



---

# From street to platform

An introduction to digitally mediated drug distribution

---

Monica J. Barratt

August 2024

@monicabarratt [monica.barratt@rmit.edu.au](mailto:monica.barratt@rmit.edu.au)



# Acknowledgement of country



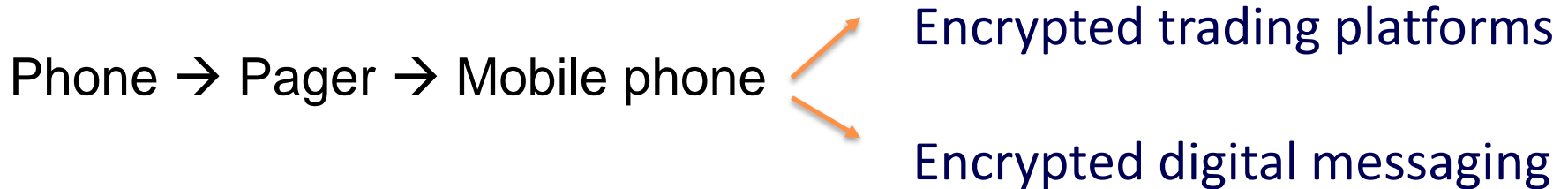
Me-Mandook Galk 'Grandmother tree' - Dja Dja Wurrung - 2021

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Dja Dja Wurrung people, Traditional Custodians of the land on which I work and live, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.

# From street to lounge room

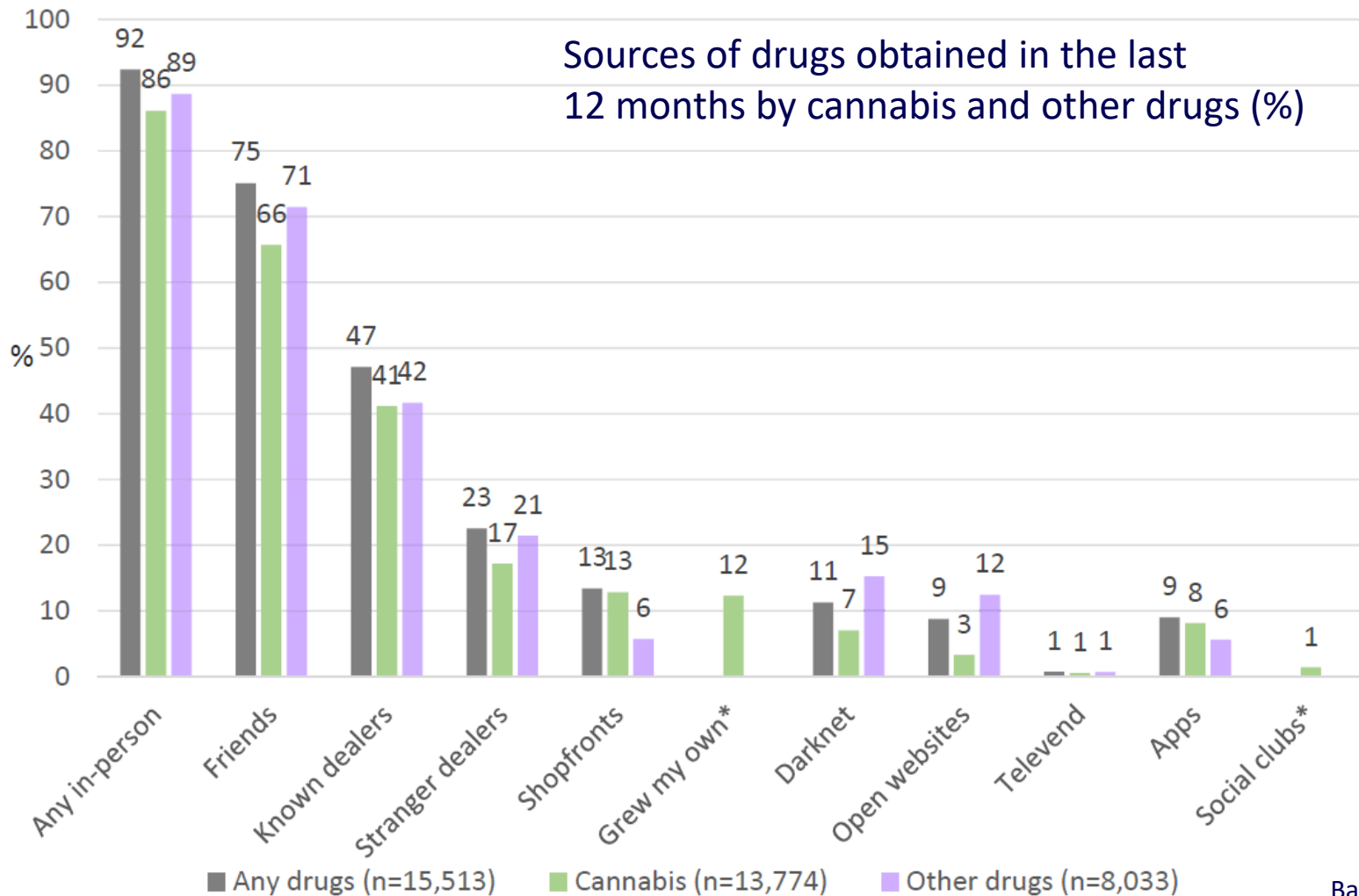
“In reality, much of what is commonly called ‘street-level drug dealing’ in Australia might more accurately be described as ‘lounge room level’ dealing. This is because it is far more likely to take place in the home of one of the parties to the transaction, and involve people that are well known to each other.”

