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Human Trafficking Online

The Role of Social Networking Sites and Online Classifieds

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Human Trafficking Online, visit
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents a comprehensive examination of the role of social networking sites and online classified ads in facilitating human trafficking and delivers recommendations for developing technological innovations to monitor and combat trafficking.

Human trafficking, a form of modern-day slavery, is a grim reality of the 21st-century global landscape in developed as well as developing countries. While traditional channels of trafficking remain in place, online technologies give traffickers the unprecedented ability to exploit a greater number of victims and advertise their services across geographic boundaries.

Yet the extent to which online technologies are used in both sex and labor trafficking is unclear, and the current approach to the question is lacking. While online classified sites such as Craigslist have already been under intense scrutiny for being used by traffickers,¹ little research is available on the role of online classified and social networking sites in human trafficking, and the issue has yet to be fully studied. Instead of singling out these technologies as a root cause of trafficking, this report poses the following question: Can online technologies be leveraged to provide actionable, data-driven information in real time to those positioned to help victims?

This study forwards the hypothesis that tools such as data mining, mapping, and advanced analytics can be used by governmental and non-governmental organizations, law enforcement, academia, and the private sector to further the anti-trafficking goals of prevention, protection, and prosecution. Adapting these technologies and methods requires careful consideration of potential implications for civil liberties, such as privacy and freedom of expression. This report applies detailed methods to understanding the relationship between domestic human trafficking and online

technologies through literature reviews, field research, and interviews. In addition, the report presents preliminary results from primary research in developing tools to assist law enforcement and anti-trafficking efforts. The report concludes with a set of recommendations and guidelines to inform future research and technological interventions in human trafficking.

The use of Internet technologies in people's daily lives has dramatically increased in recent years. In 2010, the number of Internet users worldwide exceeded an estimated 2 billion.² Hundreds of millions of individuals use social networking sites,³ and approximately half of all online adults in America have used online classified advertising sites.⁴ In contrast to the many social benefits that Internet technologies provide, a darker narrative also has emerged. Social networks and online classified sites are being used by traffickers to market, recruit, sell, and exploit for criminal purposes. Many of these sites are explicit in nature and some are underground. Yet, evidence from legal cases demonstrates that mainstream sites such as Craigslist, Backpage, and Myspace have already been used for trafficking.⁵ Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking sites are susceptible to similar uses.

Because human trafficking is a crime recognized by international protocols and state laws, traffickers are traditionally forced to conduct their activities underground. But this report illustrates that online transactions leave behind traces of user activity, providing a rare window into criminal behavior, techniques, and patterns. Every online communication between traffickers, "johns," and their victims reveals potentially actionable information for anti-trafficking investigators.

Until now, there has been a lack of data on the role of online technologies in human trafficking. Yury Fedotov, executive director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, remarked:

“We do not have an accurate picture of the scope and nature of [the misuse of technology] and cannot act as effectively as we should. Knowledge is essential for evidence-based policy, and we must fill the information gap.”⁶

The Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership & Policy (CCLP) at the University of Southern California launched an anti-trafficking initiative in response to a similar call for increased knowledge. The project began at a June 2010 meeting CCLP Director Geoffrey Cowan convened in Washington, D.C., at the urging of Alec Ross, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s senior adviser for innovation, and Ambassador Luis CdeBaca, head of the State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Representatives from the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Department of Justice, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and the United Nations joined leaders from the technology field, nongovernmental organizations, and academia to discuss the use of technology to address trafficking.

The meeting set into motion research initiatives in the Mekong Subregion (including Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam), Haiti, and the United States. An absence of technological solutions for information sharing among anti-trafficking organizations inspired further study into potential uses of technology in this field. A partnership between the USC Information Sciences Institute and CCLP developed prototype software designed to detect possible cases of online sex trafficking activity, particularly cases involving underage victims. Together, the group conducted advanced research on data mining, computational linguistics, and mapping tools to monitor trafficking on social networking and online classified sites. Feedback from the Federal Bureau of Investigation was integral to this process.

This report indicates that immediate action is required to develop monitoring and prevention techniques to combat human trafficking online. The report recommends future research and proposes actions that stakeholders can undertake to address trafficking online. Comprehensive solutions to trafficking through online channels should involve proactive steps by governments to protect victims and support law enforcement in combating a new generation of tech-savvy traffickers. At the same time, this report urges private-sector technology firms to recognize the opportunity to address human trafficking on their networks and services. In addition, NGOs and academics bring needed expertise to technological interventions.

This study also identifies technological innovations that can be used by actors and stakeholders involved in anti-trafficking efforts. To that end, the following principles are intended for those seeking to employ technology as a means to combat human trafficking.

Guiding Principles for Technological Interventions in Human Trafficking

1) The ultimate beneficiaries of any technological intervention should be the victims and survivors of human trafficking.

Throughout the technological design and implementation process, decisions should be guided by a single question: How will technology maximize the benefit and minimize the harm to victims and survivors of trafficking?

Developers and users of anti-trafficking tools should examine the inherent risks that arise when technology is applied to complex social problems. While benefits may appear clear at first, experts should be consulted to evaluate whether tools have the potential to cause inadvertent harm.

2) Successful implementation of anti-trafficking technologies requires cooperation among actors across government, nongovernmental, and private sectors, sharing information and communicating in a coordinated manner.

Technological interventions in anti-trafficking efforts necessitate collaboration across sectors. Addressing trafficking online in particular requires coordination of efforts to avoid inefficiencies, for example, when a proposed technology is already in use by parallel organizations or when existing technologies can readily be adapted to fit anti-trafficking needs. The private sector, academics, and the technology community can serve as valuable resources for creative innovations that can be tailored to anti-trafficking, including technologies to facilitate information sharing.

3) Private-sector technology firms should recognize that their services and networks are being exploited by traffickers and take steps to innovate and develop anti-trafficking initiatives through their technologies and policies.

Social networking sites, online classified sites, and technology firms provide Internet services that criminals are using to facilitate domestic and international trafficking in persons. These companies should consider their social responsibility and assume an active role in combating trafficking on their sites. Whether through practices such as establishing industry-wide codes of conduct or innovating technological solutions, the private sector can exercise considerable influence in anti-trafficking efforts.

4) Continuous involvement is necessary to ensure that tools are user-centric and refined over time to most effectively respond to shifts in technology and trafficking.

User-centered design principles should aim to improve functionality and usability by focusing on the particular needs of users of anti-trafficking technologies. Law enforcement, NGOs, service providers, and the public each have particular needs based on technological literacy, class, and language, among other factors.

Furthermore, technological interventions must be supported by individuals committed to sustaining the technology over time. Both governmental and nongovernmental actors can play a key role in providing expertise and support for anti-trafficking innovations.

5) Technological interventions should account for the range of human rights potentially impacted by the use of advanced technologies.

Technologies used in anti-trafficking efforts should be carefully tailored to avoid recklessly encroaching upon fundamental rights such as privacy, security, and freedom of expression. Developers and users of the technology must reflect on the full range of rights implicated by any information-collecting activity, taking particular care to reduce the number of false positives associated with tracking and monitoring.

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INTRODUCTION

In November 2010, Marvin Chavelle Epps was sentenced to 12 years and seven months in federal prison for sex trafficking of a minor. According to court documents, Epps contacted the 16-year-old female via Myspace, encouraging her to travel to Sacramento, California, to work for him and then advertising her sexual services on the Internet from a hotel.⁷ Police recovered a transcript in which Epps described his practices as “Y2K pimpin’,” explaining that he would “get some professional, beautiful, elegant, glamor [*sic*] shots [and] put ’em on these escort websites.”⁸

According to evidence gathered for this report, online classifieds and social networking sites are used as conduits for human trafficking. “Human trafficking” and “trafficking in persons” are terms commonly used to describe a form of modern-day slavery wherein victims are forced or otherwise coerced into labor or sex both across and within state and international borders.⁹

The number of trafficking victims around the world is a topic of debate, with recent estimates ranging from 12 million to 27 million victims worldwide. Due to myriad methodological difficulties, this report refrains from estimating the number of trafficking cases online; however, it will demonstrate that traffickers are indeed employing 21st-century communication tools to support human slavery.

The rapid expansion of the Internet and online technologies is affecting numerous aspects of daily life around the globe, including facilitating domestic and international trafficking in persons. “We are faced with the increasing use of social network sites and other advances in technology to carry out these crimes and facilitate these criminal enterprises,” said Robert S. Mueller III, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Mueller observed, “Because of the

Trafficking online presents an unprecedented window to observe, track, and monitor the conduct of both the supply and demand sides of the trade.

accessibility and the anonymity the Internet provides, Main Street is quickly becoming an online avenue.”¹⁰

Similarly, Kimberly Agbonkolor, program manager for the Los Angeles Metro Task Force on Human Trafficking, stated that much of what once happened on the streets now takes place behind closed doors. “The Internet is used as a way of recruiting and a way of advertising for the prostitution of young girls,” said Agbonkolor.¹¹

Despite accounts of traffickers and their customers using online channels for recruitment, advertising, and procurement, the extent to which online technologies are used in both sex trafficking and labor trafficking is unclear, and the current approach to the issue is lacking. Although online classified sites such as Craigslist already have come under intense scrutiny for use by traffickers,¹² the role of social networking sites and online classifieds in trafficking has yet to be fully studied.

While human trafficking stems from a complex set of economic, social, and cultural causes that predate the development of online technologies¹³ and continue to exist as new technologies emerge, it is undeniable that trafficking activity is taking place online. Yet the role of the online environment in trafficking remains an open question. Instead of viewing social networking sites and online classifieds as the cause of trafficking, this report offers a different approach by observing the manner in which traffickers are using online technologies and exploring whether the same technologies can

be used to monitor and combat trafficking.

The Internet makes a wide array of human behaviors—both positive and negative—more visible.¹⁴ Trafficking online thus presents the anti-trafficking community with an unprecedented window to observe, track, and monitor the conduct of both the supply and demand sides of the trafficking trade.

The private sector capitalizes on the online visibility of Internet users by routinely collecting data on consumer behaviors for targeted marketing and advertising strategies. Yet efforts to harness data and technological tools to address social problems lag behind. This report attempts to utilize the visibility of trafficking activity online to develop solutions.

The 2011 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, issued by the U.S. Department of State, addresses the potential of new media to combat trafficking. According to the report, “New media will play a critical role in bringing together those committed to this fight.”¹⁵ Despite the potential for applying new media and technology to target trafficking, the tools are not being developed rapidly enough or deployed in a sufficiently coordinated way.

This study forwards the hypothesis that technology and online tools can be used by anti-trafficking actors dedicated to prevention, protection, and prosecution. One research goal is to develop ways online technologies can be leveraged to provide empirically driven actionable information in real time to those positioned to help victims. Adapting these technologies and methods requires careful consideration of potential implications for civil liberties, such as privacy and freedom of expression.

In this report, researchers analyze the relationship between human trafficking and online technologies. Literature reviews of research related to trafficking in persons and trafficking via the Internet, specifically, serve to identify information

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gaps and highlight the need for additional study. Field research, interviews, and a sample of recent trafficking cases involving online technologies provide details regarding the different uses of the Internet by traffickers. Although the scope of this inquiry includes the role of online activity in both sex trafficking and labor trafficking, this study found evidence establishing the use of online channels only in the context of sex trafficking.

This report details a series of exploratory studies conducted by the Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership & Policy, in partnership with the Information Sciences Institute at the University of Southern California, to innovate and develop tools to potentially detect sex trafficking online. Researchers employed technologies and methods such as data mining, web crawling, computational linguistics, and mapping. These tools are being developed with feedback from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and are intended to support law enforcement and other anti-trafficking efforts. This report also examines other potentially useful technologies, including crowdsourcing and mobile phone applications, and offers action-oriented recommendations for government, NGOs, the private sector, and academia. The report concludes with a set of guidelines to inform future technological interventions in the anti-trafficking space.

BACKGROUND

Human Trafficking Definitions

The definition of trafficking varies under a range of assumptions and laws on the subject. The descriptions provided in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 and the Palermo Protocol are two of the most frequently cited definitions today.¹⁶

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, the first U.S. federal law passed in response to the problem of human trafficking, defines “severe forms of trafficking in persons” as

(A) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or

(B) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.¹⁷

Under the TVPA, “sex trafficking” is “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act.”

The definition of “severe forms of trafficking in persons” delineates distinctions between forms of human trafficking, such as labor trafficking and sex trafficking, and the treatment of minor and adult victims in the context of sex trafficking. For example, a minor induced to perform a commercial sex act is a victim under the TVPA, as the definition of “severe forms of trafficking” includes causing a person under 18 to engage in a commercial sex act. The use of force, fraud, or coercion is not required in such cases because the

law presumes that an underage victim cannot consent to a commercial sex act.

The identification of adult victims of severe forms of trafficking is more complicated, by virtue of the requirement of force, fraud, or coercion.¹⁸ Thus, an additional dimension of the definition concerns the distinction between consensual sex work and forced prostitution.¹⁹ This element of the definition indicates that consensual sex work by adults is not a severe form of trafficking per se.

Another definition is found in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, opened for signature in Palermo, Italy, in December 2000. The United States is a signatory to this protocol to the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, implemented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which provides states with assistance in drafting laws and developing strategies to combat trafficking.

The Palermo Protocol defines “trafficking in persons” 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.²⁰

While there is no collective agreement on these terms and definitions,²¹ for the purposes of this study, the terms “human trafficking” and

“trafficking in persons” will refer to the definition of “severe forms of trafficking” under the TVPA.

Measuring Trafficking in Persons

The increasing international concern regarding trafficking in persons is reflected in the growth in the amount of research on the issue. The International Organization for Migration has tracked the rapid rise in publications on the topic since 2000.²² Reports address the many aspects of trafficking, from policy-related issues to historic dimensions and technological implications, with many researchers working to measure this global phenomenon.

Research studies estimating trafficking in persons are inherently problematic due to the limitations of measuring a global, covert, and criminal enterprise.²³ The IOM global survey notes several factors that pose a challenge to measuring trafficking: many cases are unreported; the victims may be unwilling to talk; and the capacity of data collection in some countries is very poor, resulting in statistics that may be no more than “guesstimates.”²⁴ Many scholars and organizations are working to improve methodologies to gather more accurate empirical data on human trafficking.²⁵ The domestic recommendations in the 2011 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, issued by the U.S. Department of State, include the improvement of data collection on suspected cases of human trafficking. Indeed, data-collection capabilities pose a challenge to measuring trafficking in numerous regions around the world.

