

Dealers in Disguise:

The virtualisation of retail level drugs markets

Judith Aldridge (University of Manchester)

Majid Yar (University of Hull)

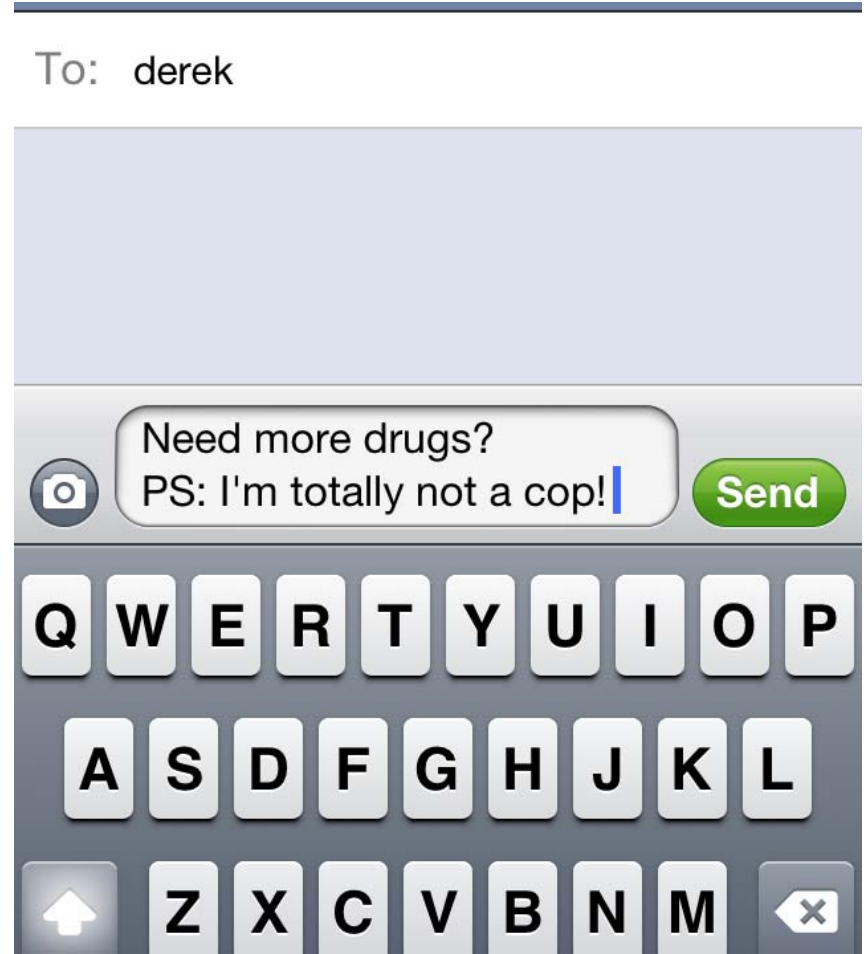
The argument

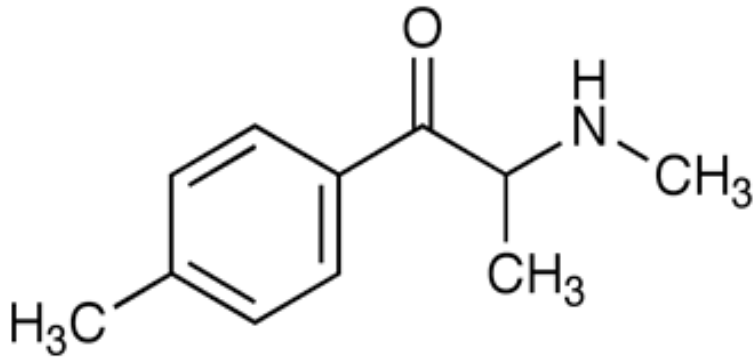


Open drugs markets



Closed drugs market





Mephedrone: *Mcat, Meph, Drone, Meow*

The sales and purchasing of mephedrone in the year prior to criminalisation

'Plant Food' 'Mcat'