Nicholas, 2008, p. 23





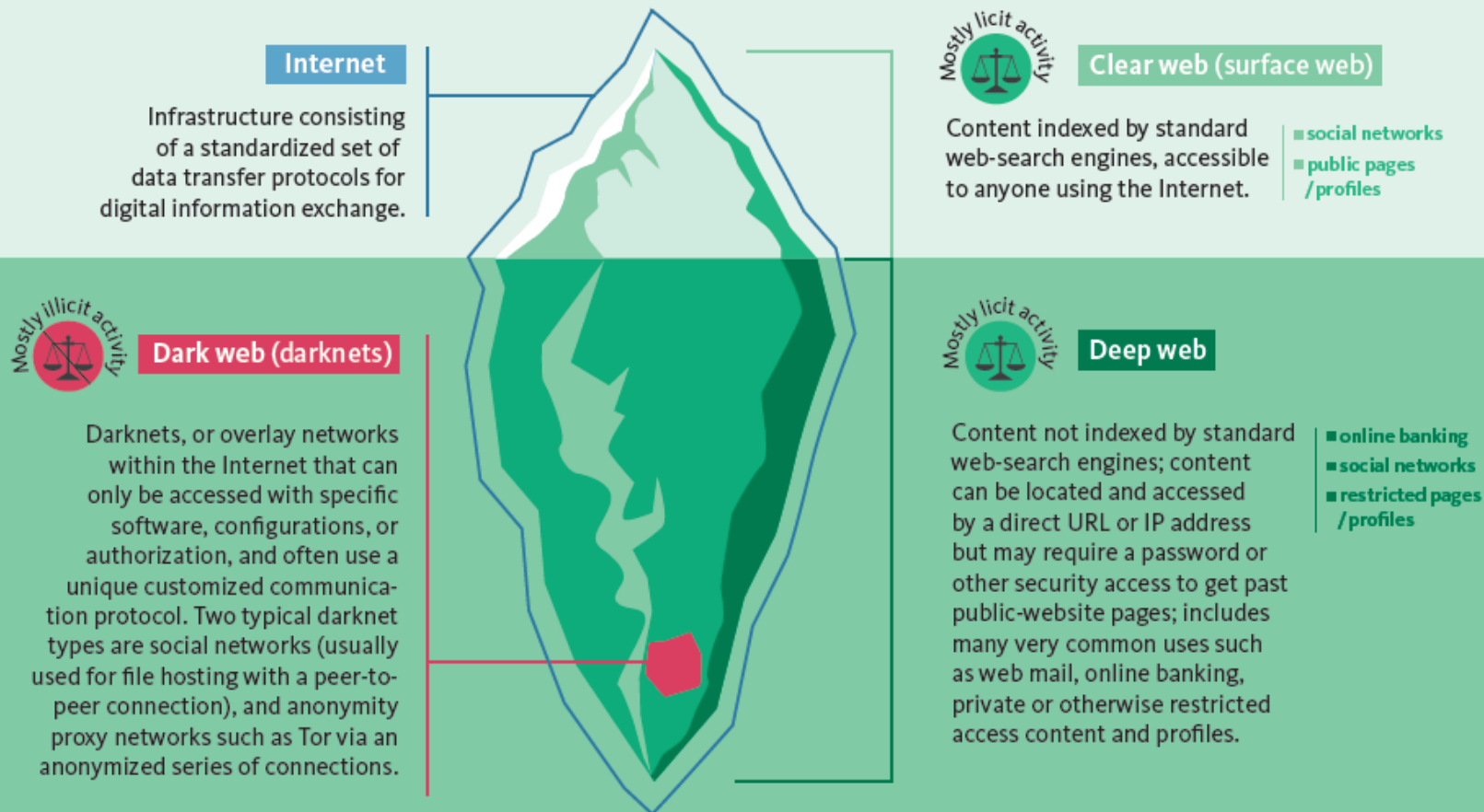
### Sources of drugs obtained in the last 12 months by cannabis and other drugs (%)



