

Responsible vendors, intelligent consumers:
Silk Road, the online revolution in drug
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Editors' choice

Responsible vendors, intelligent consumers: Silk Road, the online revolution in drug trading

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Abstract

Background

Silk Road is located on the Deep Web and provides an anonymous transacting infrastructure for the retail of drugs and pharmaceuticals. Members are attracted to the site due to protection of identity by screen pseudonyms, variety and quality of product listings, selection of vendors based on reviews, reduced personal risks, stealth of product delivery, development of personal connections with vendors in stealth modes and forum activity. The study aimed to explore vendor accounts of Silk Road as retail infrastructure.

Methods

A single and holistic case study with embedded units approach (Yin, 2003) was chosen to

explore the accounts of vendor subunits situated within the Silk Road marketplace. Vendors ($n = 10$) completed an online interview via the direct message facility and via Tor mail.

Results

Vendors described themselves as "intelligent and responsible"™ consumers of drugs. Decisions to commence vending operations on the site centred on simplicity in setting up vendor accounts, and opportunity to operate within a low risk, high traffic, high mark-up, secure and anonymous Deep Web infrastructure. The embedded online culture of harm reduction ethos appealed to them in terms of the responsible vending and use of personally tested high quality products. The professional approach to running their Silk Road businesses and dedication to providing a quality service was characterised by professional advertising of quality products, professional communication and visibility on forum pages, speedy dispatch of slightly overweight products, competitive pricing, good stealth techniques and efforts to avoid customer disputes. Vendors appeared content with a fairly constant buyer demand and described a relatively competitive market between small and big time market players. Concerns were evident with regard to Bitcoin instability.

Conclusion

The greatest threat to Silk Road and other sites operating on the Deep Web is not law enforcement or market dynamics, it is technology itself.



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Keywords

Silk Road; Internet; Vending; Drug markets

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