Advertised high purity, cost £10-15g

Dose 100-200mg, 1-2g per session

Rapid spread 2009 festival season;
then 1st year university students in
halls



+



=



China

Eastern Europe

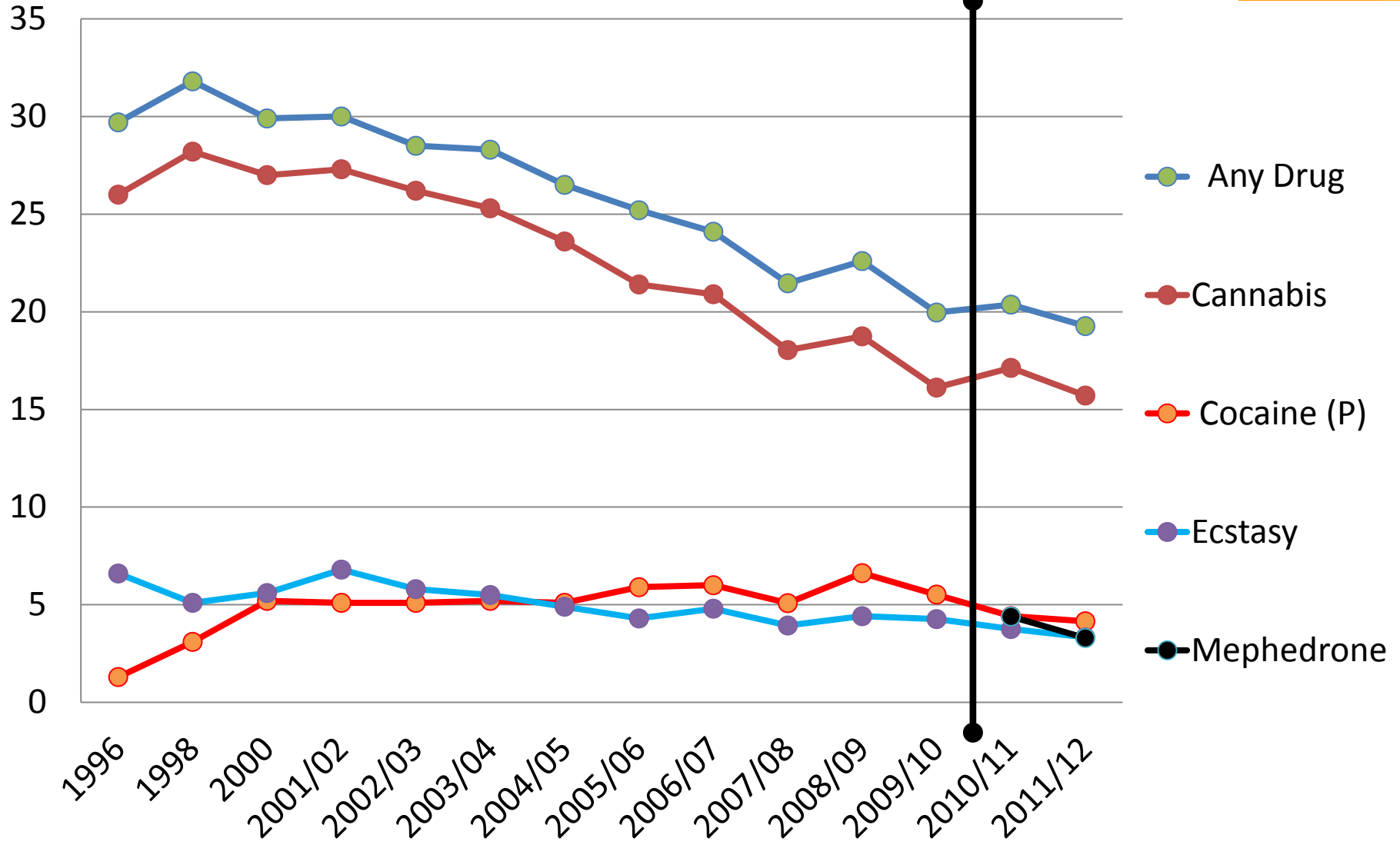
India



Mephedrone effects

- Desired : euphoria, increased energy, alertness, empathy, wellbeing, 'rushing', confidence, increased libido, improved mood, talkativeness
- Undesired : nausea/vomiting, headaches, teeth grinding, skin rashes, excessive sweating, anxiety/panic attacks, hallucinations, insomnia, psychosis, racing heartbeat, chest pains, vasoconstriction, nose burns

% of 16 to 24 year olds reporting past year use of the drugs 1996 to 2011/12 Crime Survey for England and Wales (formerly BCS)



Mephedrone 'dealers' in student halls of residence: why?