# What are drug cryptomarkets? (darknet markets)

- Cryptomarkets are digital platforms that use anonymising software (e.g. Tor) and cryptocurrencies (e.g. Bitcoin) to facilitate trade of goods and services.
- All kinds of drugs are sold: illicit, novel, pharmaceutical
- It's been 13 years ... Silk Road began in Feb 2011
- Vendor ratings are collated and utilised by buyers to discern best quality and service
- Typically delivered through the postal system
- Decentralised and globalised drug exchanges

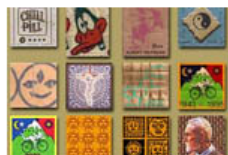
# THE INTERNET: CLEAR WEB, DEEP WEB AND DARK WEB



# Learning to buy and sell...

- Similar features to Amazon and eBay
  - Plus stealth packaging
- But actors must learn:
  1. Tor/12P (anonymous access to marketplaces)
  2. PGP (encrypting messages between actors)
  3. Bitcoin/Monero (non-cash payment without identity disclosure)



**Shop by category:****Cannabis(137)****Ecstasy(18)****Psychedelics(77)****Opioids(38)****Stimulants(60)****Dissociatives(7)****Other(106)****Benzos(42)**1 hit of LSD  
(blotter)  
฿1.641/8 oz high  
quality cannabis  
฿4.121 g pure MDMA  
(white)  
฿4.90**Step-by-step:**

1. Get **anonymous money**
2. Buy something here
3. Enjoy it when it arrives!

back to **business as usual****recent feedback:**

seller	rating	feedback	
<b>edgarnumbers(100)</b>	5 of 5	Excellent packaging. The pill was left entirely intact. Not crushed one bit. Would definitely buy again!	<b>item</b>
<b>dexsource</b>	5 of 5	Product arrived well protected and on time, no complaints.	<b>item</b>
<b>Goldismoney(97)</b>	5 of 5	Top quality! Would use again!	<b>item</b>
<b>3Jane(99)</b>	5 of 5	Fast and discreet.	<b>item</b>
<b>crimson(100)</b>	5 of 5	legit. you do pay for quality service.	<b>item</b>
<b>psynom(100)</b>	5 of 5	Good communication, quick delivery. I didnt test the product yet, but it looks good.	<b>item</b>
<b>easypeezy</b>	5 of 5	Fast shipping. Gave some freebies. Highly recommended!	<b>item</b>
<b>Ivory(100)</b>	5 of 5	tasty stuff. packaging could have been a little less stinky	<b>item</b>
<b>swch</b>	5 of 5	Good Swiss Quality (strong) weed. All went as agreed, very good and legit seller, thanks!	<b>item</b>
<b>kaliforniaProducts(100)</b>	5 of 5	Outstanding product but get a vacuum sealer	<b>item</b>



**⚠ YOU DO NOT HAVE A PGP KEY ASSIGNED TO YOUR ACCOUNT, PLEASE ATTACH ONE IN THE USER PANEL**

NO IMAGE AVAILABLE

tronica

Status: Regular  
 Joined: Today  
 Total Spent: AS\$0.00

**Balances**

0.00000000 BTC AS\$0.00

0.00000000 XMR AS\$0.00

**Information Board**

Your personal login phrase is: **green sheep is fast asleep** - if this is incorrect, please leave immediately and seek a new mirror.

