Introduction to the Minitrack on Illicit Activity and Criminal Justice

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Information technologies have changed the practices used by illicit actors and those seeking to interdict illegal or exploitative activity. Advances in ICT have led to new business models and business practices that expand illicit actors' markets, increase the risk and scope of victimization, and allow illicit actors to evade detection. ICT also enables illicit actors to gain access to marginalized groups, who are often already vulnerable to exploitation. Law enforcement agencies and governments react to these adaptations by illicit actors, often by trying to comply with or reform aging laws and policies that fail to keep up with criminal use of information technology. In addition, many legitimate organizations are seeking opportunities to use information technology to identify and mitigate the use of their products or services by illicit actors to protect their stakeholders and organizations from harm or exploitation.

The Illicit Activity and Criminal Justice minitrack was offered for the first time at HICSS this year as part of a new special track on Information Technology, Social Justice, and Marginalized Contexts. This minitrack promotes research that explores the intersection of information technology and illicit activity, with an emphasis on the use of technology by illicit actors that target or exploit marginalized groups. We are interested in research from a range of perspectives, such as how criminal behavior is altered due to ICTs, interventions by law enforcement, civil agencies, NGOs, or businesses to detect, disrupt, or dismantle illicit networks, and the role of information technology to serve and support victims of crime and exploitation in gaining access to justice.

The paper in this minitrack is "Analyzing the Effectiveness of Chatbots vs. Webforms for Suspicious Activity Reporting." Technologies have been developed to allow civilians and law enforcement to report suspicious activity to an appropriate authority. In this exploratory work, Elson et al. examine how individuals report suspicious activity when using a webform versus a chatbot. This work offers some initial insights on how to design tools for individuals to report potentially illicit activity.

We are hopeful that this minitrack stimulates additional research on the role that ICTs have in allowing actors to engage in illicit activity or the practices that are used to interdict illicit activity and promote criminal justice.

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