A literature review on human trafficking produced for the U.S. Department of Justice identified many areas of human trafficking that need more research. The review highlights the problem of data gathering, emphasizing that “the most important arena which needs urgent exploration is the way the knowledge upon which

the public debate about trafficking for sexual and labor exploitation is based is generated.”²⁶

Differing methodologies and gaps in knowledge have produced varying global trafficking estimates. At the release of the 2011 *TIP Report*, U.S. Secretary of State Clinton stated that “as many as 27 million men, women and children” are victims of human trafficking.²⁷ By contrast, a report by the International Labour Organization in 2008 set the number of persons in forced labor around the world at 12.3 million.²⁸

In another example, the 2010 *TIP Report* described labor trafficking as the primary form of trafficking in persons in the United States, while a 2011 Department of Justice report that reviewed 2,515 suspected cases of human trafficking found that 82% were classified as sex trafficking.²⁹ The 2011 *TIP Report* acknowledges the different variables associated with trafficking figures: “Combined federal and state human trafficking information indicates more sex trafficking than labor trafficking investigations and prosecutions, but law enforcement identified a comparatively higher number of labor trafficking victims as such cases uncovered recently have involved more victims.”³⁰

Additionally, the International Labour Organization and UN Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking differ on their data for trafficking. The ILO reports that, of the total number of persons trafficked, 43% are victims of sexual exploitation.³¹ UN.GIFT estimates that, at 79% of persons trafficked, sexual exploitation is the most common form of trafficking—although the organization recognizes that the figures “may be the result of statistical bias.”³²

The 2011 DOJ report describes two main issues facing federally funded human trafficking task forces: “missing individual-level information about suspects and victims, and [a] failure to update cases as the investigations progressed.”³³ The report adds, “Identifying the characteristics

of individuals involved in human trafficking was problematic overall. The quality of the data was associated more with the task force itself than with the date the case was opened or the type of suspected trafficking.”³⁴

Sheldon Zhang conducted a literature review on sex trafficking research produced from 2000 to 2009, highlighting a growing number of researchers challenging the empirical basis of many reports on the topic.³⁵ Statistics may reflect an organization’s agenda and bias, which invites skeptics to question the empirical foundations of human trafficking data. Zhang quotes Professor Ronald Weitzer, who “deplored that in no area of the social sciences has ideology contaminated knowledge more pervasively than in writings on the sex industry. Too often in this area, the canons of scientific inquiry are suspended and research deliberately skewed to serve a particular political agenda.”³⁶

Among the challenges facing researchers in this area, Zhang discussed the difficulties in accurately determining the scope of the problem, due in part to the range of methods employed by different agencies and the lack of reference or data to support researchers’ claims.

In response to the knowledge gap in measurements of trafficking in persons, the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking in the Mekong Subregion held an international competition to increase the quality of measurement to better inform counter-trafficking initiatives.³⁷ The top selected methodologies received funding and technical assistance to measure sex trafficking in Cambodia.

In summary, these reports echo the need for better empirical methods and caution that future research on human trafficking will not be credible without a stronger foundation. While “the very existence of human trafficking at any level for any purpose is unacceptable,”³⁸ more accurate

measurements of trafficking victims are important. Precise measurements are needed in order to develop comprehensive counter-trafficking strategies and to effectively allocate more resources to areas with the greatest need.³⁹

Internet Trends and Trafficking Online

Internet technologies and digital networks give users the unprecedented ability to connect and communicate instantaneously with individuals and large audiences over vast distances. Such technological capabilities and affordances enable traffickers by increasing their ability to exploit a greater number of victims across geographic boundaries.

Between 2005 and 2010, the number of global Internet users reportedly doubled, passing 2 billion in 2010.⁴⁰ In the United States, 79% of the population uses the Internet and almost half use at least one social networking site.⁴¹ For the purposes of this report, social networking sites are online platforms and services that allow users to build a network of connections and share messages and content with others.⁴²

The use of social networking sites has exploded among teens and adults in recent years.⁴³ According to a recent Pew Internet Project sample, the number of Americans who use social networking sites has nearly doubled since 2008, with the majority of users on Facebook.⁴⁴

Online classified websites also have seen significant growth in the number of users. In September 2007, 32% of online American adults reported using sites such as Craigslist; by May 2010, that figure increased to 53%.⁴⁵ Online classifieds operate much like the newspaper classifieds section where individuals can post advertisements grouped by categories, such as products, services, and personals. Classifieds sites allow users to reach a wide audience and may be

free of charge or charge a fee for posting; some allow anonymous posting, while others may require a username and password.

As noted in a report produced for the Council of Europe, “None of these new technologies are in and of themselves harmful,” but for those criminals searching for means of exploiting their victims, they provide “new, efficient, and *often anonymous*” methods.⁴⁶ Evidence that social networking sites and online classified sites are used for human trafficking is increasingly apparent. Craigslist, a free online classified site, received much attention for reports of sex trafficking via the “Adult Services” (previously “Erotic Services”) section of the site. With the expansion of the site into cities across the country, an increasing number of news outlets reported on traffickers using Craigslist postings to advertise trafficked persons.

In 2006, the FBI arrested Marcus Sewell in Las Vegas for sex trafficking. According to the indictment, Sewell advertised two underage girls as escorts on Craigslist.⁴⁷ In another case, two Chicago women were arrested and charged for selling girls as young as 14 on Craigslist. The women allegedly forced the girls to have sex with 10 to 12 men daily.⁴⁸ More recently, Randal G. Jennings was convicted of forcing five underage girls into prostitution. Jennings reportedly made the girls post ads on Craigslist and then drove them to the hotels to meet with “johns.”⁴⁹

“Online classified ads make it possible to pimp these kids to prospective customers with little risk,” said Ernie Allen, president and CEO of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.⁵⁰ As discussed in detail below, amid such statements and growing pressure, Craigslist closed the Adult Services section of its site. Despite the closure, evidence indicates that traffickers are utilizing other online venues, such as Backpage and Myspace, and numerous explicit sites and chatrooms.

“Whether it’s ... on Craigslist or on some of these other social network sites, the pimps can offer these women and children for sale across the entire Internet.”

*—Ambassador Luis CdeBaca
at the U.S. Department of State*

In 2010, a man in Minnesota who used Backpage to advertise the sexual services of a female minor was found guilty of sex trafficking.⁵¹ That same year, several New York gang members reportedly advertised girls as young as 15 on Backpage, beating and starving them if they did not make at least \$500 a day performing sexual services.⁵²

News reports have similarly connected Myspace and Facebook to cases of human trafficking, as traffickers use social networking sites to target victims and advertise their sexual services.

In November 2010, a local news station in San Antonio, Texas, reported the case of a 14-year-old girl who was recruited through Myspace. The girl reportedly was forced to act as a prostitute in Arizona for six months before she was rescued.⁵³ The same year, a report from Indonesia described a case involving pimps allegedly posting pictures of their young victims on Facebook to attract potential customers.⁵⁴ Interested buyers would send a Facebook message to the girl’s pimp to arrange a meeting.⁵⁵

According to Ambassador Luis CdeBaca, at the U.S. Department of State, “Globalization and technology allow the traffickers ... to operate in a way that they never used to be able to.” He observed, “Whether it’s ... on Craigslist or on some of these other social network sites, the pimps can offer these women and children for sale across the entire Internet.”⁵⁶

Research on Trafficking and the Role of the Internet

Research on the role of the Internet and technology in facilitating human trafficking is emerging and not yet comprehensive. Researchers have examined the increased use of the Internet by traffickers and the new challenges technology presents, especially concerning the sexual exploitation of children. A literature review conducted for this report did not find any research addressing labor trafficking online.

Donna Hughes, an American researcher on trafficking of women and children, has studied how the Internet has facilitated the global trafficking industry since 1997.⁵⁷ She notes how closely trafficking, especially sex trafficking, is intertwined with new technologies.⁵⁸ According to Hughes, “The sexual exploitation of women and children is a global human rights crisis that is being escalated by the use of new technologies.”⁵⁹

Researchers have analyzed the link between new technologies and human trafficking and explored the possible advantages the Internet provides for traffickers. For example, a group of experts commissioned by the Council of Europe found that “the Internet industry and the sex industry are closely interlinked and the scope, volume, and content of the material on the Internet promoting or enacting trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation ... are unprecedented.”⁶⁰

A Shared Hope International report offers a comparison of the marketplace of commercial sexual exploitation in four countries and describes the Internet as a major impetus behind the growth of the sex trade, noting, “Technology has become the single greatest facilitator of the commercial sex trade in all of the countries observed, with the exception of Jamaica, where word of mouth continues to dominate.”⁶¹ According to the

report, “As one of the most technologically advanced countries in the world, the U.S. faces the challenge of combating facilitation of sex tourism and sex trafficking markets by technology.”⁶² The same report included a Google search by SHI for sites associated with sex trafficking. The web analysis identified more than 5,000 “suspected” websites that directly or indirectly facilitate the sex trafficking and sex tourism industry.⁶³

However, identifying incidences of human trafficking is not straightforward. In a report for the Council of Europe, researchers conducted an Internet search for potential trafficking sites and emphasized that a website can only be termed “suspect,” since there is no evidence that the girls featured in ads for sex services or marriage are in fact trafficking victims.⁶⁴ What is clear is that the Internet has changed the methods used to recruit and market victims, and it has “certainly contributed to the rise of trafficking in human beings.”⁶⁵

There are many examples of research addressing the online safety of children and the risk of sexual exploitation. Studies have examined the role of online technologies in the recruiting or grooming of children by traffickers. An SHI report on domestic minor sex trafficking in America notes that the Internet is not only used to advertise sexual services, but that “pimps, madams, and escort agencies recruit new members through their own websites, Myspace accounts, and Facebook accounts.”⁶⁶ The role of social networking sites was the focus of a recent report by the Australian Institute of Criminology, which found that “social networking sites, in particular, have become an important element in the child grooming process. These technologies, popular with the digital/virtual generation, allow offenders to make contact with children and even masquerade as children in cyberspace to secure their trust and cooperation.”⁶⁷ An August 2010 report to

Congress by the Department of Justice also addressed crimes related to child exploitation and the Internet. According to the report:

Some criminals have turned away from illicit activities such as drug dealing and robbery toward child sex trafficking, from which they can generate potentially several thousand dollars per day, as a single child can generate as much as \$1,000 on a weekend night. In fact, the profitability of child prostitutes to the pimp has increased as Internet advertising and web-enabled cellphones have aided pimps in reaching a larger client base; they can schedule more sexual encounters per child.⁶⁸

The Internet is used not only by traffickers but also by victims and clients. A report on the commercial sexual exploitation of minors in New York City said, “Some teens (23%) said that the Internet was an increasingly popular option to meet customers, and 11% of the teens used the popular website Craigslist to meet prospective ‘dates.’”⁶⁹ A June 2011 Congressional Research Service report on domestic minor sex trafficking found that the Internet has facilitated the demand for child sex trafficking because it “can rapidly connect buyers of commercial sex with trafficking victims while simultaneously distancing the perpetrator from the criminal transactions.”⁷⁰

However, the exact numbers of children sexually exploited through the Internet are difficult to measure. A 2010 study prepared by the Schapiro Group for the Women’s Funding Network details the results of several statewide studies of commercial sexual exploitation of female children in the United States.⁷¹ The results indicate a significant number of girls under age 18 are involved in the sex trade, with rates varying state by state.⁷²

Although the study presents original research addressing the use of Internet classified advertisements in the commercial sexual exploitation of children, major components of the report lack

methodological rigor.⁷³ As a result, some of the methods employed in the study—specifically, the method of determining juvenile prostitutes by counting pictures of young-looking women online—were publicly criticized.⁷⁴ Despite the shortcomings of the Women’s Funding Network study, it gained considerable attention in September 2010 when it was introduced in congressional testimony addressing the issue of domestic minor sex trafficking.⁷⁵

The Berkman Center for Internet & Society created the Internet Safety Technical Task Force, which includes major social networking sites, communication companies, and scholars, to analyze social networking sites and their efforts to increase online safety for children.⁷⁶ The results indicate that social networking sites are making an effort to increase online safety for children and that there is potential for future technological solutions. The task force emphasized that “more research specifically needs to be done concerning the activities of sex offenders on social network sites and other online environments, and encourages law enforcement to work with researchers to make more data available for this purpose.”⁷⁷

The Australian Institute of Criminology echoed the need for collaboration, stating, “A future solution in fighting child exploitation, and perhaps human trafficking as a whole, requires effective coordination and collaboration on the part of a wide range of government and private-sector entities.”⁷⁸

HUMAN TRAFFICKING ONLINE: CASES AND PATTERNS

In order to better understand patterns related to human trafficking online, this section offers a review of a set of U.S. federal cases involving human trafficking via online channels, beginning with an overview of some of the applicable domestic laws related to trafficking. The following is only a sampling of U.S. laws relevant to this complex issue.

Relevant Trafficking Laws

At the federal level, numerous domestic laws might be applied to human trafficking cases. Sex trafficking was criminalized by 18 U.S.C. §1591, which makes it illegal to recruit, entice, provide, harbor, maintain, or transport a person or to benefit from involvement in causing the person to engage in a commercial sex act, knowing that force, fraud, or coercion was used or that the person was under the age of 18. Sex traffickers also may face charges under other federal statutes applicable to sex trafficking, such as 18 U.S.C. §2423(a), prohibiting transportation of a minor with intent that the individual engage in criminal sexual activity. On the labor trafficking side, 18 U.S.C. §§1589-1590 make it illegal to knowingly provide or obtain the labor of a person by certain means, such as force or threats of force, or to traffic a person for labor or services by means of force, coercion, or fraud for the purpose of subjecting the person to slavery, involuntary servitude, debt bondage, or peonage.

Federal laws addressing human trafficking apply across the country; state laws addressing trafficking also exist, but vary in terms of definitions, penalties, and enforcement priorities. While most states have recognized and criminalized sex trafficking,⁷⁹ many have only recently done so,

and with significant variations in penalties imposed on perpetrators. According to the State Department's 2011 *TIP Report*, "While state prosecutions continue to increase, one study found that less than 10% of state and local law enforcement agencies surveyed had protocols or policies on human trafficking."⁸⁰

The above laws address the criminalization of a trafficker's conduct, but a trafficked victim can potentially face criminal charges, depending on whether the applicable law offers the victim protection. For example, under federal law, a 16-year-old engaged in commercial sex acts is a trafficking victim, regardless of whether the minor appears to have participated willingly in said acts, because the law presumes that an underage victim cannot provide legal consent. However, the protections available to trafficking victims vary between states, and minor victims of sex trafficking can face prostitution charges in some state courts.⁸¹ In April 2010, New York became the first state to pass legislation addressing this issue, with the Safe Harbor for Exploited Children Act.⁸² The act prohibits the prosecution of minors for prostitution. Several states would subsequently pass similar legislation.⁸³

Evidence From Federal Cases

Fiscal year 2010 saw the greatest number of U.S. federal human trafficking prosecutions initiated in a single year. According to the 2011 *TIP Report*, "Collectively federal law enforcement charged 181 individuals, and obtained 141 convictions in 103 human trafficking prosecutions (32 labor trafficking and 71 sex trafficking)."⁸⁴ The average prison sentence was 11.8 years, with prison terms ranging from 3 months to 54 years.⁸⁵ The Internet and online tools played roles in a number of these cases.

A scan of recent legal cases involving human

trafficking and online technologies provides insights regarding details about the uses of technology by traffickers.⁸⁶ The primary sources for details of trafficking investigations were press releases from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Department of Justice, and U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement. A search of press releases from these organizations using a combination of terms including “sex trafficking,” “forced labor,” “labor trafficking,” “human trafficking,” “minor,” “prostitution,” “online,” “advertisement,” and “Internet” produced a set of cases that were manually reviewed for relevance, with results limited to cases involving either a guilty plea or a conviction. The search did not produce any cases involving labor trafficking and online technologies; all of the results reviewed were related to sex trafficking. The following is based on a self-selected sample of 27 federal trafficking cases since 2009 involving the use of social networking sites or online classified advertisements to facilitate trafficking. A search of legal databases, using keywords including “sex trafficking,” “labor trafficking,” “human trafficking,” “minor,” “website,” “online,” and “Internet”—as well as searches for convictions under 18 U.S.C. §§1590-1591⁸⁷—produced examples illustrating the use of the Internet to facilitate trafficking.