Please take precautions prior to placing any orders, this means vetting the merchants you wish to use, and encrypting any sensitive data with PGP.

Always verify the mirror you are visiting, safety is key.

**Exchange Rates**

	USD	EUR	GBP	CAD	AUD
<b>Bitcoin</b>	26072	24493	21308	35167	40623
<b>Monero</b>	144.14	135.41	117.8	194.42	224.59

**Quick Search**

Search by Keyword / Merchant Name

Category

Select A Category

Search

**Featured Listings****COKE (28G) \$855 "lucky turtle" stamp n...**

In Cocaine

Sold by **Cuckoobird** (★ 5.0)

Available Sold (48H) Price  
**Unlimited** **5** **AUD 1319.45**

**Mix n Match Carts 1g - Fast Shipping Wi...**

In Concentrates

Sold by **lucky** (★ 4.9)

Available Sold (48H) Price  
**Unlimited** **215** **AUD 7.71**

**1000xB974 30mgAdderal(.85Cent A Pill)...**

In Adderal

Sold by **AllStateRx** (★ 4.9)

Available Sold (48H) Price  
**Unlimited** **0** **AUD 1319.45**

**(.55) 3000xBIG DAWG PROMO\*\*BEST ...**

In Adderal

Sold by **Simponis1** (★ 5.0)

Available Sold (48H) Price  
**Unlimited** **3** **AUD 2561.30**

**3.5 GRAM (8 BALL)\*\*NEW VENDOR PR...**

In Cocaine

Sold by **Habibmia** (★ 5.0)

Available Sold (48H) Price  
**Unlimited** **0** **AUD 178.51**

**30mg Oxycodone ALG 265 | USA TO US...**

In Oxycodone

Sold by **OxyFresh** (★ 0.0)

Available Sold (48H) Price  
**Unlimited** **0** **AUD 46.55**

**Bad Apple - Connected (Branded GOAT ...**

In Buds

Sold by **pretypacks** (★ 4.9)

Available Sold (48H) Price

**1oz. hash bar**

In Concentrates

Sold by **cb2021** (★ 4.9)

Available Sold (48H) Price

**Browse Categories** Benzodiazepines

3109

 Cannabis & Hashish

14262

 Dissociatives

3279

 Psychedelics

4892

 Ecstasy

5400

25/9/2023

# Who is using them, then?

Addiction



RESEARCH REPORT

doi:10.1111/add.12470

## Use of Silk Road, the online drug marketplace, in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States

Monica J. Barratt<sup>1</sup>, Jason A. Ferris<sup>2</sup> & Adam R. Winstock<sup>3,4</sup>

National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, Fitzroy, Victoria, Australia,<sup>1</sup> Institute for Social Science Research, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia,<sup>2</sup> South London and Maudsley NHS Trust/Kings College London, London, UK<sup>3</sup> and Global Drug Survey, London, UK<sup>4</sup>

- Young males, of higher than average education & employment
- Almost all (95%) have used illicit drugs before
- Most popular drugs bought are MDMA, cannabis, cocaine, LSD
- Reasons for use: convenience, quality, range, ratings, price

# Who is using them, now?

Drug and Alcohol Dependence 231 (2022) 109243



Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Drug and Alcohol Dependence

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/drugalcdp](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/drugalcdp)