Mephedrone markets research: results

(Aldridge & Askew early 2010)

- Who were the sellers?
- Entrepreneurialism, diffusion, demand
- Early signs of:
 - A return to ‘open’ drugs markets
 - ‘Virtual’ drugs markets

Types of seller



	<i>Age</i>	<i>User</i>	<i>Illegal drugs sold</i>	<i>Weekly sales (g)</i>	<i>Price sold (g)</i>
<i>LEGITIMATE TRADERS</i>					
<i>Online</i>					
Ed	25	Yes	no	3000	£15
Dave	32	Yes	no	160,000	£11
Kieran	36	Yes	no	140	£15
<i>Specialist shops</i>					
Ben	30	Yes	no	400	£20
Guy	38	Yes	no	50	£20
<i>SHADOW TRADERS</i>					
<i>High volume (100g+ weekly)</i>					
Nick	27	Yes	yes	500	£15
Ryan	22	Yes	yes	220	£10
Marissa	21	Yes	yes	500	£15
<i>Low volume (< 100g weekly)</i>					
Leon	21	Yes	Yes	30	£15
Ricky	24	Yes	No	50	£30
Rachel	37	Yes	No	15	£15
Paul	18	Yes	Yes	7	£20
<i>Opportunistic sellers</i>					
Gabrielle	20	Yes	No	-	£40
Scarlett	20	Yes	Yes	-	£15
<i>Under-the-counter in shops</i>					
The Newsagent	50	No	Yes	170	£15
The Poundshop	61	No	No	50	£15

Entrepreneurialism & diffusion

The 'Re-opening' of drugs markets

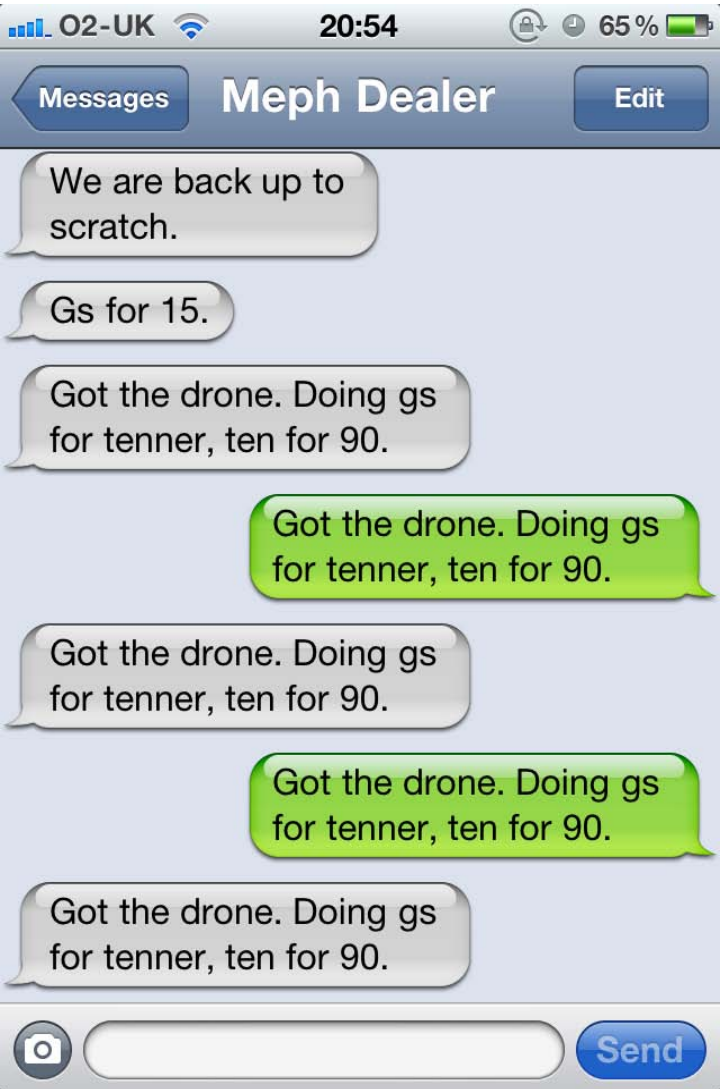
Right here, right now: Mcat parties



Helping sellers stay awake??



SMS: adverts v hassle



New sellers: diffusion

	Mean £	Mean £/g
1 g	11.04	11.04
2 g	19.50	9.75
5 g	47.06	9.41
10 g	82.81	8.28
20 g	156.04	7.80
25 g	180.12	7.20
50 g	327.95	6.56
100 g	591.42	5.91
200 g	1039.16	5.20
250 g	1189.99	4.76
500 g	1599.99	3.20
1000 g	3057.14	3.06

Diffusion

- Mephedrone deaths:
 - good news for sales??