The cases collected do not indicate the totality of trafficking cases involving social networking sites and online classifieds but rather serve to demonstrate some of the ways in which technology is used to facilitate trafficking and the patterns that begin to emerge across cases.

Labor Trafficking and Technology

In the course of this study, researchers did not discover evidence of traffickers utilizing the Internet to facilitate labor trafficking, perhaps due to the circumstances typically surrounding this

form of trafficking. Research suggests that victims often are recruited from impoverished regions and typically learn about opportunities via word of mouth. Once recruited, workers may be isolated, without access to technology. “Most of the victims we’re seeing are from underdeveloped countries,” said Anna Park, regional attorney for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Los Angeles District Office. “In the cases we’ve had,” she noted, the use of technology “is very unlikely.”⁸⁸

Employment discrimination laws have become instrumental in the fight against labor trafficking.⁸⁹ Park was involved in a case brought by the Los Angeles District Office of the EEOC against Trans Bay Steel,⁹⁰ in which the EEOC filed a class national-origin discrimination action on behalf of a group of Thai welders who were trafficked and forced into labor. Initially recruited by an agency to work as high-skilled welders and provided with legitimate visas, the workers were subsequently “held against their will, had their passports confiscated, had their movements restricted, and were forced to work without pay, all in violation of Title VII. Additionally, some workers were confined to cramped apartments without any electricity, water, or gas.”⁹¹

What we have seen are temporary contracting agencies bringing in workers through legitimate means under the auspices of luring people with the promise of work so that they can lead a better life. However, the victims are charged exorbitant fees that the workers can never pay because, oftentimes, they are never paid for their work. This fee is used to subjugate and exploit the workers, forcing them to tolerate and endure intolerable situations.⁹²

According to Park, most of the targeted communities are agrarian, and people typically learn about job opportunities from neighbors and

members of their communities. Newspapers in languages targeting a monolithic group (e.g., Thai newspapers) also may advertise positions that turn out to be labor trafficking, particularly in light of the fact that many of the employment agencies involved in trafficking are otherwise legitimate and likely advertise. In the event that these community newspapers move online, there may be an opportunity to evaluate how online classifieds may be used for labor trafficking.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta offered a similar assessment of technology in the context of labor trafficking, noting that labor traffickers do not use much technology and that such uses tend to be limited to pay-as-you-go cellphones.⁹³ However, as rural communities gain access to the Internet, there will be a need to study the benefits of online technologies as well as their potential use as tools of manipulation, depicting a false reality designed to lure persons away from their homes and into forced labor.⁹⁴

The lack of examples of online communication with respect to labor trafficking might also stem from the nature of the messages communicated by traffickers—namely employment opportunities and promises of fair wages. Unlike sex traffickers, who advertise using language that signals the nature of the available services (e.g., using terms such as “young”), labor traffickers rely on deceit, making compelling false promises. The challenge is to decipher which job advertisements will result in labor trafficking once the laborer responds to the advertisement and arrives for work. Unless the recruiters, employers, or other details of their advertisements have already been identified for trafficking abuses, it is immensely difficult to design studies wherein observing online communications alone will reveal disingenuous intentions. The unique features of the labor trafficking system make it particularly challenging to track through Internet tools and technologies at this time.

Sex Trafficking and Technology

Although easier to track than labor trafficking, determining instances of sex trafficking online poses its own complications. In particular, distinctions between advertisements of trafficking victims as opposed to sex workers who do not fall within the legal definitions of trafficking can be limited and blurred. Focusing on some of the most vulnerable victims of trafficking, this report directs its research and technological solutions toward detecting minors advertised for commercial sexual services. Under the TVPA, all minors engaged in commercial sex acts are treated as victims of trafficking.⁹⁵ Although advertisements frequently misrepresent the age of victims, certain keywords meant to serve as signals for the purchasers who drive the demand for sex with minors make detection a possibility. Although the signals and terms change frequently, the nature of advertising a minor's sexual services to purchasers with particular age and characteristic preferences makes it possible to detect common themes across online classified ads.

Focusing on the set of cases in which the Internet is used by sex traffickers, certain patterns begin to emerge: (1) Online classified sites are used to post advertisements of victims, (2) social networking sites are used in the recruitment of victims, (3) investigations may begin with a picture of what appears to be an underage girl in an online classified ad, and (4) a number of victims have been identified as runaways.

The Internet was used to advertise the sexual services of victims in all of the cases reviewed. For example, Byron Thompson, who pled guilty to sex trafficking in Maryland in July 2009, created Craigslist and Backpage postings advertising the sexual services of his victims, who were featured in photographs in the ads.⁹⁶ In January 2011, Clint Wilson pled guilty to sex trafficking

in a Texas federal court. Wilson posted ads on Backpage, offering commercial sex services by his minor victim, who was featured in the ads.⁹⁷ A Florida federal jury found Tyrone Townsend guilty of sex trafficking in February 2011. Among the evidence collected by investigators were 28 Internet ads and a Garmin GPS seized from Townsend's vehicle. Using the GPS, investigators were able to establish locations of several customers in the Jacksonville area.⁹⁸

In a case filed in the Southern District of New York, *United States v. Daniel Marino, et al.*, 14 members and associates of the Gambino organized crime family pled guilty to various federal charges, including sex trafficking and sex trafficking of a minor.⁹⁹ Several of the defendants operated a prostitution business through which they exploited young women and girls for commercial sex. The business was advertised on Craigslist and other websites.¹⁰⁰

While Craigslist was the most frequently referenced website in the cases reviewed, the Adult Services section of the site has since closed. "The source now is Backpage," noted the U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta, "aside from underground and quasi-underground chat rooms."¹⁰¹

Describing the challenges of reviewing online classified ads in search of trafficking activity, the office added: "It's not easy to quantify or to identify someone who is using code words. You would have to weed through, in theory, a hundred ads before you get the one."¹⁰² The task of manually sorting through myriad advertisements is a strain on often-limited law enforcement resources. Without some technological solutions to narrow the pool of potential advertisements, the task of manually reviewing these ads exceeds the limits of what investigators can reasonably expect to achieve.

Beyond advertising sexual services, traffickers also use the Internet to interact with potential

A common starting point for investigators is the appearance of the victim in photos used by sex traffickers to advertise, particularly when a girl seems younger than her age.

victims. In four of the cases reviewed, traffickers used social media as a recruiting tool. In June 2010, Dwayne Lawson was sentenced to 210 months in federal prison after pleading guilty to sex trafficking of children. The investigation began when Los Angeles police arrested a teenage girl for prostitution. Investigators learned that the girl was a runaway working for Lawson, who initially "contacted the girl in the fall of 2008 on Myspace.com and, after promising to make her a 'star,' gave her a bus ticket from Florida to Las Vegas, Nevada."¹⁰³

A common starting point for investigators is the appearance of the victim in photos used by sex traffickers to advertise. According to public records, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta said, agents frequently review pictures in online classified ads, noting when a girl seems younger than her advertised age. Agents may then undertake investigations based on a picture that appears to feature an underage girl.

In August 2010, Lawrence Pruitt and Marvin Harris were sentenced to 10 years and four years, respectively, in federal prison for sex trafficking of a minor. Agents investigating the possible prostitution of underage girls arrested the pair at an Atlanta-area hotel, where investigators found the victim, a 17-year-old "whose photographs the agents had previously seen on an Internet website advertising erotic services. The FBI believed that the victim, whose advertisement listed her age as 19, was a juvenile."¹⁰⁴

The investigation of Thelonious Reed, sentenced in June 2009 on charges related to sex trafficking, began when an agent discovered an ad for a young woman in the Erotic Services section of Craigslist. The ad, in which a young woman appeared topless, described the woman as 19 years old. Believing her to be younger, the agent set up a meeting posing as a client. Upon arrival, the 18-year-old victim revealed that she was trafficked for sex by Reed, who lured her by describing himself as a modeling agent.¹⁰⁵

However, investigating based upon a photo is not without complications, as in some cases a fake or doctored image may be used to advertise the victim's services. "That makes it even harder to peel back the layers and get to the trafficked female," noted the U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta.¹⁰⁶

In several of the cases reviewed, investigators discovered the victims were runaways.¹⁰⁷ This finding corresponds to the 2011 U.S. *Trafficking in Persons Report*: "U.S. citizen child victims [of sex trafficking] are often runaways, troubled, and homeless youth."¹⁰⁸ In May 2010, Ezekiel Alon Hampton of Tacoma, Washington, was sentenced to 13 years in prison for counts involving sex trafficking. The investigation began when the police department contacted a young runaway about a reported assault and discovered that the 14-year-old girl was being trafficked, along with several other young women. The girl, who had recently left Hampton, explained that he made the girls advertise their sexual services on Craigslist. All of the victims turned out to be runaways, and Hampton provided them with housing, food, and drugs.¹⁰⁹

In October 2010, Sterling Terrance Hospedales, a former Army sergeant, was sentenced to 11 years for sex trafficking and attempted sex trafficking of a child. The investigation began in Lakewood, Washington, when local police received reports of a young runaway posting ads selling sexual services on Craigslist. Investigators located and interviewed

the juvenile, who led them to Hospedales. Investigators also discovered another juvenile victimized by Hospedales. The second juvenile had met him on Myspace. Hospedales paid for her plane ticket and, within a week, posted photos of her on Craigslist advertising sexual services. In a memo, prosecutors emphasized that Hospedales had targeted susceptible juveniles: "Hospedales intentionally sought out emotionally damaged, vulnerable victims—runaways who had no support system whatsoever and no idea of how to be in a normal, functioning relationship."¹¹⁰

The Human Trafficking Rescue Project conducted a sting operation in March 2009 targeting individuals attempting to engage in sex with prostituted children.¹¹¹ Ads were posted on Craigslist describing children available for sex; however, no children were actually involved in the operation. Richard Oflyng, a Kansas truck driver who responded to an ad describing "little girls," was arrested after making an appointment to have sex with an 11-year-old girl. Oflyng pled guilty and was sentenced to 15 years in federal prison for attempted sex trafficking.¹¹²

"This sentence serves as a warning," said Gilbert Trill, assistant special agent, ICE Office of Investigations, Kansas City. "Some child predators mistakenly believe the anonymity of cyberspace shields them from scrutiny. In fact, their use of the Internet gives us new tools in our efforts to investigate this insidious behavior."¹¹³

At the prosecution stage, a broad reading of the interstate commerce element of §1591(a)(1)¹¹⁴ allows prosecutors to bring a potentially wider range of sex trafficking cases involving online activity under federal trafficking laws, as illustrated in the recent Eleventh Circuit decision in *United States v. Timothy Myers*. The defendants, who were charged with trafficking two girls under the age of 18 for sex, placed advertisements featuring their victims on Craigslist and Backpage.

Testimony from Craigslist's customer service manager revealed that "the data for its websites was stored on servers in Arizona and California and that Craigslist payments end up in the company accounts in California, where the company is based."¹¹⁵ The court concluded that the interstate commerce element of the statute was satisfied, by virtue of the movement of monies through accounts and information through servers in various states.¹¹⁶ With many social networking and online classified sites maintaining servers in multiple states, decisions such as *United States v. Myers* could allow a greater number of prosecutors to bring sex trafficking cases involving online activity in federal courts, allowing victims to benefit from the protections offered under the TVPA.

Case Study: Craigslist Under Fire

Due in part to increasing reports citing Craigslist's role in trafficking and sexual exploitation, in September 2010 the website shut down its Adult Services section in all U.S. cities. By December, the company closed the Adult Services sections of the website worldwide.

Since 2007, Craigslist has been criticized for its role in facilitating prostitution and sexual exploitation via its Adult Services (formerly Erotic Services) sections.¹¹⁷ In November 2008, Craigslist began charging users of its U.S. sites a \$5 credit card fee for adult ads, requiring a phone number to verify the identity of the user and to help police better track the postings to the actual users.¹¹⁸ In May 2009, the company renamed its Erotic Services section Adult Services.¹¹⁹ The change in policy included a fee increase to \$10 and the hiring of attorneys to manually filter ads.¹²⁰ Craigslist reported that it would continue cooperating with law enforcement to crack down on ads selling sex.¹²¹

The Craigslist case represents a missed opportunity to explore more creative solutions to the problem of trafficking online.

But a number of politicians, advocates, and law enforcement officials were not persuaded. "I believe Craigslist acted irresponsibly when it unilaterally decided to keep the profits from [sex ad] posts," said Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal.¹²² Yet when Craigslist attempted to donate monies to a nonprofit group, the Advocates for Human Rights, the unsolicited contribution was rejected.¹²³ Along with 17 other state attorneys general, Blumenthal in 2010 sent a letter to Craigslist demanding the removal of the Adult Services section.¹²⁴

In March 2009, Illinois Cook County Sheriff Thomas Dart filed a suit in the Northern District of Illinois against Craigslist, alleging, "Missing children, runaways, abused women, and women trafficked in from foreign countries are routinely forced to have sex with strangers because they're being pimped on Craigslist."¹²⁵ Craigslist asserted that §230(c)(1) of the Communications Decency Act of 1996 protected it from liability for the distribution of third-party content. The court agreed that §230(c)(1) applied and granted Craigslist's motion for judgment on the pleadings.¹²⁶

As the campaign against Craigslist continued to gain momentum, a research study commissioned by the Women's Funding Network, conducted by the Schapiro Group, reported numbers related to the trafficking of minors via online classified ads. The report was cited in congressional hearings, despite the fact that aspects of the methodology were not rigorous.

On September 15, 2010, the House Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security conducted a hearing on domestic minor sex trafficking and specifically H.R. 5575, the Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Deterrence and Victims Support Act of 2010.¹²⁷ The subcommittee expressed particular concern that advertisements for sex trafficking appeared online on Internet sites such as Craigslist.¹²⁸ U.S. Representative Jackie Speier (D-CA) stated, “The activity taking place on myredbook.com, eros.com, and Backpage is equally as horrific ... These sites are facilitating crimes.”¹²⁹

During the hearing, William Powell, director of customer service and law enforcement relations for Craigslist, highlighted the company’s steps to address concerns that a subset of ads represented suspected cases of trafficking. “I have personally been told many times by law enforcement agents that Craigslist is by far the most responsive Internet company that they deal with,” Powell said.¹³⁰ He continued:

We participate actively in the cyber tip line program administered by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, and ads that meet NCMEC’s reporting guidelines are reported immediately. Moreover, we have been advised by NCMEC that we are the only such participant making direct reports among countless other venues that carry adult service ads. We have assisted sweeps, anti-trafficking sweeps by the FBI, and have been credited by agents with helping make those sweeps successful. We have engineered special tools to facilitate the work of NCMEC and law enforcement. These include creation of multiple special search interfaces that facilitate the search for missing children across all Craigslist sites.¹³¹

In his testimony, Powell announced that Craigslist had permanently closed its Adult Services section in the United States, with no plans to reopen the section.¹³² By December 2010, Craigslist closed all Adult Services sections worldwide.

The Craigslist case is striking because of (1) the lack of credible empirical research and aggregate data on trafficking and online technologies informing the debate, (2) the lack of more cooperative cross-sector partnerships and coordination, and (3) a missed opportunity to explore more creative solutions to the problem of trafficking online.