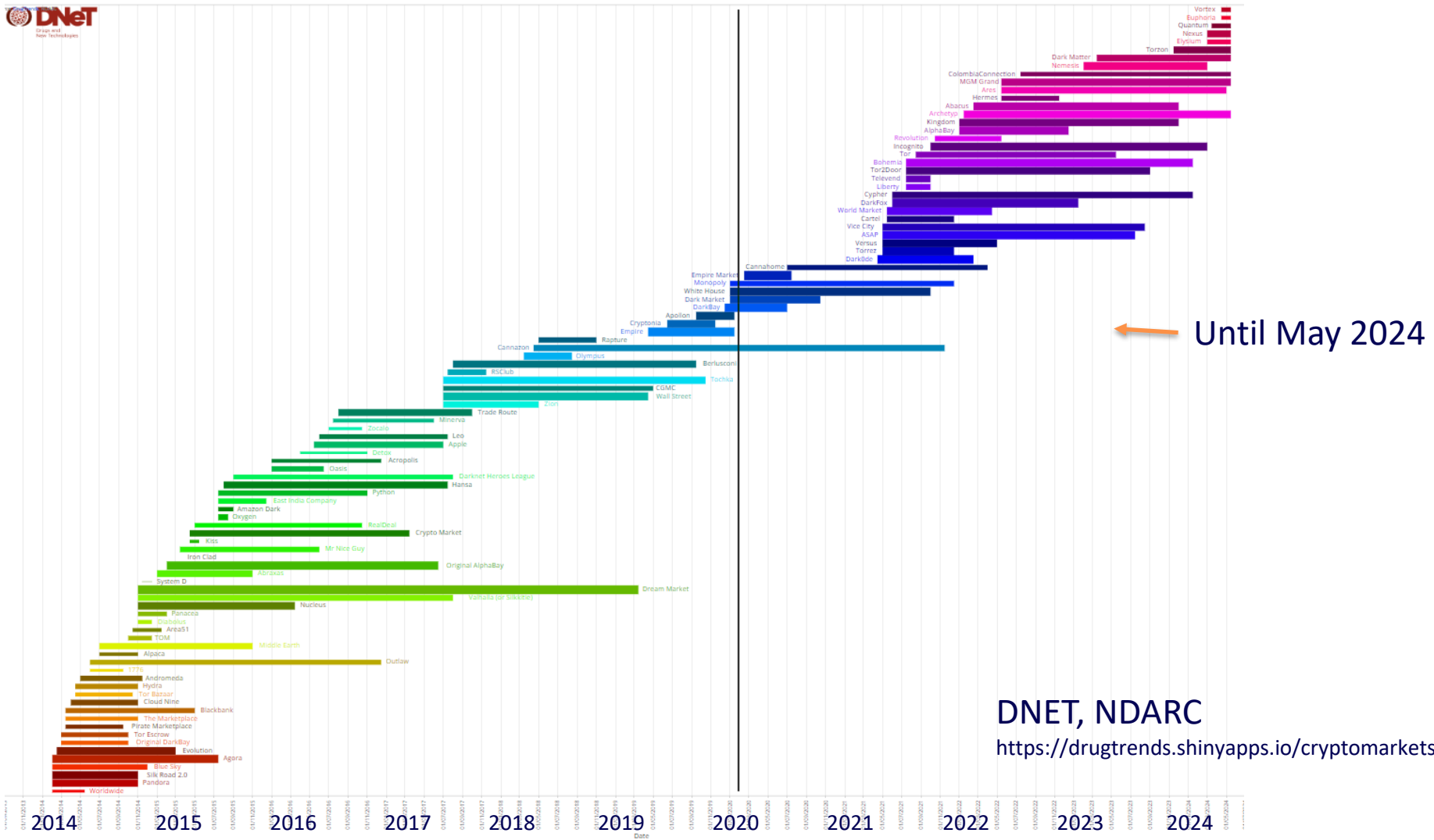


Exploring Televend, an innovative combination of cryptomarket and messaging app technologies for trading prohibited drugs



Monica J. Barratt<sup>a,b,\*1,2</sup>, Francois R. Lamy<sup>c,1,3</sup>, Liam Engel<sup>a,d,4</sup>, Emma Davies<sup>e,5</sup>,  
Cheneal Puljevic<sup>f,g,6</sup>, Jason A. Ferris<sup>f,7</sup>, Adam R. Winstock<sup>h,i,8</sup>

- Of darknet sample, median age 24 years, 80% identify as cis men, 34% report having a university degree
- Cannabis, psychedelics, MDMA still popular but also opioids and dissociatives



← Until May 2024

**DNET, NDARC**  
<https://drugtrends.shinyapps.io/cryptomarkets/>

# Features of drug market types #1

	Open	Closed	Crypto
Introductions required for new entrants	No	Yes	No
Difficulty associated with entering	Low	High	Tech expertise
Location of drug/money exchange	Public space	Private space	Delivery
Buyer holds identifying information about vendor	No	Yes	No
Vendor holds identifying information about buyer	No	Yes	Maybe
Access to history to establish/maintain trust	No	Maybe	Yes
Third party system designed for dispute resolution	No	No	Yes

# Apps & social media

- Public feeds with hashtags = initial connection to buyer
- More secure messenger app = organise transaction
- Local meet-ups to exchange drugs/money or postal delivery reliant on digital payment



