

Internet is the hub for the circulation of meanings and a central nodal point through which human networks function and are formed, and when it comes to architecture, the web is a rhizome. It is a metaphor for an organism that is constantly in flux, never ceasing to develop. The web, however, is not without power structures, as it is clear that there are actors with more social capital than others and nodal points that direct the circulation of meanings. The rhizomatic architecture of the Internet makes it easy to transcend national and cultural boundaries and makes space and distance less relevant. This does not exclude deep interrelations between online spaces and offline contexts and the project addresses this strongly. It also points that after a long period of utopian ideas about the Internet, the last couple of years have revealed many disruptive ways in which this medium is used.

The project **explores the Internet in a specific area of disruptive (disnormative) activities**, that is **online drug trade** (using Poland as a case study), and

- 1) considers how the open Internet (social media) is utilized in drug trading,
- 2) characterizes what is the role of online darknet environments when it comes to narcotics, and
- 3) discovers complex circulation of drug trade contents and meanings between the open and the dark web.

**The project focuses** on the meaning making within drug subculture and rhizomatic networks involved in drug trading. It also asks what is the role of language in underpinning the organization of the online landscape and shaping online interactions and what are unique traits of Polish online drug trade? What are the special traits relating to the way of life, demographics, and identities of drug users (as members of the so-called drug subcultures), and how these traits are reflected on the Internet; how these are important in light of recent trends in web surveillance and datafication? What the Polish case adds to the general knowledge on the topic of drugs, e.g. why and how online drug trade is important for the drug market dynamics (drug consumption, distribution, etc.). Policy and legal issues are also considered, especially how these coincide with the local traits of Polish online drug trade, and how these shape drug consumption in general. Can the Polish case give some clues on narcotics-related harm prevention?

As noted by John Markoff<sup>1</sup>, legend has it that the first ever online commerce transaction was the sale of a small quantity of Cannabis over the ARPAnet (the first “version” of the Internet) between students in the participating universities. Today, next to direct social media and app use, dark web sites are a key channel of access for many people wanting to sell or purchase narcotics. The so-called dark web is a part of the Internet but requires specialized software to access. The best known of these tools is the Tor (The Onion Router) network, but others also exist. Even social media companies such as Facebook now provide Tor-based access to them. The most well-known use of the technology, however, is the establishment of drug trading sites, the so-called cryptomarkets with cryptocurrencies usage, or image boards with setting up face to face (f2f) sales using instant messaging services. Buying drugs might take some skill to apply, but in fact, not that much skill is required beyond curiosity. Due to how popular media has been covering such sites, curiosity by a sufficient number of users can almost certainly be guaranteed.

When it comes to drug trading online, one can observe a turn towards locality, as vendors are increasingly seeking to operate within their home countries. Besides, **there is a growth of small**, particularly non-English language cryptomarkets directed to single countries or regions – the project focuses on Polish online drug market.

The project dives into both **'big data'** (data scraping, gathering huge amounts of posts, etc.) **and 'small data'**. Natural language processing and other computational methods are combined with digital media ethnography, and in-depth interviews, both in collecting and analyzing data. This means contextualizing the computational data through different theoretical, methodological, and empirical perspectives that increase reliability of results. It is important that next to producing new knowledge on the drug trading that takes place online, the project introduces **new methodological tools ready to use by other researchers**.

The **international research team** (scholars from both Poland and Finland) tackles various computational methods biases in data with the multidisciplinary and multi-method approach. Additionally, the research team deals with several ethical issues and indicates good practices, when it comes to studying drug trading in both dark and clear web.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Markoff, (2006). *What the Dormouse Said: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry*. Penguin Books.