INNOVATION, MONITORING, AND ANALYSIS OF TRAFFICKING ONLINE: PRIMARY RESEARCH

To address the information gaps and other deficiencies revealed in the Craigslist debate, the USC Center on Communication Leadership and Policy (CCLP) initiated a project to conduct primary, empirically driven research in the area of technology and trafficking. CCLP partnered with the USC Information Sciences Institute, a leader in computer and information sciences and Internet research. The objective was to explore the hypothesis that innovative and advanced methods for online data collection and analytics can help monitor and combat human trafficking activity.

The research focused on the detection of possible cases of sex trafficking on online classified and social networking sites. While expanding the scope to include labor trafficking was considered, researchers assumed the project was laden with difficulties based on the literature review above and the available methods. Simply, advertising for labor trafficking was considered too covert an activity, wherein traffickers would advertise for legitimate-sounding jobs and subsequently engage in “bait and switch” tactics. Thus evaluating these deceptive advertisements for signals of labor trafficking in online classifieds was not considered a viable research question at this juncture.

The evidence gathered for this report suggests that a specific subsection of adult and escort ads on online classified sites such as Backpage have the potential to be covert advertisements for sex trafficking. It was hypothesized that the type of language displayed, while covert, might reveal signals of trafficking, particularly when the characteristics of the trafficking victim are used to attract clientele.

For example, language or images that include youthful characteristics might indicate a potential sex trafficking case involving a minor. Yet from the start, the research plan was faced with a needle-in-a-haystack problem: The challenge was to create techniques to detect the rare signals of sex trafficking while filtering out the vast amount of “noise” from services that do not fall within the definition of severe forms of trafficking under the TVPA.

It is important to note that researchers did not assume that there must be evidence of human trafficking on numerous online classified and social networking sites, whether mainstream sites such as Craigslist, Twitter, or Facebook, or the numerous explicit sites for the commercial sex industry. It is reasonable to assume, however, that based on the reports and cases cited above, all of these sites have the potential to be used to facilitate trafficking.

Based on existing research and the capabilities of available technologies and methods, the following research questions emerged: To what extent can content on publicly available social networking and online classified sites indicate sex trafficking of adults or children (under the age of 18)? To what extent can keywords be used to detect sex trafficking? Can a spatio-temporal analysis of an event serve as a significant indicator of patterns of sex trafficking activity and behaviors online? Can the location or identity of either traffickers or victims be discerned and mapped?

The Super Bowl as a Potential Event for Trafficking Online

The first study conducted for this report involved a spatio-temporal analysis of online classified ads surrounding an event. An event occurring in one location at a certain time is useful to measure any differences or changes in

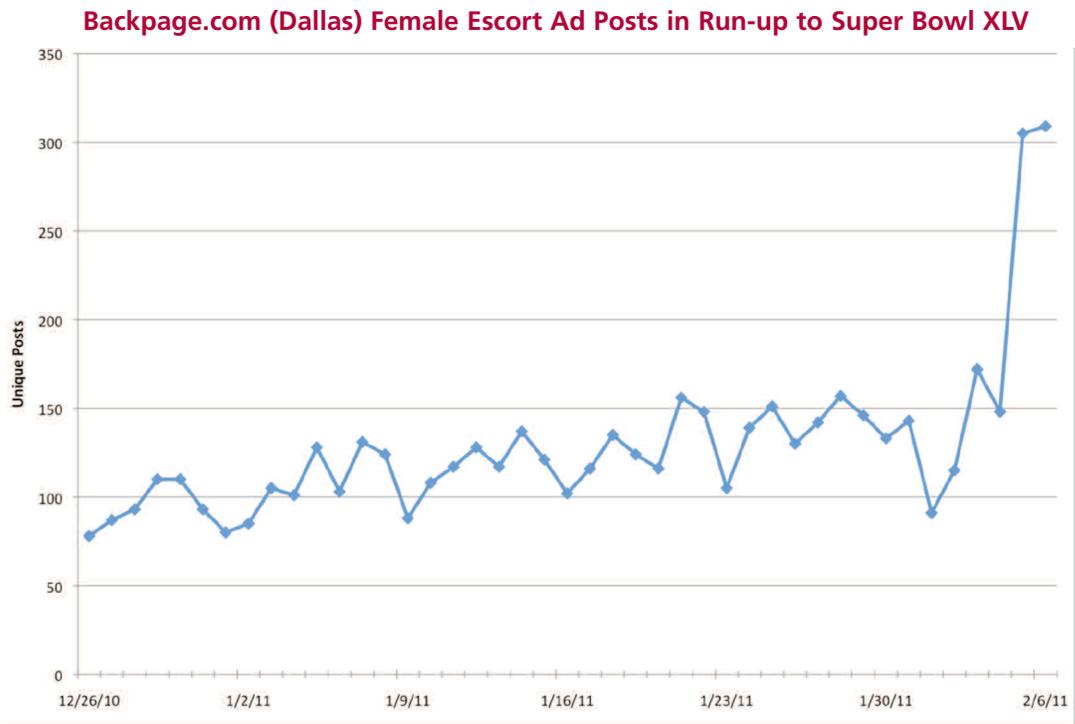
online behaviors before, during, or after the event. This analysis can be conducted by collecting data around a predetermined event with the hypothesis that researchers might observe an increase or decrease of existing behavior or new patterns based on a search category or topics.

The Super Bowl was chosen as the event for analysis, based on literature indicating a link between major sporting events and trafficking, which suggests that a spike in sex trafficking occurs in host cities during these large events.¹³³ Traffickers reportedly increase their profits by transporting child victims to cities for commercial sexual exploitation during major sporting events and conventions.

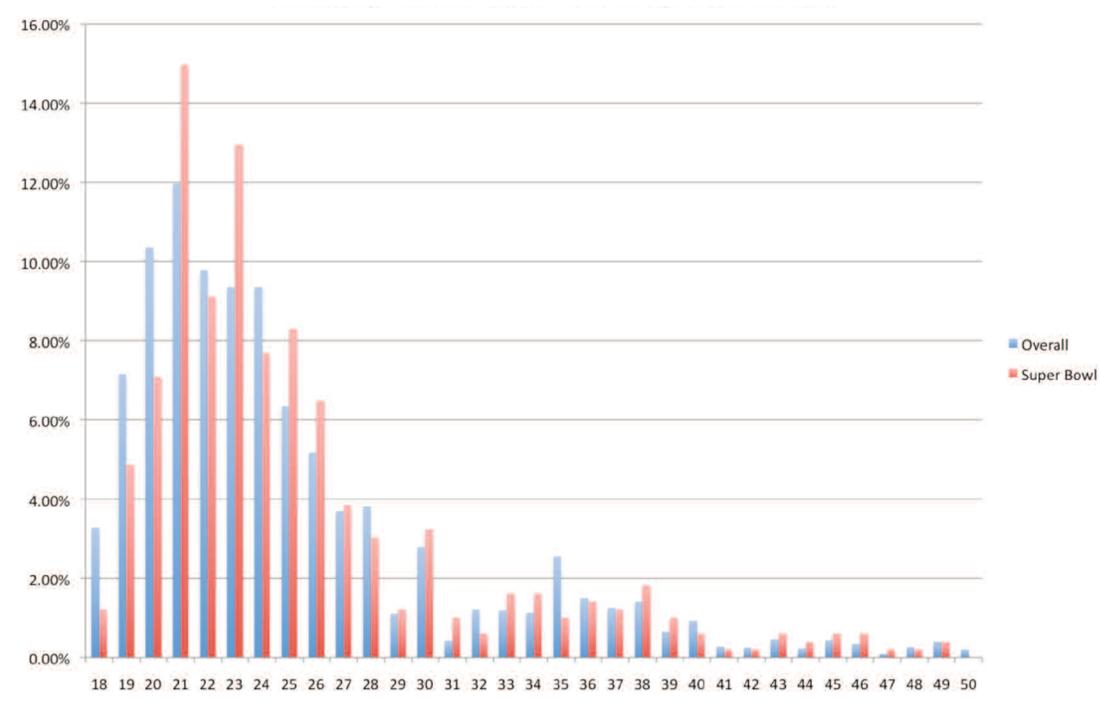
In anticipation of the 2012 Summer Olympic Games, the London Councils sought to better understand the impact of mega-sporting events on trafficking in persons. The results of the study were mixed. On the one hand, the Internet

is described as possibly playing a role during such events by recruiting girls for prostitution. At the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Canada, for example, recruiting methods “took place in the schoolyard, over Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking sites.”¹³⁴ On the other hand, the study did not find enough evidence to predict an increase in trafficking around the upcoming Olympic Games.

A number of reports have described a noticeable increase in trafficking during past Super Bowl games. For example, during the 2009 Super Bowl in Tampa, Florida, the Department of Children and Families took in 24 children trafficked to the city for sex.¹³⁵ Internet classified ads featuring child victims of prostitution rose sharply in February 2009 in advance of the Super Bowl.¹³⁶ According to Deena Graves, executive director of child advocacy group Traffick911, law enforcement officials and advocacy groups rescued



Backpage.com (Dallas) Female Escort Reported Age Distribution



the most salient words extracted from posts on Super Bowl Sunday. The bigger a word appears, the more salient the term is as measured using standard natural language processing techniques, e.g., term-frequency analysis. As the image shows, the most salient words are mostly related to the Super Bowl and various “specials” that were offered. Other keywords of interest that emerged include “visiting,” “iowa,” “vegas,” and “cali,” which suggest that escorts might have traveled to Dallas (or were transported) across state lines specifically for the Super Bowl.

Researchers also analyzed posts for any mention of the age of individuals depicted in the posts. The reported ages were extracted and plotted in the distribution graph above. In analyzing any difference in the age distribution during the Super Bowl weekend compared to the average distribution, it seems that the Super Bowl

attracted a slightly older pool of reported ages than usual. Yet these ages are self-reported, which makes it difficult to determine the accuracy of the extracted ages.

It became clear that, when further isolating posts of interest, because of the limited ways to verify the facts within each post, a positive detection of trafficking in persons could not be achieved solely through analyzing the collected texts or images. While isolating the subset of posts indicated possible reasons for further investigation, researchers could not discern signals of sex trafficking of minors or adults with any degree of confidence based solely on the methods used in this study.

post updates from its Twitter account. Most of the Twitter posts contained links to websites, which upon inspection contained detailed information on the physical characteristics and reported ages of the female escorts, including information on nationality and country of origin. Other terms suggesting age appear in the frequency analysis, such as “girl,” “young,” and “tiny.” The self-reported ages appearing on the websites were 18 and over.

The results of both the Super Bowl and Twitter studies suggest that online data collection, basic computational linguistics, and data visualization can be useful for narrowing the pool of cases, which may warrant further investigation into potential sex trafficking advertisements. More sophisticated methods and tools could be employed to further reduce the pool of potential cases. However, one cannot assume that online tools and methods alone could detect sex trafficking cases with certainty. Researchers hypothesized that if traffickers are using covert, deceptive, and nuanced language to advertise trafficking victims online, this behavior is to a degree that necessitates a human expert to be included as part of a feedback loop. A combination of computer-assisted analysis and data collection with a human expert making informed decisions regarding that data could increase the likelihood of detecting possible cases of human trafficking online.

Integrating Human Experts and Computer-Assisted Technologies

Researchers initiated a third study to detect evidence of trafficking online, incorporating the lessons learned above. The study remained guided by the assumption that a subset of posts from adult and escort classified ads might contain keywords signaling potential cases of trafficking. It was clear, however, that search methodologies

were useful only to a point and that a human expert was needed to make an informed decision regarding whether an online classified ad might be a case of trafficking. The following research question emerged: Could online trafficking be detected through a combination of advanced computer-assisted data gathering and analysis techniques and input from an expert human actor?

Researchers decided to generate a data corpus containing a large amount of collected data, which would outpace an individual investigator’s ability to analyze without machine assistance, due to the rate of comprehension and quantity of data. Only with the increased bandwidth of computer processing could a human sort through the collected data for possible cases of interest. Yet the limitations observed in the first two studies suggested the need to develop more advanced methodologies. While computer-assisted tools could create a pool of potential trafficking cases from a large data corpus, researchers hypothesized that including a human expert in the process could (1) increase the possibility of detecting trafficking online and (2) send the computer feedback regarding which posts have greater potential to be trafficking cases, thus allowing the computer to learn through basic artificial-intelligence techniques and algorithms.

A series of questions arose from planning, designing, and implementing this study: Is the purpose of the data collection clear? Who would have access to the data? How would technology ultimately serve the victims of trafficking? Could the technology do harm?

Identifying experts who are adept at handling sensitive information was a key consideration. Special agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation with expertise in crimes against children and human trafficking were asked to provide feedback on the data collected.

Researchers developed a computer prototype

to locate and extract or “scrape” the information appearing on the websites, then collect and store the aggregate data for analysis. Sites of interest were identified by the FBI and included for monitoring. A number of online classified and social networking sites were targeted, such as Backpage sites in dozens of U.S. cities and a number of explicit websites and forums known for trafficking activity. Information scraped from the sites includes all text, dates, and photographs.

The need for computer assistance can be demonstrated by observing the frequency of the advertisements from the Los Angeles Backpage Adult section in the graph below.

For a period of more than three months, the average number of posts was 735 per day. Taking one week as a sample, from April 24, 2011, to April 30, 2011, approximately 5,150 ads were posted and collected. Those posts contained 392,567 words in addition to tens of thousands of images. Reading at a pace of 200 words per minute,¹⁴³ it would take an individual approxi-

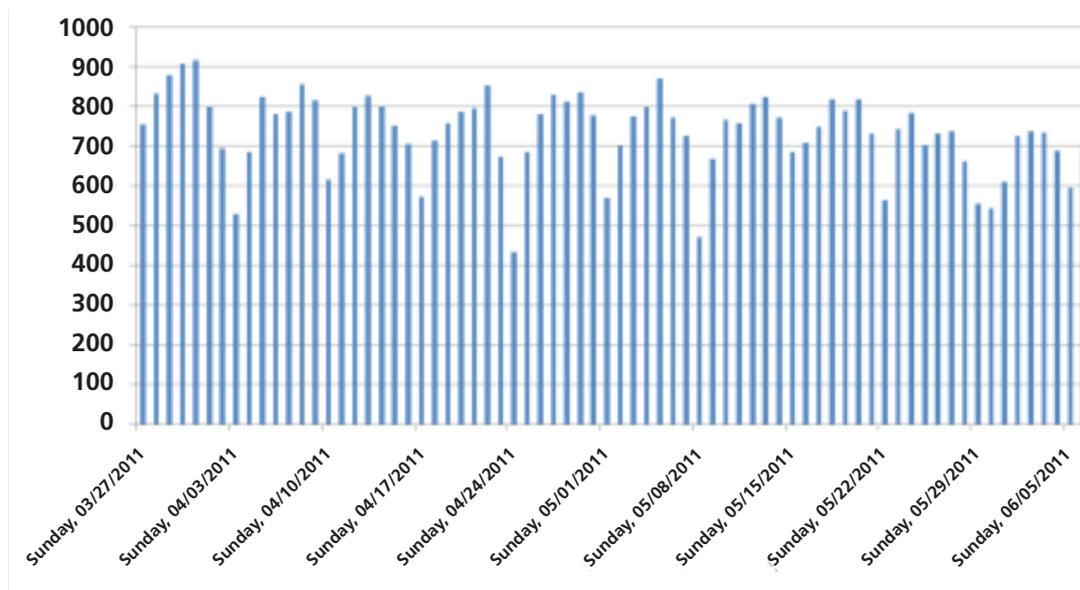
mately 32 hours of continuous reading to review all the language in the posts for the week for Los Angeles Backpage, let alone the dozens of other sites being crawled in this study.¹⁴⁴

During the period selected above, about 55,000 posts were collected on the Los Angeles Backpage site.¹⁴⁵ Term frequencies included possible age indicators such as “girl” (14,749 mentions) and “young” (145); ethnicities such as “asian” (9,167) and “latina” (5,931); nationalities such as “european” (176) and “thailand” (29); and transitory indicators such as “visiting” (2,366). Researchers then can calculate various permutations of these categories and isolate possible cases.