Apps and games

Movies & TV

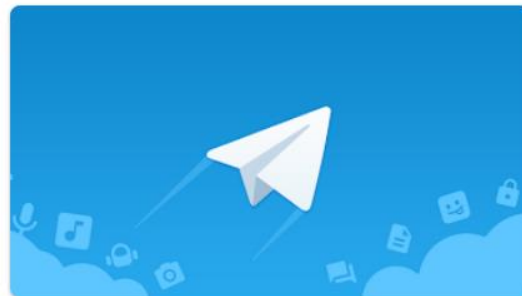
Books



Signal - Private Messenger  
Signal Foundation  
4.5 ★



Discord – Talk, Play, Hang Out  
Discord Inc.  
3.1 ★



Telegram  
Telegram FZ-LLC  
4.1 ★



Snapchat  
Snap Inc  
4.0 ★



Instagram  
Instagram  
3.7 ★



WhatsApp Messenger  
WhatsApp LLC  
4.4 ★

---


# Changes in Online Psychoactive Substance Trade via **Telegram** during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Matthijs Blankers<sup>a, b, c</sup> Daan van der Gouwe<sup>a</sup> Lavinia Stegemann<sup>a</sup>  
Laura Smit-Rigter<sup>a</sup>

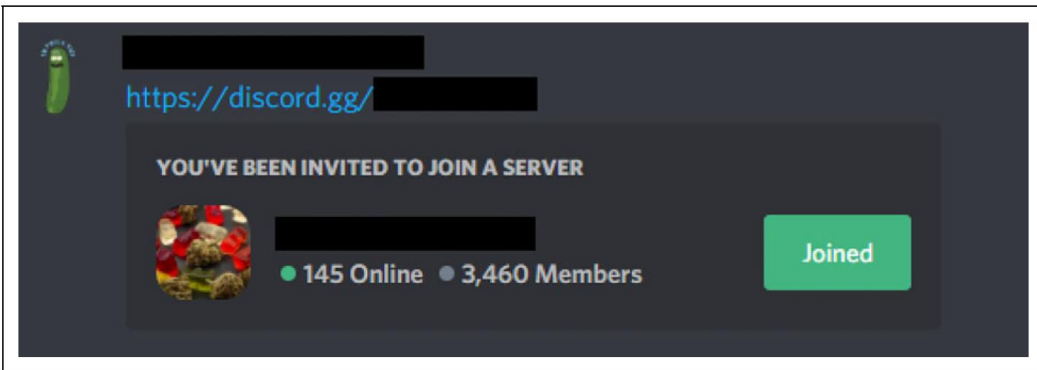
<sup>a</sup>Trimbos Institute, Netherlands Institute of Mental Health and Addiction, Utrecht, The Netherlands; <sup>b</sup>Arkin Mental Health Care, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; <sup>c</sup>Location AMC, Department of Psychiatry, Amsterdam UMC, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands



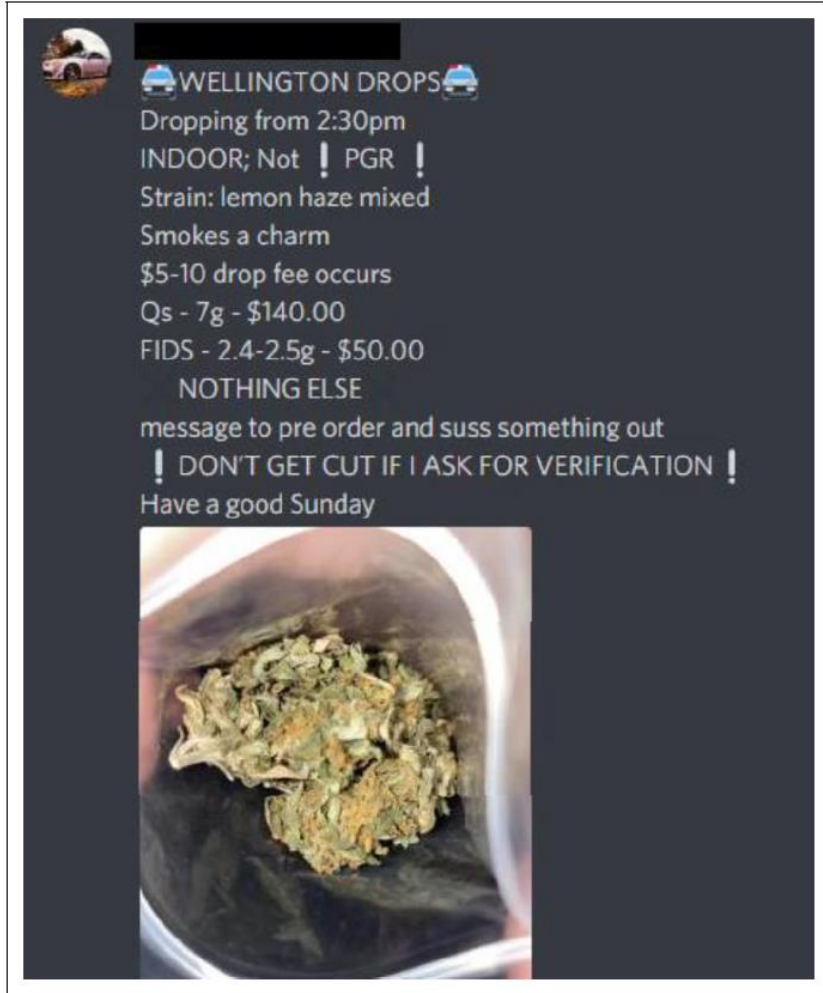
# The Use of **Discord** Servers to Buy and Sell Drugs

