploring game analogies to describe how digital figurations operate and are affected by both human actors and non-human actants in the darknet drug trade. Authors of peer-reviewed publications on cryptomarkets are invited to submit contributions that describe empirically supported techno-social dynamics by game analogies. For example, data published by the European Union Drugs Agency (2024) shows that the plurality of cryptomarkets ended up with operators committing exit scams: intentionally shutting down the marketplaces and taking user funds that were deposited in the escrow systems. Players, as operators, may decide to exit scam if they employed a centralised cryptocurrency wallet, that however, reduces their trust-level among vendors and customers. Submitted analogies will be thematically coded and synthesised (1) to develop a state-of-the-art review paper on current academic knowledge on cryptomarkets, and (2) to inform the development of Exit scam, an educational game that demonstrates sociotechnical dynamics in the darknet drug trade. While contributors will be invited to join as co-authors of the journal article, the game will assist teaching undergraduate and postgraduate sociology and criminology courses on digital drug markets. The presentation will outline the contribution framework and invite discussion, with the aim of recruiting potential collaborators among European drug researchers.

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