These basic data-mining techniques could allow investigators to respond to potential trafficking cases more quickly, particularly if traffickers advertise in an area for only a short time before moving victims to another location.

Automated data collection, therefore, is a key first step. For an individual sitting at a desk, manually clicking through online classified ads in

Frequency of Posts to the Adult Section of Backpage.com (Los Angeles)



search of ads that appear to feature underage sex trafficking victims and flagging those ads for analysis is a labor-intensive activity. As Ernie Allen, president and CEO of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, observed, “Web crawling tools may automate this review, by flagging keywords suggestive of child trafficking.”¹⁴⁶ As the size of the data set increases, it approaches limits that exceed the human capacity to comprehend, thus making automated data collection, filtering, flagging, aggregating, and storing via computer processing a necessity. Automating the search thus narrows the pool of online classified ads and conserves the investigator’s manpower for filtering through the posts more efficiently.

Natural language processing is another essential component of this prototype design and implementation. Under the leadership of Dr. Eduard Hovy at the ISI Natural Language Group,¹⁴⁷ a number of computational linguistic and machine-learning methods are being explored using the corpus of extracted data. The expert feedback from federal law enforcement agents is a key element, providing evaluative information that can be used to develop algorithms designed to detect possible human trafficking cases.

Facial recognition is being developed for tracking subjects across multiple sites in multiple cities or matching photos of specified criteria among the thousands of photos collected by the prototype. Developing technologies that might determine the ages of subjects based on the photograph alone remains a major technological challenge. Moreover, the issue of false positives and the security of photos of potential trafficking victims are sensitive issues associated with this technology, and they require careful consideration.

Mapping technologies and methods are being employed, as location-based information is extracted from the data collected for this study in an attempt to map the location of individuals

Basic data-mining techniques could allow investigators to respond to potential trafficking cases more quickly, particularly if traffickers advertise in an area for only a short time before moving victims to another location.

mentioned in the posts. While the exact location is often cloaked or not given, researchers are utilizing methods for geo-location. Mapping software could help law enforcement, anti-trafficking organizations, and service providers monitor and track victims and survivors over geographic space. Yet data access and security are primary concerns, as information leading to the location of potential victims could expose those victims to greater harm.

This project is ongoing and the tools and methods are being developed, evaluated, and refined as of the publication of this report.

One issue both researchers and law enforcement face is the challenge of securing techniques and methods in order to remain a step ahead of the covert and malicious activities of traffickers operating in the online space. As the project moves forward, the ultimate goal of this technological intervention, and proof of concept, is to provide real-time data for those who are qualified to act on that information in order to assist a potential trafficking victim or to prosecute a potential trafficker. Sharing methods and tools for analysis of online advertisements with other researchers working in this area is a necessary and proactive next step.¹⁴⁸

ADDITIONAL TECHNOLOGICAL APPLICATIONS

Technologies used for anti-trafficking efforts need not be invented from scratch. In fact, a number of existing technologies can be repurposed for use by the anti-trafficking community. Examples of possible technological solutions include the following:

Information-Sharing Platforms for Anti-Trafficking Organizations

The need for information sharing is a common refrain among actors engaged in anti-trafficking efforts. In August 2010 and March 2011, the Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership & Policy sent research teams to the Mekong Subregion (Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam) to conduct a communication-needs assessment of organizations combating trafficking in persons. CCLP researchers met with leaders of more than 20 governmental, international, and nongovernmental organizations who indicated that the efforts of anti-trafficking actors often are hampered by the lack of effective inter-organization communication. These organizations have specialized expertise in trafficking issues and were proficient in their primary mission to assist victims. Yet the reasons behind the lack of information sharing are complex and include competing visions, values, missions, and funding sources, to name a few. Other challenges to an organization's ability to share information include privacy concerns, victims' rights, public safety, national laws, limited resources, and communication technology gaps.

A variety of Internet-based information-sharing platforms, from private social networking services to database-sharing software, could be developed to improve communications between

actors and stakeholders. Other technologies can be developed to give victims and concerned members of the public more ways to communicate with service providers. One possible solution could involve developing a platform that captures calls from the trafficking reporting hotlines of various organizations and distributes those phone calls via text or email among those organizations. Data security and maintaining trust among organizations are among the challenges for innovators designing technological interventions to facilitate information sharing in this space.

The need to identify and improve information-sharing processes and technologies was highlighted by the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in a recent report for the U.S. Department of Energy. The report found that information-sharing technologies were needed among federal agencies, regional anti-trafficking taskforces, and local police.¹⁴⁹

Photo Recognition

While facial-recognition technology aims to match an individual's countenance across different photos, photo-recognition technology addresses a slightly different issue—identifying copies of a particular photo among the sea of images on the Internet. In December 2009, Microsoft donated technology to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) to combat the spread of child pornography, in a move that illustrates recent advancements in the area of photo recognition, as well as the important role technology can play in supporting organizations such as NCMEC.

Microsoft's PhotoDNA technology, developed in partnership with Dr. Hany Farid, a digital-imaging expert at Dartmouth College, makes it possible to locate copies of pornographic images of minors distributed online—even when copies

had been digitally altered. Previously, the alteration of a picture made it difficult to match a photo to its original image, as the signature or “digital fingerprint” of the image was changed.

“The problem was that the signature was extremely fragile—the tiniest change to the image and the signature would be completely different,” said Farid. “The PhotoDNA technology extends the signature to make it robust and reliable, so that even if you change the image a little bit, we can still find it.”¹⁵⁰

As a result, PhotoDNA creates a unique signature that remains consistent across copies of a photo—even when it has been digitally altered. Once known images are identified, NCMEC can share the signatures with online service providers, which can locate and remove copies of the photos.

“[PhotoDNA] is fast, it’s accurate, [and there are] no false alarms yet,” said Farid, noting that false alarms are a serious problem with facial-recognition technology.¹⁵¹

Microsoft’s PhotoDNA also addressed another challenge facing NCMEC—locating the worst forms of child pornography among the innumerable images online. “If I laid down in front of you a couple of billion images and asked you to hand me the ones that are inappropriate, you can imagine the scope of that problem,” said Farid. PhotoDNA, however, “can pluck out those inappropriate images from a sea of billions in a very fast, very reliable way.”¹⁵²

Microsoft has adopted PhotoDNA for use in Hotmail, SkyDrive, and Bing. In May 2011, Facebook announced the adoption of PhotoDNA on its social networking site, applying the technology to all images uploaded to the site to help locate and remove images of child pornography. “Our hope and belief is that Facebook will be just the first of many companies to use the technology,” said Ernie Allen, president and CEO of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.¹⁵³

Technology such as Microsoft’s PhotoDNA could conceivably be repurposed to assist with anti-trafficking efforts. “We think that this technology can also help disrupt the global sex trade,” observed Farid.¹⁵⁴

Crowdsourcing and Flagging

Crowdsourcing technologies could enable the public to play an important role in anti-trafficking efforts. These technologies enable the public or a large defined or undefined group (the “crowd”) to send content that can be aggregated to produce possibly useful information.

A project called Survivors Connect created a program using the Ushahidi and Frontline SMS tools to map and connect international anti-trafficking organizations as well as survivors of trafficking.¹⁵⁵ According to Aashika Damodar of Survivors Connect, crowdsourcing must be deployed with an eye to flexibility, adapting procedures depending on the ultimate viewers of the aggregated data.¹⁵⁶

For example, when collecting sensitive information about the location of shelters and support centers in unstable environments, Survivors Connect uses individualized passwords, allowing only verified humanitarian organizations to access the final maps. Through the organization’s Ayiti SMS SOS project in Haiti, text messages reporting instances of abuse or requests for services or advice are filtered through a referral-and-response team. The team, working in coordination with an array of NGOs and service providers, then responds to the messages or refers the information to other agencies. The data also is collected, stripped of sensitive information that may endanger the information provider, and plotted on a map showing instances of violence in a particular area.

While such examples of crowdsourcing have

proven useful in the context of human rights issues, the method raises issues related to data collection that must be considered—namely, how to avoid overloading anti-trafficking organizations with information, how to organize information, and how to assess the veracity of reports. One possible method of making sense of the stream of information from a number of different sources may lie in tagging functionality. Tagging can allow users to classify the content of information found in classified advertisements, posts, images, or websites. A concentration of user-generated tags on a trafficking-related category might increase the likelihood that reports relating to that area are accurate, prompting investigation into the circumstances.¹⁵⁷

Social media sites frequently rely on users themselves to monitor the site through “flagging.” A review of the practices of 12 social networking sites¹⁵⁸ revealed that all of the sites have some sort of reporting mechanism for users to flag inappropriate content. Craigslist requires more than one flag to affect a posting.¹⁵⁹ More than 15% of all Craigslist postings are removed through community flagging, and approximately 98% of the posts removed are in violation of the site’s terms of use.¹⁶⁰

Flagging may have particular uses to address labor trafficking online. Systems could be designed for users to flag or rate advertisements on job-placement websites that have a history of labor or trafficking abuses. Again, verifying user-generated information or collected opinions is an issue to consider.

Mobile Phone Applications

Mobile and wireless technologies have been adopted more quickly than any communication technology in history.¹⁶¹ Several anti-trafficking initiatives are harnessing mobile

phone penetration rates to educate consumers about human trafficking via mobile phone applications. In an example of technology used to create awareness of the economics of trafficking, Free2Work, a project that provides consumers with information about forced labor,¹⁶² distributes a mobile-phone application that allows consumers to look up the ratings of companies and support companies demonstrating zero tolerance for forced labor.¹⁶³ “The Free2Work application will provide conscious consumers with valuable information and company evaluations at the moment they need it most—when they shop,” according to Not For Sale Campaign president David Batstone.¹⁶⁴

In June 2011, the U.S. Agency for International Development partnered with the Demi and Ashton Foundation and NetHope Inc. to announce the Stop Human Trafficking App Challenge, a contest to design the most innovative mobile phone technology application to combat human trafficking in Russia.

“Traffickers in the region are increasingly using mobile technology to lure vulnerable people into modern-day slavery. The Stop Human Trafficking App Challenge makes mobile technology part of the solution,” according to Alison Padget, program manager for the NetHope anti-trafficking project.¹⁶⁵

The applications will be judged according to various criteria, including the potential for widespread application; usefulness in preventing human trafficking, increasing awareness, or providing services to victims; and functionality. Yet issues related to data security, building trusted systems, and the potential for these technologies to harm victims abound and should be a consideration in the development of mobile phone applications.

FUTURE ACTION FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING ONLINE

Human trafficking via online technologies can be addressed by a variety of actors, including those in government, the private sector, NGOs, service providers, and academia. This section explores possibilities for future action with a focus on cross-sector partnerships.¹⁶⁶

Government

Ambassador Luis CdeBaca recently testified, “As important as innovations and partnerships with civil societies are, it remains a core governmental responsibility to fight against modern slavery.”¹⁶⁷

The William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 called for a study specifically focused on the relationship between the Internet and sex trafficking. Section 237(c), on “Reports and Studies,” states: “Subject to availability of appropriations, the head of the National Institute of Justice shall conduct ... a comprehensive study to examine the use of Internet-based businesses and services by criminal actors in the sex industry, and to disseminate best practices for investigation and prosecution of trafficking and prostitution offenses involving the Internet.”¹⁶⁸ However, according to the National Institute of Justice, funds were not appropriated for the study.¹⁶⁹ Research studies can inform future policy and action and lead to innovative technologies, which law enforcement and government officials can use in anti-trafficking efforts.

- Government officials can play an essential role in the response to trafficking online by allocating resources for further research related to sex and labor trafficking in domestic and international contexts.

Enforcement efforts in this space are especially

dependent on specialization and expertise that can keep pace with the rapidly changing technologies that can be used to facilitate or combat trafficking. To promote the development of this expertise, additional actions for government officials include:

- Establishing national-level taskforces on trafficking online and supporting existing regional taskforces with information and capabilities to address trafficking online.
- Enabling federal and local agencies to develop the technological capabilities to monitor trafficking online and to share information among organizations.

Informing national taskforces and government officials about issues related to technology and trafficking and providing training and skills on how best to use these technologies are inter-related endeavors. Federal and local officials could also work toward coordinating databases and developing platforms for information sharing on trafficking cases. Private-sector expertise could assist these government efforts. As Yury Fedotov, executive director of UNODC, notes, “When it comes to fighting crime, there has to be a partnership between the public and the private sectors. Crime prevention and victim protection cannot be achieved by governments or criminal justice systems alone; we need Internet service providers, civil society, the media, educational institutions and the public on board.”¹⁷⁰

Private Sector

Under the guiding principles of corporate social responsibility, ISPs and Internet companies have an opportunity to be a part of a collective response to the problem of trafficking in persons. Further, the recent growth of socially conscious consumer trends gives online classifieds and social networking sites an incentive to build client trust in the services they provide.¹⁷¹ As

CSR initiatives ultimately depend upon consumers demanding change from companies, individuals are positioned to directly influence private-sector action by calling for online service providers to respond to the issue of human trafficking on their networks.

The notion of technology companies taking steps to respond to social problems was demonstrated during the Egyptian protests of 2011. When ISPs in Egypt blocked public Internet access, reportedly in response to government requests, Twitter and Google partnered to develop a workaround that allowed users to post messages to Twitter via voice messages sent from their mobile phones.¹⁷² Yet detection of individuals engaged in human trafficking online is an extremely difficult task for technology firms, requiring the identification of specific behavioral patterns among millions of user transactions. Moreover, traffickers engage in behaviors that purposefully seek to evade detection, thus more advanced tools are required.

ISPs and Internet companies lag behind other key industries in collective efforts to combat human trafficking. The travel and tourism sectors have historically been viewed as critical elements of a trafficker's operation. Over the years, public pressure has resulted in the development of a range of anti-trafficking campaigns by hotels, restaurants, and common carriers. Among the most notable is the creation of the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children From Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism (the Code).¹⁷³ The document, developed by members of industry in collaboration with ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes), boasts signatories such as the Carlson Companies, Delta Airlines, the American Society of Travel Agents, Amazon Tours, and many more international service providers. The Code requires signatories to establish ethical policies regarding commercial sexual exploitation of children, train personnel, and provide annual reports.