Contemporary Drug Problems  
2022, Vol. 49(4) 453-477  
© The Author(s) 2022  
Article reuse guidelines:  
sagepub.com/journals-permissions  
DOI: 10.1177/00914509221095279  
journals.sagepub.com/home/cdx  


Robin van der Sanden<sup>1</sup> , Chris Wilkins<sup>1</sup>, Marta Rychert<sup>1</sup>,  
and Monica J. Barratt<sup>2,3</sup> 



**Figure 4.** An invite-link for a large drug server posted to the main chat of another drug server.



**Figure 2.** An advert for cannabis posted to a drug server including information on strain, weights and additional charges for drop offs.

# Why use apps for drug trading #1

## Immediacy and convenience

“It just seemed like a simple, modern way to buy things. I’d gotten pretty sick of the darknet because I never really got it, so had to always have a friend on hand to help me out. With apps its super simple, I get it and in no time I’ve managed to connect with strangers who I would’ve never been able to access before. Plenty of dealers in this area exist solely on Snapchat, so without it, I would’ve kept relying on people approaching me in the street or randomly bumping into people in clubs.”

# Why use apps for drug trading #2

## Visual dealing practices – ‘seeing’ quality

“The first time I bought Xanax it was through Snapchat because I could watch the dealer opening sealed packets on his story before he sold them and I therefore felt safe consuming them...I would never buy anything I hadn’t tried before from some guy on a street corner or anything at all really unless I was desperate.”

## Law enforcement and detection – ephemeral messaging

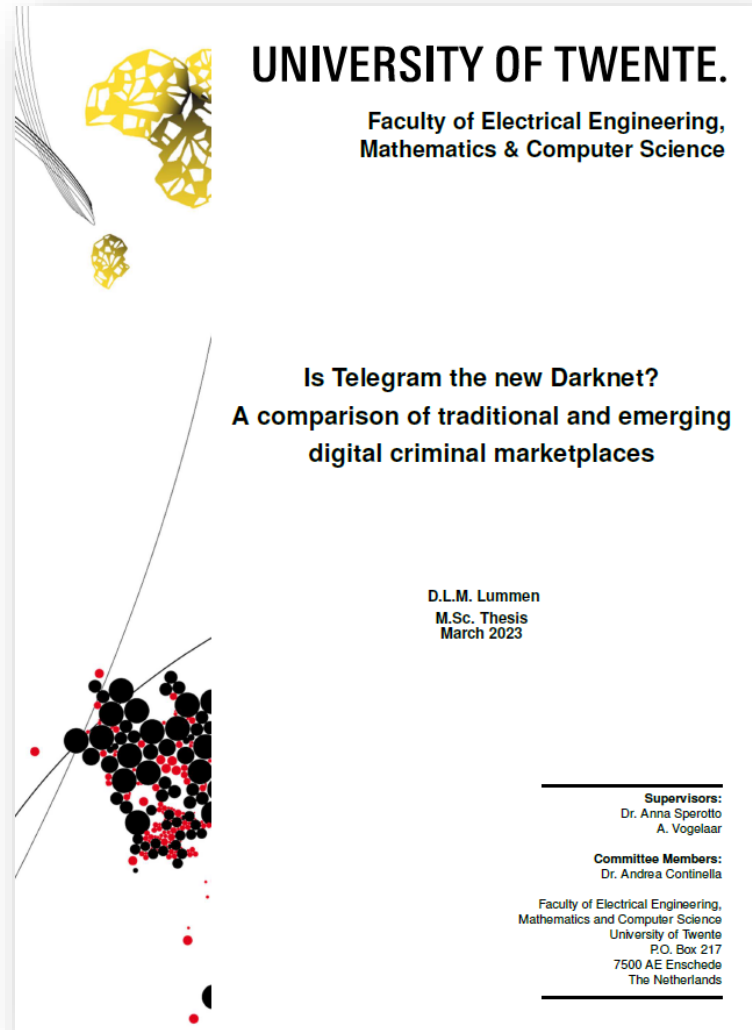
“I realised rather rapidly that Snapchat was totally secure, as was WhatsApp. Law enforcement agencies cannot [access] any data transmitted over these apps as was recently proven by several high-profile cases.”

