

CASE STUDIES

HUMAN
TRAFFICKINGNatural
Language
ProcessingNetwork
AnalysisDeep
Learning

Human trafficking is the trade of human beings for sexual slavery, forced labour or any other activity the victims are coerced to carry out against their will. Traffickers have traditionally proved very difficult to apprehend, partially due to the often international component of the networks, which make displaced victims even more vulnerable when moved across borders.

PROBLEM

To help fight this crime, we partnered with a Law Enforcement Agency in Central America. It is worth noting that the retail component of human trafficking means that **human ads are made publicly available** on social media, chats, web pages, etc. to first, **poach victims**, and second, to **facilitate purchases**.

With this in mind, we devised a **3-stage approach**: initially, we wanted to identify what type of online postings were created to **deceive and capture victims**, secondly, isolate the types of ads and users **offering the victims for purchase**, therefore distinguishing genuine sex ads from actual trafficked humans. Thirdly, we wanted to detect whether different "ad publishers" interacted with each other to ascertain if there were indicators that they may **belong to the same trafficking ring**.



HOW WE HELPED

Initially, Natural Language Processing analysis allowed us to identify patterns in ads posted for non-sex jobs (e.g. working in an office) that were geared towards attracting victims, in the same way that in the second phase we searched for specific types of descriptions or listings of what the person allegedly does. **Giving specifics in the open goes against public interest in this case, but we can provide them upon request for legitimate reasons.**

The retail component of human trafficking means that human ads are made publicly available both to poach victims and to facilitate purchases.

Simultaneously, investigating outwards from individual traffickers the authorities had already singled out, we used **social network analysis to surface connections** between the user profiles that posted listings in different cities and even neighbouring countries.

SOLUTION

By mapping out their interactions, we found out that a number of very similar handles were recurrent posters and, after cross-checking those posts with the types of questionable messages we had isolated in the previous phase, **we were able to submit to the authorities a list of potential members of trafficking rings.**