Coalitions of international political and business leaders have assembled on occasion to highlight the importance of addressing human rights challenges through responsible business practices. In 2006, CEOs from private-sector companies, along with representatives from governments and NGOs, came together to sign the Athens Ethical Principles to End Human Trafficking and subsequent Luxor Implementation Guidelines to the Athens Ethical Principles.¹⁷⁴ Together these documents demand policies, enforcement, and reporting on signatories' anti-trafficking efforts. In March 2011, the United Nations released a set of Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights¹⁷⁵ to broadly highlight the important role of the private sector in preserving fundamental human rights. These principles include broad categories on "adverse human rights impacts," which relate to human trafficking.¹⁷⁶ Despite the existence of these documents, there is little oversight for private-sector efforts to preserve and protect human rights. As noted by Noeleen Hezzer, executive secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "The private sector needs to play a role because traditional partners such [as] U.N. agencies and law enforcement organizations are no longer able to address the magnitude of [human trafficking]."¹⁷⁷

Private-sector media companies have used online communications as part of their awareness campaigns. In 2004, MTV, with funding from the United States Agency for International Development, launched EXIT: End Exploitation and Trafficking, which uses celebrity PSAs, music videos, and live concerts to educate youth on the realities of trafficking.¹⁷⁸ The campaign website is available in 31 languages and encourages users to upload their own videos with anti-trafficking messages and to get involved with NGOs in their communities. CNN has brought international

attention to trafficking and slavery issues through its “Freedom Project.”¹⁷⁹ Microsoft is another company taking the anti-trafficking message online. The corporation offers e-learning courses, provided by UN.GIFT and the End Human Trafficking Now campaign, on its Middle East website, which help businesses evaluate their potential risks for human trafficking and point out actions that can be taken to address them.¹⁸⁰

- Technology companies can coordinate to create an industry code of conduct to combat trafficking online.

- Media and technology companies can use their distribution channels and services to increase awareness of trafficking online.¹⁸¹

Companies interested in implementing a CSR policy of preventing human trafficking can attempt to limit illegal activity through their terms of use (or terms of service). The terms of use for each website and service are an important resource for learning the policies and priorities of the various online platforms in popular use.

A review of 12 selected websites,¹⁸² including adult-specific sites, assessed whether these sites addressed human trafficking in their terms of use. The review noted the available reporting mechanisms, as well as any resources offered to ensure the Internet safety of users. Backpage specifically mentions human trafficking in its terms of use, while Facebook prohibits registered sex offenders from using its site. While some sites specifically describe child pornography and prostitution as prohibited content, other adult-specific sites only mention the restriction of minors to the site. Backpage has the most direct language, prohibiting “posting any solicitation directly or in ‘coded’ fashion for any illegal service exchanging sexual favors for money or other valuable consideration.”¹⁸³

Backpage also has a disclaimer page that opens when a user enters any category in the Adult

section, requesting that the user report suspected cases of child exploitation or human trafficking and providing a link to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. But all these provisions are inadequate if users are not reporting, or if responses from the ISPs are not timely and effective.

- Technology companies can include language in their terms of service prohibiting any activity related to trafficking in persons.

- Companies can make the terms of service prominently visible on their sites and empower conscientious consumers to police the sites they visit daily.

Private-sector cooperation with law enforcement is one way to bring successful prosecutions of trafficking. As Secretary of State Clinton recently noted, “Criminal justice and law enforcement organizations should not only enforce existing anti-trafficking laws but refine their methods to fight modern slavery in order to keep up with an evolving understanding of the crime.”¹⁸⁴ In order to keep pace with the rapidly changing methods of online communications, law enforcement needs the support of the private sector.

Some companies have a notable record of cooperating with law enforcement and supporting anti-trafficking work. Myspace is recognized as being particularly helpful in efforts to protect vulnerable users by working with the appropriate agencies internationally. Myspace representatives “work with local police and investigators regarding user activity and interface ... with law enforcement agencies at local, state, and federal levels. Myspace personnel have met with law enforcement officials from around the world to find out how Myspace can enhance its cooperation with law enforcement and increase user security.”¹⁸⁵ Partnerships between the private sector and law enforcement must also be mindful of citizens’ civil rights.

- Companies can provide efficient mechanisms for public authorities to access actionable

information related to trafficking in persons.

The massive amounts of information found online are far too large for law enforcement to analyze in any meaningful way with its current tools. While “the private sector routinely analyses this data in real time to drive critical business decisions, the public sector has barely begun to come to terms with this new world of big data.”¹⁸⁶ The United Nations’ Global Pulse initiative, which collects data for indicators of potential international conflict, has recognized that “the analytical tools and approaches used in the private sector need to be repurposed to detect the ‘digital smoke signals’ in the data.”¹⁸⁷ Responses to criminal activity using online technologies depend upon new and constantly updated data-gathering tools, along with careful attention to individual rights, particularly the rights of privacy and freedom of expression.¹⁸⁸ To further this goal, the progress and innovation of the private sector can support efforts in the public sector. For example, the DNA Foundation convened a task force of key technology companies in March 2010 that meets quarterly to develop and implement innovative solutions to child sexual exploitation.¹⁸⁹

- Technology companies and developers can create more innovative solutions for detecting and disrupting human trafficking on their networks and services and assume a more proactive role in advancing research in this area.

Nongovernmental Organizations

NGOs span a broad range of research, advocacy, and service providers that already play active roles in the anti-trafficking space. Many of these organizations work directly with trafficking victims and thus can play a crucial role in understanding how technology can be applied to anti-trafficking efforts. Because victims and survivors should be considered the ultimate

beneficiaries of technological interventions in human trafficking, expert knowledge of their needs should be part of any innovation, development, and implementation process. Feedback from NGOs and service providers should be an important resource for technology companies, government, and law enforcement in developing anti-trafficking tools. Questions that NGOs and service providers can help answer include:

- How can technology be used to connect with and empower victims and vulnerable populations, while also addressing their economic, social, psychological, and physical needs?
- How can technologies be used to improve the collection of data on trafficking and the sharing of information resources?

In addition to using technology to improve services and support, NGOs could seek innovative tools for information sharing and cooperation between organizations. Writing about a recent project in Cambodia, the Asia Foundation noted: “There is currently very little sharing of information due to the wide distribution of NGOs addressing the problem, the difficulty of communications in remote areas, low levels of information technology capacity in anti-trafficking groups, and the hesitancy to share sensitive information over insecure channels.”¹⁹⁰ NGOs should coordinate among themselves and pursue licensing agreements that will allow them to use technological solutions for information sharing in order to coordinate and further their anti-trafficking activities.

As noted above, the CCLP project in the Mekong Subregion is pursuing this possibility, identifying technologies that will help link victims directly to service providers and also help NGOs coordinate better among themselves and with other groups and agencies. Coordinating the various trafficking telephone hotlines is another example of developing partnerships around technology.

- NGOs and service providers should consider

searching for common ground in order to utilize technological tools that support improved communication and information sharing among individuals and groups.

Nongovernmental organizations often struggle to acquire and maintain information and communication technologies due to high prices for the products themselves and the costs of training personnel. Partnerships with technology companies that result in licensing products for low or no fees, including technological support, would be a helpful step.

Academic and Research Community

Members of the academic community are in a unique position to bring together the efforts of various sectors and analyze the effectiveness of technology as applied to various organizations. Academics bring the necessary methodological and technical skills to address and evaluate many of the research questions among government, law enforcement, the private sector, and NGOs. Some disciplines have a history of studying human trafficking and slavery issues, such as law, social work, psychology, and sociology. Other fields, such as computer science, information science, engineering, and communication research, bring a unique added value to questions concerning human trafficking and Internet technologies.

The research conducted above has already raised several new issues and topics for future studies. Research questions that have emerged or remain unanswered include:

- Can online technologies be used to monitor and disrupt the demand side of sex trafficking?
- Can online language-translation technologies be used to assist international human trafficking victims?
- Can technologies designed to detect sex trafficking be used to detect labor trafficking?

- How might offline trafficking behaviors manifest themselves in online messages?

- Do individual and small-time criminals use online technology differently than organized crime syndicates?

- Do potential traffickers and clients using mainstream social media sites differ from those using more underground sites, forums, and chatrooms?

- What is the role of online technology in victim rehabilitation, recovery, and/or recidivism?

- Can online technologies be used for rehabilitation efforts?

- Can online technologies be exploited by traffickers to reconnect with recovering victims, leading to recidivism?

- How can social networking sites be used to identify and assist potential victims or potential runaways (e.g., children in abusive homes)?

- How will Internet-enabled mobile devices affect trafficking in persons?

- How can technologies that are designed to monitor and disrupt trafficking incorporate protections for privacy and freedom of expression?

Funding for research can be obtained from a variety of university, government, foundation, NGO, and private-sector sources. The process of producing research and holding conferences that involve input from all of these actors is in itself a way to engender and establish cross-sector collaboration.

The innovations identified in this report have the potential to be used by various actors in anti-trafficking efforts. Technological interventions in anti-trafficking may fall into one or more of the following categories: (1) technology that disrupts behaviors that underpin the trafficking trade, (2) technology that helps anti-trafficking groups to cooperate, and (3) technology used to create public awareness and/or provide support for victims and survivors of trafficking. To that end, the following principles are intended for those seeking to employ technology as a means to combat human trafficking:

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TECHNOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS IN HUMAN TRAFFICKING

1) The ultimate beneficiaries of any technological intervention should be the victims and survivors of human trafficking.

Throughout the technological design and implementation process, decisions should be guided by a single question: How will the technology maximize the benefit and minimize the harm to victims and survivors of trafficking?

Developers and users in this space should examine the inherent risks that arise when technology is applied to complex social problems. While benefits may appear clear at first, experts should be consulted to evaluate whether tools have the potential to cause inadvertent harm. For example, protections should be built into any technological intervention to ensure that it is not used to prosecute minor trafficking victims. An analysis of potential risks and benefits to victims and survivors of trafficking should be the primary task before planning and deploying technological interventions.

2) Successful implementation of anti-trafficking technologies requires cooperation among actors across government, nongovernmental, and private sectors, sharing information and communicating in a coordinated manner.

Technological interventions in anti-trafficking efforts necessitate collaboration across sectors. Addressing challenges such as competing missions, values, and limited resources among actors would be a major step toward implementing technological solutions. Trafficking online in particular requires coordination of efforts to avoid inefficiencies, for example, when a proposed technology is already in use by parallel organizations or when technologies can readily be adapted to fit anti-trafficking needs. The private sector, academics, and the technology community can serve as valuable resources for creative innovations that can be tailored to anti-trafficking efforts, including technologies to facilitate information sharing.

3) Private-sector technology firms should recognize that their services and networks are being exploited by traffickers and take steps to innovate and develop anti-trafficking initiatives through their technologies and policies.

Social networking sites, online classified sites, and technology firms provide Internet services that criminals are using to facilitate domestic and international trafficking in persons. Yet, as innovation leaders, the private sector is uniquely positioned to exercise considerable influence in anti-trafficking efforts. While Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act provides a “safe harbor” that immunizes providers of interactive computer services when content is created by third-party users, these companies should acknowledge their social responsibility and assume an active role in combating trafficking on their sites. Developing strategies to incentivize the private sector to act in the public interest is a unique challenge in this area.

4) Continuous involvement is necessary to ensure that tools are user-centric and refined over time to most effectively respond to shifts in technology and trafficking.

User-centered design principles should aim to improve functionality and usability by focusing on the particular needs of users of anti-trafficking technologies. Law enforcement, NGOs, service providers, and the public each have particular needs based on technological literacy, class, and language, among other factors.

Furthermore, technological interventions must be supported by individuals committed to sustaining the technology over time. Data mining and analysis might help collect evidence of potential trafficking behavior, but there must be a “human in the loop,” providing expert feedback, evaluating data, and making informed decisions. If users become dependent on a technology and that technology is not maintained or is discontinued after initial enthusiasm wears off, the consequences will be harmful for future anti-trafficking efforts. Similarly, if a tool proves useful in anti-trafficking efforts, its long-term effectiveness is not guaranteed since traffickers might adapt their behavior to avoid detection. Only with vigilant observation, support, and feedback can anti-trafficking technologies retain their usefulness.

5) Technological interventions should account for the range of human rights potentially impacted by the use of advanced technologies.

Technologies used in anti-trafficking efforts should be carefully tailored to avoid recklessly encroaching upon fundamental rights such as privacy, security, and freedom of expression. Developers and users of the technology must reflect on the full range of rights implicated by any information-collecting activity, taking particular care to reduce the number of false positives associated with tracking and monitoring. Safeguards for human rights could be included in the terms of service and integrated into the technologies themselves.

It can be difficult to reconcile anti-trafficking efforts with individuals’ rights, particularly when monitoring online trafficking behavior is needed to provide immediate help to victims. Yet without careful attention to human rights, there is a risk that new anti-trafficking technologies could endanger them. It is therefore important to consider human rights at every stage of the design process, from inception to implementation and training.

This report demonstrates that online classifieds and social networking sites play a role in facilitating human trafficking. As online technologies become integral to many facets of everyday life, and insofar as human trafficking remains a dark aspect of our modern reality, the intersection between trafficking and online technologies demands a coordinated response.

While the vast majority of Internet users do not engage in trafficking online, further research into trafficking activity on mainstream sites as well as numerous explicit sites is necessary and

may serve as the proverbial canary in the coal mine. As more evidence is found, it would give various actors and stakeholders an opportunity to address the potential problem immediately, before the consequences become more widespread. Innovations and technologies applied to the online space have the potential to monitor and combat human trafficking in unprecedented ways. Carefully developing technological interventions that provide actionable, data-driven information in real time to those who are best positioned to help victims and survivors is a step forward.

NOTES

¹ *Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Hearings on H.R. 5575, Before the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security*, 111th Cong. (2010).

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⁵ For a Craigslist/Backpage example, see U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, “Maryland man pleads guilty in sex trafficking conspiracy involving 3 minor girls,” news release, July 16, 2009, <http://www.ice.gov/news/releases/0907/090716baltimore.htm>. For a Myspace example, see Federal Bureau of Investigation, Sacramento, “Sacramento Man Sentenced to 12 Years and Seven Months for Sex Trafficking of a Minor,” Department of Justice press release, November 8, 2010, <http://sacramento.fbi.gov/dojpressrel/pressrel10/sc110810.htm>.

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⁹ According to the 2011 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, major forms of trafficking include forced labor, sex trafficking, bonded labor, debt bondage, involuntary domestic servitude, forced child labor, child soldiers, and child sex trafficking. U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 2011, 7–10. For an in-depth discussion of the debate surrounding the definition of “trafficking,” see Siddharth Kara, *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 4.

¹⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Innocence Lost/Operation Cross-Country Press Conference,” Washington, D.C., June 25, 2008, <http://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches/combating-the-sex-trafficking-of-children> (speech by Robert S. Mueller, director, FBI).

¹¹ “Starting out young in the world’s oldest profession: children prostitutes in L.A.,” Patt Morrison, Southern California Public Radio, October 21, 2010, <http://www.scpr.org/programs/patt-morrison/2010/10/21/starting-out-young-in-the-worlds-oldest-profession/>.

¹² *Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Hearings on H.R. 5575, Before the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security*, 111th Cong. (2010).

¹³ For a discussion on the complex social causes of human trafficking, see Siddharth Kara, *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression Into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010); and Joel Quirk, *The Anti-Slavery Project: From the Slave Trade to Human Trafficking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

¹⁴ For more information, see danah m. boyd, *The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming 2012).

¹⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 2011, 35.

¹⁶ Efforts to define trafficking and slavery certainly predate the legal definitions utilized in this report. For a discussion of the historical progression of slavery and trafficking opposition, see Joel Quirk, *The Anti-Slavery Project: From the Slave Trade to Human Trafficking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) and the work at the Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery and Emancipation, University of Hull, U.K., <http://www2.hull.ac.uk/fass/wise.aspx>.