# Features of drug market types #2

	Open	Closed	Crypto	App
Introductions required for new entrants	No	Yes	No	No
Difficulty associated with entering	Low	High	Tech expertise	Low
Location of drug/money exchange	Public space	Private space	Delivery	Public space or delivery
Buyer holds identifying information about vendor	No	Yes	No	Likely
Vendor holds identifying information about buyer	No	Yes	Maybe	Likely
Access to history to establish/maintain trust	No	Maybe	Yes	Maybe
Third party system designed for dispute resolution	No	No	Yes	No

# Is Telegram the new Darknet?

*“Telegram marketplaces are easier to use. However, for this ease of use users compromise by not having access to systems that can protect both buyer and seller in the ordering process, which Darknet marketplaces do have.”*



# Apps + cryptomarkets?

## Multichannel marketing

*interacting with customers using a combination of indirect and direct communication channels*



## Cryptomarket vendors are:

### Offering messaging apps as alternative trading platform

- Convenience+ (especially when vendor/buyer reln already established)
- Discounts offered (commission to cryptomarket not needed)

# Apps + cryptomarkets?

## “Darknet social dealing”

*the practice of purchasing drugs for resale via apps to social networks*

“I'm rather talented with computers and managed to find my way onto the darknet markets pretty easily, where the quality and the price was incredible, and super easy to make a profit off of. So I started buying off the darknet, and selling to friends, in which case using messaging apps came in very handy, especially with the secure/disappearing nature of them.”

# Telegram CEO arrested over probe into child porn, drug trafficking on app

By Layli Foroudi and Tassilo Hummel

August 27, 2024 6:55 AM GMT+10 · Updated a day ago





# Further reading & acknowledgements

Patrick Shortis, Judith Aldridge, Leah Moyle, Andrew Childs, Ross Coomber, Francois Lamy, Robin van der Sanden

- Barratt, M. J., & Aldridge, J. (2016). Everything you always wanted to know about drug cryptomarkets\* (\*but were afraid to ask). *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 35, 1–6.
- Aldridge, J., et al. (2018). Will growth in cryptomarket drug buying increase the harms of illicit drugs? *Addiction*, 113, 789–796.
- Moyle, L., et al. (2019). #Drugsforsale: An exploration of the use of social media and encrypted messaging apps to supply and access drugs. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 63, 101–110.
- Shortis, P., et al. (2020). Drug cryptomarket futures: Structure, function and evolution in response to law enforcement actions. In D. Bewley-Taylor & C. Hallam (Eds.), *Research Handbook on International Drug Policy*, (pp. 355–380). Edward Elgar. doi: 10.4337/9781788117067.00031
- van der Sanden, R., et al. (2021). Predictors of using social media to purchase drugs in New Zealand: Findings from a large-scale online survey. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 98, Article #103430
- Barratt, M. J., et al. (2022). Exploring Televend, an innovative combination of cryptomarket and messaging app technologies for trading prohibited drugs. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 231, Article #109243.
- van der Sanden, R., et al. (2023). Social supply and the potential for harm reduction in social media drug markets. *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 50, 381–401.