How the use of the Internet is affecting drug trafficking practices

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What kinds of criminal opportunities the Internet offers for drug trafficking to occur? *How* these opportunities affect the organisation of drug trafficking?

1) To what extent does the Internet provide new criminal opportunities for drug trafficking? What kind of criminal opportunities are provided? What specific phases of drug trafficking are facilitated by the Internet?

2) How do actors involved in drug trafficking exploit these new criminal opportunities?

3) Does this new opportunity structure change the relationships between actors involved in drug trafficking? If so, how?

*What are the main challenge*s for researchers and law enforcement to better understand/counter this criminal activity?

Internet-mediated drug trafficking

New Psychotropic Substances (NPSs)

1961 Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs

1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances

... all modern nations have regulatory frameworks that prohibit the importation, manufacturing, growth, distribution, sale, and use of a variety of recreational drugs

NPS is *"a new narcotic or psychotropic drug, in pure form or in preparation, that is not controlled by the United Nations drug conventions, but which may pose a public health threat comparable to that posed by substances listed in these conventions"* (EMCDDA)

[Counterfeit   pharmaceuticals]

*"spurious/falsely-labelled/falsifed /counterfeit (SFFC) medicines are medicines that are deliberately and fraudulently mislabeled with respect to identity and/or sourc*e" (WHO 2012)

50% sold online are counterfeits , 100,000-700,000 deaths per years (?)
USD 75billion/year (10%global trade in medicines)
North-South divide
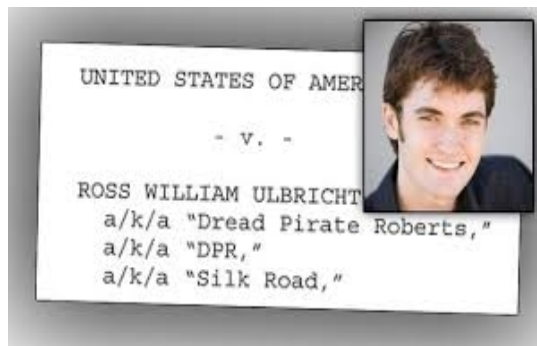Over The Counter (OTC) & Prescription Only (POM)

Internet-mediated drug trafficking

Internet-mediated drug trafficking: the state of the art

(INCB 2001, Rider 2001, Britz 2008, Walsh 2011, Christin 2012, Dipartimento Politiche Antidroghe 2013, UNODC 2013... EMCDDA 2013, 2014, 2015)

Focus on the Deep Web
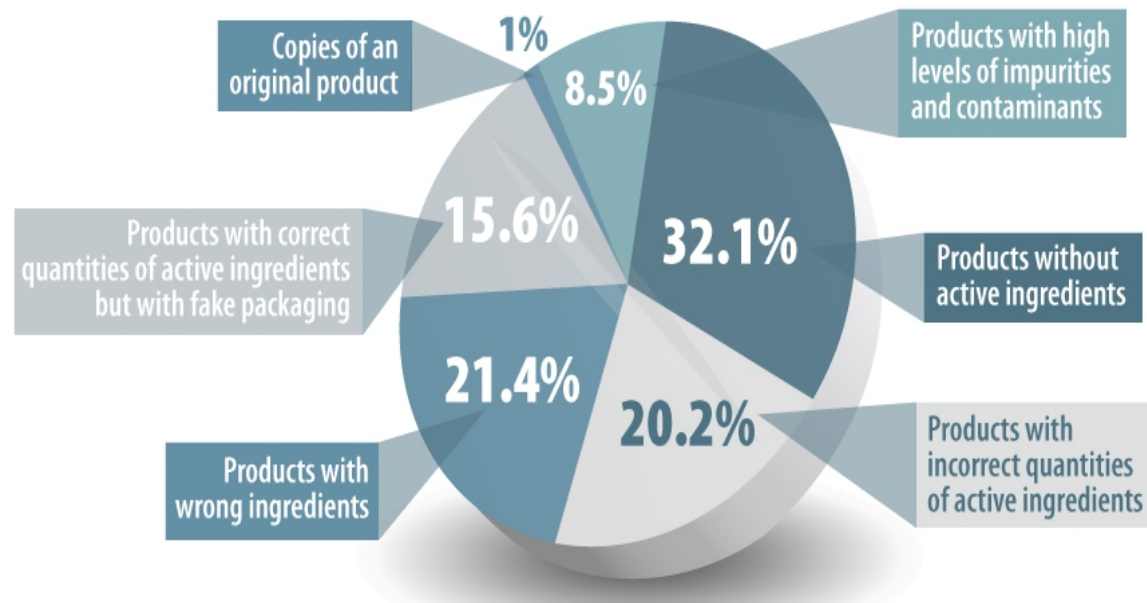
E.g. **SILK ROAD**

An eBay for drugs?
B2C or B2B?
Silk Road 2.0, Agora, Abraxas, Outlaw, Silk Road Reloaded

Internet-mediated drug trafficking

[Counterfeit pharmaceuticlas]

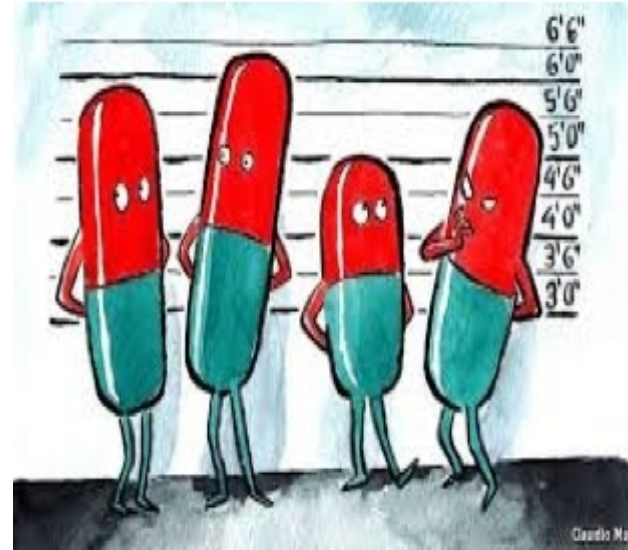One of these medicines is fake.
Can *you* tell which?