¹⁷ Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, 22 U.S.C. §7102 (October 28, 2000), as amended.

¹⁸ Siddharth Kara addresses the definitional tension surrounding judicial interpretations of the term “coercion,” noting, “Some jurists argue for more direct physical coercion, while others recognize that coercion can take subtler forms, such as economic desperation, psychological coercion, or even socio-cultural factors.” Siddharth Kara, “Designing More Effective Laws Against Human Trafficking,” *Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights* 9, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 137.

¹⁹ The issue of sex trafficking and its applicable definitions is a particular source of contention among groups. On one side of the debate are those who find all prostitution to have some degree of force or coercion, Melissa Farley, “Prostitution Research & Education,” last accessed July 13, 2011, <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/>. On the other side are those who posit that regulating prostitution to establish better labor conditions presents a greater social benefit, Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Illicit Flirtations: Labor, Migration, and Sex Trafficking in Tokyo* (Palo Alto:

Stanford University Press, forthcoming 2011).

²⁰ United Nations, *United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto*, “Annex II: Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime,” Article 3a (2004).

²¹ Although it is beyond the scope of this study to fully address the complex discourse on trafficking, it is worth noting the many tensions that arise. Some dichotomies are definitional, such as domestic or international; citizen or foreigner; documented or undocumented worker; victim or survivor. Other tensions involve complexities such as individual trafficker or organized crime; sold by family or stolen from family; runaway child or abducted child; domestic (household) labor or corporate employer; profit motive or deviant behavior; physical captivity or psychological captivity; rehabilitation or recidivism.

²² Frank Laczko and Elzbieta M. Gozdzia, eds., “Data and research on human trafficking: a global survey,” *International Organization for Migration* 43, no. 1/2 (2005).

²³ Sonia Stefanizzi, “Measuring the Non-Measurable: Towards the Development of Indicators for Measuring Human Trafficking,” in *Measuring Human Trafficking: Complexities and Pitfalls*, Ernesto U. Savona and Sonia Stefanizzi, eds. (New York: Springer, 2003), 50.

²⁴ Frank Laczko and Elzbieta M. Gozdzia, eds., “Data and research on human trafficking: a global survey,” *International Organization for Migration* 43, no. 1/2 (2005): 11-12. Additionally, in 2006, the U.S. Government Accountability Office questioned the methodology used to estimate victims at the global level by the U.S. government, noting that research may not be replicable because of the lack of documentation and because the data that exists for countries is

“limited in its availability, reliability and comparability.” U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Human Trafficking—Better Data, Strategy, and Reporting Needed to Enhance U.S. Anti-trafficking Efforts Abroad*, GAO-06-825, July 2006, 2.

²⁵ Frank Laczko, “Enhancing Data Collection and Research on Trafficking in Persons,” in *Measuring Human Trafficking: Complexities and Pitfalls*, Ernesto U. Savona and Sonia Stefanizzi, eds. (New York: Springer, 2003), 41.

²⁶ Elzbieta M. Gozdziaik and Micah N. Bump, *Data and Research on Human Trafficking: Bibliography of Research-Based Literature*, Georgetown University Institute for the Study of International Migration, October 2008, 45.

²⁷ Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks on the Release of the 2011 *Trafficking in Persons Report*,” June 27, 2011, U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/06/167156.htm>. Similarly, Kevin Bales, Zoe Trodd, and Alex Kent Williamson offer 27 million as a global figure in *Modern Slavery: The Secret World of 27 Million People* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2009).

²⁸ International Labour Organization (ILO), *ILO Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings*, 2008, 3.

²⁹ U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents, 2008-2010*, by Duren Banks and Tracey Kyckelhahn, NCJ 233732, April 2011, 1.

³⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 2011, 372.

³¹ International Labour Organization, *ILO Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings*, 2008, 3.

³² “Because it is more frequently reported, sexual exploitation has become the most documented type of trafficking, in aggregate statistics. In comparison, other forms of exploitation are under-reported: forced or bonded labour;

domestic servitude and forced marriage; organ removal; and the exploitation of children in begging, the sex trade, and warfare.” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT), *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*, February 2009, 6.

³³ U.S. Department of Justice, *Bureau of Justice Statistics, Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents, 2008-2010*, by Duren Banks and Tracey Kyckelhahn, NCJ 233732, April 2011, 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Sheldon Zhang, “Beyond the ‘Natasha’ story—a review and critique of current research on sex trafficking,” *Global Crime* 10, no. 3 (August 2009): 178.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

³⁷ Thomas M. Steinfatt and Simon Baker, *Measuring the Extent of Sex Trafficking in Cambodia – 2008*, United Nations Interagency Project on Human Trafficking, January 2011.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁹ Kauko Aromaa, “Trafficking in Human Beings: Uniform Definitions for Better Measuring and for Effective Counter-Measures,” in *Measuring Human Trafficking: Complexities and Pitfalls*, Ernesto U. Savona and Sonia Stefanizzi, eds. (New York: Springer, 2003), 13.

⁴⁰ “ITU StatShot, Issue 5,” ITU Newsroom, January 2011, <http://www.itu.int/net/pressoffice/stats/2011/01/index.aspx>.

⁴¹ Keith N. Hampton, Lauren Sessions Goulet, Lee Rainie, and Kristen Purcell, *Social networking sites and our lives*, Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, June 16, 2011, 3.

⁴² “Of the things Americans do online, few activities have received as much recent attention as the use of social networking sites (SNS). These sites, which include Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn, and Twitter, are defined by their

unique focus on allowing people to ‘friend’ others and share content with other users. By some accounts, Americans spend more time on SNS than doing any other single online activity.” Keith N. Hampton, Lauren Sessions Goulet, Lee Rainie, and Kristen Purcell, *Social networking sites and our lives*, Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, June 16, 2011. For a more nuanced discussion, see danah m. boyd and Nicole B. Ellison, “Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 1 (2007).

⁴³ Amanda Lenhart, Kristen Purcell, Aaron Smith, and Kathryn Zickuhr, *Social Media and Young Adults*, Pew Internet & American Life Project, February 3, 2010.

⁴⁴ Keith N. Hampton, Lauren Sessions Goulet, Lee Rainie, and Kristen Purcell, *Social networking sites and our lives*, Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, June 16, 2011, 3.

⁴⁵ Kathryn Zickuhr, *Generations 2010*, Pew Internet & American Life Project, December 16, 2010, 18.

⁴⁶ Council of Europe, Group of Specialists on the Impact of the Use of New Information Technologies on Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation, February 17, 2003, 107.

⁴⁷ “Oakland Man Indicted for Sex Trafficking of Kids,” ABC7 News, August 19, 2006, <http://abclocal.go.com/kgo/story?section=news/local&cid=4477027>.

⁴⁸ News Services, “2 charged with using Craigslist to offer underage girls for sex,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 12, 2007, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2007-01-12/news/0701120390_1_prostitution-craigslist-ceo-jim-buckmaster-young-teens.

⁴⁹ “Domestic Sex Trafficking of Minors—2010 state-by-state cases reported by media,” Women’s Funding Network, last updated December 17,

2010, <http://www.womensfundingnetwork.org/sites/wfnet.org/files/AFNAP/CSECState-by-StateDec2010.pdf>.

⁵⁰ *Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Hearings on H.R. 5575, Before the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security*, 111th Cong. 145 (2010) (statement of Ernie Allen, president and CEO, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children). Malika Saada Saar, founder and executive director, Rebecca Project for Human Rights, has emphasized that the Internet “has created an easy and accessible venue for the commercial sexual exploitation of children. As a result, young girls are the new commodities that traffickers and gangs are selling. And, there isn’t a culture of crime and punishment for selling girls as there is for selling illegal drugs. It is less risky, and more profitable (the girls are ‘reusable’) to traffic girls, instead of meth or crack.” Malika Saada Saar, “Girl Slavery in America,” *Huffington Post*, April 20, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/malika-saada-saar/girl-slavery-in-america_b_544978.html.

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⁵² William Sherman, “Bloods gang members went to Brooklyn schools to recruit underage girls as hookers: prosecutors,” *New York Daily News*, June 2, 2010, http://articles.nydailynews.com/2010-06-02/news/27065932_1_investigator-trafficking-prostitution.

⁵³ Sarah Forgany, “Beware: Social networks lure young Texans into danger,” KENS 5, November 19, 2010, <http://www.kens5.com/news/Human-traffickers-bring-scores-of-victims-through-Texas-109028984.html>.

⁵⁴ Sandy Adam Mahaputra and Eko Piliawito, “Indonesia Girls Sold Through Facebook,” *Viva*

News, January 19, 2011, <http://us.en.vivanews.com/news/read/200132-indonesia-girls-sold-through-facebook>.

⁵⁵ Amanda Kloer, "Teen Prostitution Ring Operation on Facebook Gets Busted," Change.org, February 4, 2010, <http://news.change.org/stories/teen-prostitution-ring-operating-on-facebook-gets-busted>.

⁵⁶ "Amb. CdeBaca Combats Sex Trafficking in U.S.," narrated by Neal Conan, "Talk of the Nation," NPR, April 28, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/04/28/135808703/amb-cdebaca-combats-sex-trafficking-in-the-u-s>.

⁵⁷ For all of Hughes' publications, see "Dignity Deferred," University of Rhode Island, last accessed July 13, 2011, <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/pubtrfrep.htm>.

⁵⁸ Donna M. Hughes, *The Demand for Victims of Sex Trafficking*, University of Rhode Island, June 2005, 8.

⁵⁹ Donna M. Hughes, "The Use of New Communications and Information Technologies for Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children," *Hasting's Women Law Journal* 13, no. 1 (2002): 129. For example, according to the 2011 *TIP Report*, "More than 95 percent of commercial exploitation of children in South Korea is arranged over the Internet." U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 2011, 217.

⁶⁰ Council of Europe, *Group of Specialists on the Impact of the Use of New Information Technologies on Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation*, February 17, 2003, 107. In order to inform a European policy on the matter, the Council of Europe created a group of specialists (EG-S-NT) to study the scale of the problem of the Internet and its role in sexual exploitation of women that includes human trafficking. The Association of Progressive Communications also wrote a brief exploratory study on the different ways digital technologies facilitate human trafficking,

from Internet advertising to recruiting victims online. Kathleen Maltzahn, *Digital Dangers: Information & Communication Technologies and Trafficking in Women*, Association of Progressive Communications, August 2006, 5.

⁶¹ Shared Hope International, *Demand: A Comparative Examination of Sex Tourism and Trafficking in Jamaica, Japan, the Netherlands, and the United States*, n.d., 5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 13. The report includes a web analysis that crawled the Internet to better determine which websites were directly or indirectly facilitating the commercial sex trade because a simple, preliminary search on Google resulted in 2.2 million websites for "escort services" alone. A scoring and categorization system was created based on keywords to better filter the sites and a 24-hour filter of the web commenced for 30 days. This search resulted "in a finely filtered group of 5,096 websites which contained key words and phrases determined to be associated with sex trafficking and sex tourism markets." *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁶⁴ Athanassia P. Sykiotou, prep., *Trafficking in human beings: Internet recruitment*, Council of Europe, 2007, 32.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁶ Linda A. Smith, Samantha Headly Vardaman, and Melissa A. Snow, *The National Report on Domestic Sex Trafficking: America's Prostituted Children*, Shared Hope International, May 2009, 29.

⁶⁷ Kim-Kwang Raymond Choo, "Online child grooming: A literature review on the misuse of social networking sites for grooming children for sexual offences," *Australian Institute of Criminology Research and Public Policy Series* 103, 2009, ii-xiv.

⁶⁸ U.S. Department of Justice, Project Safe Childhood, *The National Strategy for Child Exploitation Prevention and Interdiction*, August 2010, 32-33.

⁶⁹ Ric Curtis, Karen Terry, Meredith Dank, Kirk Dombrowski, and Bilal Khan, *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in New York City, Volume One: The CSEC Population in New York City: Size, Characteristics and Needs*, Center for Court Innovation, December 2008, 56.

⁷⁰ Kristin M. Finklea, Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantar, and Alison Siski, *Sex Trafficking of Children in the United States: Overview and Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Report, June 21, 2011, 2.

⁷¹ The Schapiro Group, *Adolescent Girls in the United States Sex Trade, Tracking Results for August 2010*, Women's Funding Network, 2010.

⁷² According to the report, the total number of girls exploited through Internet classifieds and escort service increased 20% in New York, 36% in Michigan, and 55% in Minnesota from February to August 2010. Women's Funding Network, "Six-Month Report: Domestic Sex Trafficking Up in Key States," press release, September 15, 2010, <http://www.womensfundingnetwork.org/about/news/press-releases/six-month-report-domestic-sex-trafficking-up-in-key-states>.

⁷³ For example, the tables included in the study show no analyses of variance or confidence estimates.

⁷⁴ "The method's not clean," said Eric Grodsky, a sociologist at the University of Minnesota. "You couldn't get this kind of thing into a peer-reviewed journal. There are just too many unanswered questions about their methodology." Nick Pinto, "Women's Funding Network Sex Trafficking Study Is Junk Science," *LA Weekly*, March 24, 2011, <http://www.laweekly.com/2011-03-24/news/women-s-funding-network-sex-trafficking-study-is-junk-science/>.

⁷⁵ *Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Hearings on H.R. 5575, Before the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security*, 111th Cong. (2010).

⁷⁶ Internet Security Task Force, *Enhancing Child Safety & Online Technologies*, the Berkman Center for Internet & Society, December 31, 2008, 4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁸ Kim-Kwang Raymond Choo, "Online child grooming: A literature review on the misuse of social networking sites for grooming children for sexual offences," *Australian Institute of Criminology Research and Public Policy Series* 103, 2009, ii-xiv.

⁷⁹ At the end of the reporting period, only three states had yet to enact anti-trafficking laws: West Virginia, Wyoming, and Massachusetts. In Massachusetts, anti-trafficking legislation had passed but had yet to be signed into law.

⁸⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 2011, 373.

⁸¹ Carrie Baker, "Jailing Girls for Men's Crimes," *Ms. Magazine*, December 8, 2010, <http://www.msomagazine.com/blog/blog/2010/12/08/jailing-girls-for-mens-crimes/>. One such example is the case of 13-year-old B.W., who was arrested in Texas for offering to perform an illegal sex act on an undercover officer, booked as an adult, and convicted, despite a state law that persons under 14 cannot consent to sex. The Texas Supreme Court reversed the decision on appeal, noting, "Children are the victims, not the perpetrators, of child prostitution." *In the Matter of B.W.*, 313 S.W.3d 818, 826 (Tex. 2010).

⁸² Safe Harbor for Exploited Children *N.Y. SOC. SERV. LAW* §447-a (McKinney 2008).

⁸³ For example, see An Act Providing a Safe Harbor for Exploited Children *CONN. PUB. ACT* 10-115.

⁸⁴ "These numbers do not reflect prosecutions of cases involving the commercial sexual exploitation of children that were brought under statutes other than the TVPA's sex trafficking provision. ... Traffickers were also prosecuted under a myriad of state laws, but no comprehensive data is

available on state prosecutions and convictions.” U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 2011, 373.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Several sources were used to gather evidence of trafficking cases involving social media and online classified ads. Searches were limited to federal trafficking cases, as researching state cases of trafficking poses a particular challenge, namely accounting for the range of criminal charges that could apply to trafficking cases, which vary by state.

⁸⁷ Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, 18 U.S.C. §1590 (October 28, 2000), addresses “trafficking with respect to peonage, slavery, involuntary servitude, or forced labor,” and 18 U.S.C. §1591 addresses “sex trafficking of children or by force, fraud, or coercion.”

⁸⁸ Anna Park, regional attorney for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, telephone interview by CCLP research staff, March 7, 2011.

⁸⁹ U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, “Employment Discrimination Laws ‘New Frontier’ in War Against Human Labor,” press release, January 19, 2011, <http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/release/1-19-11.cfm>.

⁹⁰ EEOC, “EEOC Resolves Slavery and Human Trafficking Suit Against Trans Bay Steel for an Estimated \$1 Million,” press release, December 8, 2006, <http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/release/archive/12-8-06.html>. *EEOC v. Trans Bay* was resolved in December 2006, with the parties reaching a settlement providing compensation and monetary relief to the Thai workers.

⁹¹ EEOC Meeting, Human Trafficking and Forced Labor, January 19, 2011, <http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/meetings/1-19-11/park.cfm> (written testimony of Anna Park, EEOC regional attorney).

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ U.S. Attorney’s Office in Atlanta, telephone interview by CCLP research staff, March 14, 2011.

⁹⁴ As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton noted upon the release of the 2011 *TIP Report*, “Because of the ease of transportation and the global communications that can reach deep into villages with promises and pictures of what a better life might be, we now see that more human beings are exploited than before.” Hillary Clinton, “Remarks on the Release of the 2011 *Trafficking in Persons Report*,” June 27, 2011, U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/06/167156.htm>.

⁹⁵ Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, 22 U.S.C. §7102 (October 28, 2000).

⁹⁶ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, “Maryland man pleads guilty in sex trafficking conspiracy involving 3 minor girls,” news release, July 16, 2009, <http://www.ice.gov/news/releases/0907/090716baltimore.htm>.

⁹⁷ U.S. Department of Justice, United States Attorney James T. Jacks, North District of Texas, “Dallas Felon Admits to Sex Trafficking a Minor and Possessing an Assault Rifle,” press release, January 18, 2011, http://www.justice.gov/usao/txn/PressRel11/wilson_clint_ple_pr.html.

⁹⁸ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Jacksonville Division, “Jury Finds New York Man Guilty of Sex Trafficking Women by Force, Threats of Force, and Fraud,” press release, February 17, 2011, <http://www.fbi.gov/jacksonville/press-releases/2011/ja021711.htm>. For another example, see *U.S. v. Fuertes*, 2011 WL 607391 (11th Cir., February 22, 2011) at *3, in which the defendant advertised the sexual services of his underage victim on Backpage.

⁹⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office, “Last of 14 Gambino Crime Family Members and Associates Plead Guilty to Racketeering, Murder Conspiracy, Extortion, Sex Trafficking, and Other Crimes,” press release,

January 10, 2011, <http://www.fbi.gov/newyork/press-releases/2011/last-of-14-gambino-crime-family-members-and-associates-plead-guilty-to-racketeering-murder-conspiracy-extortion-sex-trafficking-and-other-crimes/>.

¹⁰⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office, “Nine Gambino Crime Family Members Sentenced in Manhattan Federal Court for Racketeering, Murder Conspiracy, Extortion, Sex Trafficking, and Other Crimes,” press release, May 12, 2011, <http://www.fbi.gov/newyork/press-releases/2011/nine-gambino-crime-family-members-sentenced-in-manhattan-federal-court-for-racketeering-murder-conspiracy-extortion-sex-trafficking-and-other-crimes>. Preet Bahara, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, “said the sex trafficking reflected perhaps ‘a new low for the Gambino family.’” Benjamin Weiser, “Charges Called ‘New Low’ for Gambinos,” *New York Times*, April 20, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/21/nyregion/21extort.html>.

¹⁰¹ U.S. Attorney’s Office in Atlanta, telephone interview by CCLP research staff, March 14, 2011.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Los Angeles Division, “Man Pleads Guilty and Is Sentenced to 17½ Years in Federal Prison for Sex Trafficking of Minors,” press release, June 10, 2010, <http://www.fbi.gov/losangeles/press-releases/2010/la061010.htm>.

¹⁰⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Atlanta Division, “Pair Indicted, Appear in Court for Sex Trafficking of a Minor,” press release, April 16, 2009, <http://www.fbi.gov/atlanta/press-releases/2009/at041609.htm>. For details of sentencing, see Kimathi Lewis, “Arrests made in child sex crimes as agencies join forces,” *Examiner.com*, August 6, 2010, <http://www.examiner.com/crime-in-atlanta/arrests-made-child-sex-crimes-as-agencies-join-forces>.

¹⁰⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Atlanta Division, “Pimp Who Claimed to Be a Modeling Agent Sentenced to Prison,” press release, June 4, 2009, <http://www.fbi.gov/atlanta/press-releases/2009/atl060409.htm>.

¹⁰⁶ U.S. Attorney’s Office in Atlanta, telephone interview by CCLP research staff, March 14, 2011.

¹⁰⁷ Retired LAPD Detective Keith Haight described Los Angeles as “the runaway capital of the world.” “Starting out young in the world’s oldest profession: children prostitutes in L.A.,” Patt Morrison, Southern California Public Radio, October 21, 2010, <http://www.scpr.org/programs/patt-morrison/2010/10/21/starting-out-young-in-the-worlds-oldest-profession/>.

¹⁰⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 2011, 372.

¹⁰⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Seattle, “Tacoma Felon Sentenced to 13 Years in Prison for Sex Trafficking Offenses,” Department of Justice press release, May 11, 2010, <http://seattle.fbi.gov/dojpressrel10/se051110.htm>.

¹¹⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Seattle, “Army Sergeant Sentenced to 11 Years in Prison for Sex Trafficking Juveniles,” Department of Justice press release, October 26, 2010, <http://www.fbi.gov/seattle/press-release/2010/se102610a.htm>. According to Tina Frundt, executive director and Founder of Courtney’s House, a nonprofit organization that provides assistance to child sex trafficking victims, “the Internet has played a part in the sex trafficking of every client at Courtney’s House. ... Furthermore, every pimp has a Myspace page.” *Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Hearings on H.R. 5575, Before the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security*, 111th Cong. 154 (2010).

¹¹¹ “Human Rescue Trafficking Project,” U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Western District of Missouri, last accessed June 27, 2011, <http://www.justice.gov/usao/mow/programs/>

humantrafficking.html. The Human Trafficking Rescue Project (HTRP) was launched in 2006. This federal taskforce is comprised of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the Department of Labor, and two local Missouri police departments.

¹¹² U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, “Kansas man gets 15 years in prison for attempted sex trafficking of a child,” news release, December 1, 2009, <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/0912/091201kansascity.htm>.

¹¹³ “The Human Trafficking Rescue Project conducted a sting operation [in March 2009] which targeted local customers who solicit pimps to engage in commercial sex acts with children. The ‘children’ were advertised online at Craig’s List [sic]; no real children were actually involved in the sting.” *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, 18 U.S.C. §1591(a)(1) (October 28, 2000), reads “(a) Whoever knowingly —(1) *in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce, or within the special maritime and territorial jurisdiction of the United States, recruits, entices, harbors, transports, provides, obtains, or maintains by any means a person*” (emphasis added).

¹¹⁵ *United States v. Myers*, 2011 WL 2391306 (11th Cir., June 15, 2011), at *6.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* at *8.

¹¹⁷ While Craigslist CEO Jim Buckmaster made it clear that “[w]e do not want illegal activity on the site,” he explained that it was nearly impossible for its small staff to audit the millions of postings. Bruce Lambert, “As Prostitutes Turn to Craigslist, Law Takes Notice,” *New York Times*, September 5, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/05/nyregion/05craigslist.html?_r=1. Craigslist also maintained that it was exempt from any legal obligation to address the advertisements under its site, citing §230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996, which

states, “No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider.” Communications Decency Act of 1996, 47 U.S.C. §230 (1998).

¹¹⁸ As Elizabeth McDougall, counsel to Craigslist on online safety, security, and abuse issues, noted, “[I]n terms of voluntary action by Craigslist, when Craigslist implemented these measures, credit card verification and phone verification, a lot of that started to migrate over to the Therapeutic Services category on Craigslist, and voluntarily Craigslist implemented these same measures there.” *Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Hearings on H.R. 5575, Before the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security*, 111th Cong. 175 (2010) (testimony of Elizabeth McDougall).

¹¹⁹ Brad Stone, “Under Pressure, Craigslist to Remove ‘Erotic’ Ads,” *New York Times*, May 13, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/14/technology/companies/14craigslist.html>.

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¹²¹ Melissa Gira Grant, “The Craigslist Sex Panic,” *Slate*, May 27, 2009, <http://www.slate.com/id/2219167/>; Alan Duke, “Official: Craigslist to replace ‘blatant Internet brothel,’” *CNN*, May 13, 2009, http://articles.cnn.com/2009-05-13/tech/craigslist.sex.ads_1_blatant-internet-brothel-craigslist-ceo-jim-buckmaster-blumenthal?s=PM:TECH. “Misuse of Craigslist for criminal purposes is utterly unacceptable, and Craigslist will continue to work with its partners in law enforcement and at nongovernmental organizations until it is eliminated,” said Craigslist CEO Jim Buckmaster. Brad Stone, “Sex Ads Seen Adding Revenue to Craigslist,” *New York Times*, April 25, 2010, <http://>

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claiming that Section 230 of the Communication Decency Act does not apply. Complaint for Damages, *M.A. v. Village Voice Media Holdings, LLC.*, Case 4:10-cv-01740 (E. Dist. Mo. September 16, 2010). On August 15, 2011, U.S. Magistrate Judge Thomas Mummert dismissed the case, stating, "Plaintiff artfully and eloquently attempts to phrase her allegations to avoid the reach of §230. Those allegations, however, do not distinguish the complained-of actions of Backpage from any other website that posted content that led to an innocent person's injury. Congress has declared such websites to be immune from suits arising from such injuries. It is for Congress to change the policy that gave rise to such immunity." *M.A. v. Village Voice Media Holdings, LLC.*, no. 4:2010cv01740, 2011 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 90588 (E. Dist. Mo. August 15, 2011), at *48-49.

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¹³⁷ Reuters, "Super Bowl a magnet for under-age sex trade," MSNBC, January 31, 2011, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/41360579/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/.

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¹⁴⁰ These websites are located on Backpage.com, "Dallas Adult Entertainment," <http://dallas.backpage.com/adult/> and "Dallas Female Escorts," <http://dallas.backpage.com/FemaleEscorts/>, last accessed July 6, 2011.

¹⁴¹ This analysis was conducted by Dr. Don Metzler, Information Sciences Institute, University of Southern California.

¹⁴² The use of the Twitter web-based search function was intended to simulate the results for common users searching for the term "escort." The resulting number should be considered the lower bound, i.e., lower than the actual number, since the search functionality removes spam, removes duplicates, and personalizes results in some way via a search algorithm. For more information, see "The Engineering Behind Twitter's New Search Experience," Twitter Engineering, May 31, 2011, <http://engineering.twitter.com/2011/05/engineering-behind-twiters-new-search.html>.

¹⁴³ An average of 200 words per minute is considered a "reasonable" rate, yet reading words on a screen may slow reading ability to an average of approximately 180 words per minute. Martina Ziefle, "Effects of display resolution on visual performance," *Human Factors* 40, no. 4 (December 1998): 555-568.

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¹⁴⁵ This analysis was conducted by Hao Wang, Information Sciences Institute, University of Southern California.

¹⁴⁶ *Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Hearings on H.R. 5575, Before the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security*, 111th Cong. 146 (2010) (statement of Ernie Allen, president and CEO National Center for Missing & Exploited Children).

¹⁴⁷ Other team members include Dr. Don Metzler and Congxing Cai. For more information on the Natural Language Group at the USC Information Sciences Institute, visit <http://nlg.isi.edu>.

¹⁴⁸ A report prepared by the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory for the U.S. Department of Energy suggests that research is underway on tracking, facial recognition, and data visualization with regard to domestic minor sex trafficking. S.J. Kreyling, C.L. West, and J.R. Olson, *Technology and Research Requirements for Combating Human Trafficking: Enhancing Communication, Analysis, Reporting, and Information Sharing*, U.S. Department of Energy, March 2011.

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¹⁵¹ Hany Farid, professor of computer science at Dartmouth College, telephone interview with CCLP research staff, May 24, 2011.

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¹⁵³ Riva Richmond, “Facebook’s New Way to Combat Child Pornography,” *New York Times*, May 19, 2011, <http://gadgetwise.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/19/facebook-to-combat-child-porn-using-microsofts-technology/?partner=rss&emc=rss>.

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¹⁵⁶ Aashika Damodar, Survivors Connect, telephone interview with CCLP research staff, July 20, 2011.

¹⁵⁷ As Meier notes, “An event that is reported by more than one source is more likely to have happened.” Patrick Philippe Meier, “Moving Forward With Swift River,” *iRevolution*, May 7, 2009, <http://irevolution.net/2009/05/07/moving-forward-with-swift-river/>. For information on the Ushahidi open-source crowdsourcing project, see <http://www.ushahidi.com/>, and for the Frontline SMS text-messaging tool, see <http://www.frontlinesms.com/>. For a discussion on the value of online collective intelligence, see Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution* (Cambridge: Perseus Publishing, 2002). For a counterpoint, see Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

¹⁵⁸ These social networking sites include Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Craigslist, Oodle, Backpage, Friendster, Google Groups, My Red Book, World Sex Guide, Eros, and My Provider Guide.

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¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

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¹⁶² “About Free2Work,” Free2Work, last accessed June 27, 2011, <http://www.free2work.org/home>.

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¹⁶⁷ *Best Practices and Next Steps: A New Decade in the Fight Against Human Trafficking, Before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa,*

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¹⁶⁸ William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, Pub. L. no. 110-457, 122 Stat. 5044, December 23, 2008.

¹⁶⁹ John Picarelli, social science analyst, National Institute of Justice, personal communication with CCLP research staff, March 24, 2011.

¹⁷⁰ “Crime Commission to address protection of children from exploitation on the Web,” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, April 11, 2011, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2011/April/crime-commission-to-address-the-protection-of-children-from-exploitation-on-the-web.html?ref=fs1>.

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¹⁷⁴ End Human Trafficking Now, Campaign of the Suzanne Mubarak Women’s International Peace Movement, *Luxor Implementation Guidelines to the Athens Ethical Principles: Comprehensive Compliance Programme for Businesses*, 2006.

¹⁷⁵ John Ruggie, “Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations ‘Protect, Respect and Remedy’ Framework,” Human Rights Council, 17th Session, March 21, 2011.

¹⁷⁶ The guidelines state that business are to “(a) Avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts through their own activities, and address such impacts when they occur; (b) Seek to prevent or mitigate adverse human rights impacts that are directly linked to their operations, products or services by their business relationships, even if they have not contributed to those impacts.” *Ibid.*

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About the Center on Communication Leadership & Policy

Guided by Ambassador Walter Annenberg's belief that communication impacts all aspects of society and should be used in the public interest, the Center on Communication Leadership & Policy (CCLP) unites visionary ideals with impactful scholarship and practical applications that promote innovative solutions to policy and social concerns.

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