- Online pharmacies (legal / fake / illegal)

- Hot products ("lifestyle drugs" / opioid analgesics and phychotropic substances / "natural products" or nutritional supplements etc

Copies of an original product — 1%

8.5% — Products with high levels of impurities and contaminants

15.6% — Products with correct quantities of active ingredients but with fake packaging

32.1% — Products without active ingredients

21.4% — Products with wrong ingredients

20.2% — Products with incorrect quantities of active ingredients

Internet-mediated drug trafficking

Opportunities

- Communicative

- Informational

- Managerial

- Organizational and relational

- Promotional, marketing, persuasive and loyalty-building

- Targeting

- Technical

- (Countermeasure)

Trends

- Transnationality

- Continuous tranformation

- Especially in the distribution & intermiate passage stages, everything can be managed from the destination country

- On cyber-hotspots and convergence settings

- Actors (as retailers/ segmentation of the market)

- Relationships with clients

- Trust

Exploiting legal loopholes

- "Drugs that run on the edge of legality"

- Buyers' awareness / social perception

- Dissemblance

- Taking advantage of differences in national regulation

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Cyber-hotspots

- Surface + Deep Web

- "Convergence settings"(for offenders)
  + hubs for relational opportunities

- New (online) hotspots
  + extension of traditional (offline) hotspots

- Convergence settings for users (e.g. forums)
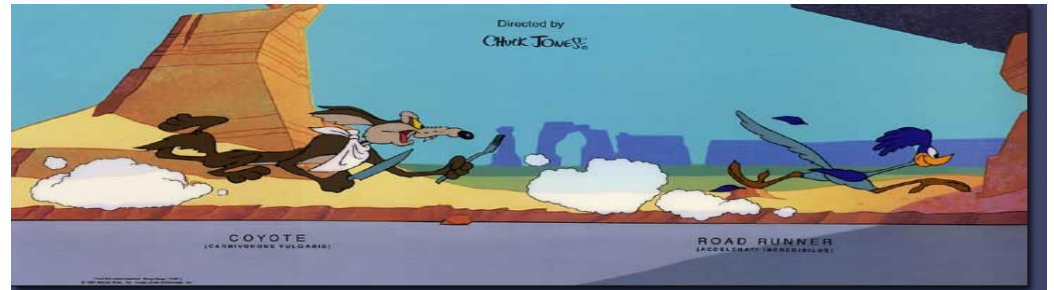
Criminal actors involved

- "Organized crime"narrative

- A distinction should be drawn!

  a) OCGs

  b) Other types of offenders

  Different use of crime opportunities ➡ different MOs

Internet-mediated drug trafficking

Law enforcement perception/policing

- Nationality
  - different experiences
  - online monitoring is something "new"
  - building experience as they go

- Ranking / generation

- New criminal opportunities
  new vulnerabilities
  new dynamics of social and institutional control

  - Traditional policing online:
    occasional, complicated, costly (McMullan & Rege 2010).
    Lack of: culture, expertise, resources; vastness of cyberspace
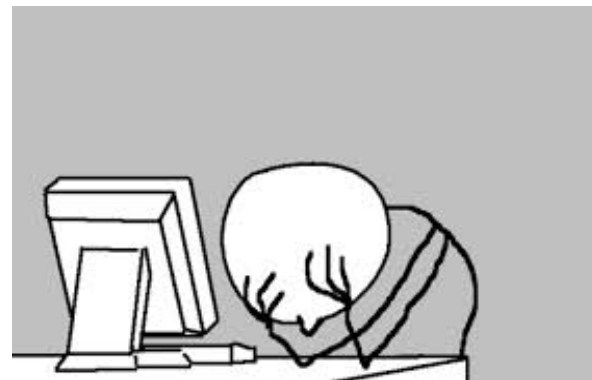
Internet-mediated drug trafficking

- Also new opportunties for intelligence gathering.

- Surveillance?
  - Profiling, "intelligence-led" searches
- - Substantial + procedural rules for gathering and handling the data

- More responsibility to informal/ alternative ways of social control
  Challenge!

- Research-informed good practices for LEAs , self-policing (Brenner 2006),
  reporting

- Civilian policing on the Internet (Huey et al. 2012),
  sense of shared responsibility in online communities (Wall & Williams 2007)

  - How to be proactive?

  - Towards an hypothesis-based approach?

Internet-mediated drug trafficking

Researching crime & deviancy online

The Internet is also a source of data for academic research
- Manual collectionf of online traces
  E.g., virtual ethnography (passive/ active)

- Automatic collection of online traces
  Mirroring, monitoring, leaks (E.g., web crawlers)

Technological challenges + ethical considerations

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