UK News

Police investigate deaths of two teens linked to mephedrone

A legal drug linked to the deaths of two teenage friends should be banned immediately, campaigners have said.



Nicholas Smith, 19 and Louis Wainwright, 18 died after a night out. Police linked their deaths to the legal drug mephedrone Photo: PA



By Nick Britten, and Tom Whitehead 5:36PM GMT 16 Mar 2010

What features of the (legal) mephedrone trade encouraged me to think about the virtualisation of drugs markets?

- Online sales
 - ‘First’ for a strong stimulant (and popular) drug
 - Online sales of large quantities at cheap prices encouraged new sellers into the market
- Move from closed to open markets
 - Extending customer base *proactively*
 - Mephedrone parties
 - Flyering (windscreens) and business cards (buses) coincided with the period of mephedrone’s biggest use

Dealers in Disguise: The Virtualisation of Retail Drugs Markets

1. Mobile phones and SMS text (but still mostly closed)
2. Websites: B2C and 'darknets' (e.g. *Silk Road*)
3. Social networking (*Twitter, Facebook*, online classifieds)
4. Internet forums (*Topix*)
5. Geo-social networking (*grindr*)

Authors: Judith Aldridge & Majid Yar (in preparation)

Darknets: Silk Road

arXiv.org > cs > arXiv:1207.7139

Search of

Computer Science > Computers and Society

Traveling the Silk Road: A measurement analysis of a large anonymous online marketplace

Nicolas Christin

(Submitted on 31 Jul 2012)

We perform a comprehensive measurement analysis of Silk Road, an anonymous, international online marketplace that operates as a Tor hidden service and uses Bitcoin as its exchange currency. We gather and analyze data over eight months between the end of 2011 and 2012, including daily crawls of the marketplace for nearly six months in 2012. We obtain a detailed picture of the type of goods being sold on Silk Road, and of the revenues made both by sellers and Silk Road operators. Through examining over 24,400 separate items sold on the site, we show that Silk Road is overwhelmingly used as a market for controlled substances and narcotics. A relatively small "core" of about 60 sellers has been present throughout our measurement interval, while the majority of sellers leaves (or goes "underground") within a couple of weeks of their first appearance. We evaluate the total revenue made by all sellers to approximately USD 1.9 million per month; this corresponds to about USD 143,000 per month in commissions perceived by the Silk Road operators. We further show that the marketplace has been operating steadily, with daily sales and number of sellers overall increasing over the past few months. We discuss economic and policy implications of our analysis and results, including ethical considerations for future research in this area.

Comments: 24 pages, 13 figures, 4 tables

Subjects: Computers and Society (cs.GD); Cryptography and Security (cs.CR)

Silk Road marketplace

Welcome! | Silk Road

messages 0 | orders 0 | account \$1.83

Search Go

Shop by Category

- Drugs 3,912
 - Cannabis 739
 - Dissociatives 108
 - Ecstasy 350
 - Opioids 217
 - Other 254
 - Precursors 21
 - Prescription 857
 - Psychedelics 725
 - Stimulants 448
- Apparel 161
- Art 6
- Books 882
- Collectibles 5
- Computer equipment 28
- Custom Orders 47
- Digital goods 380
- Drug paraphernalia 134
- Electronics 37
- Erotica 428
- Fireworks 2
- Food 3
- Forgeries 71
- Hardware 3
- Herbs & Supplements 1
- Home & Garden 7

25I-NBOME - 1g
\$31.04

Swisher Sweets - Sweet - Cigarillo singles
\$0.06

5 X Adderall XR 15 MG (Real Prescription Adderall)
\$7.37

5x Bomb 250-260mg
\$8.15

0.5g (500mg) MXE (Methoxetamine) PURE
\$1.84













5 gram MDMA crystals**Highest grade
\$16.04

ZOLPIDEM 10mg (Ambien): 400 pills
\$24.92

10 x LSD Albert Hofmann ☆ 120-150µ
\$25.59

News

- Closing the Armory
- A brand new look for Silk Road!
- The gift that keeps on giving
- Who's your favorite?
- Acknowledging Heroes



Bitcoin purchase: MT.GOX

The screenshot displays the MT.GOX trading platform interface. At the top, a dark grey bar shows market data: Last price: £6.67973, High: £6.79057, Low: £6.47780, Volume: 716 BTC, and Weighted Avg: £6.63842. Below this, the MT.GOX logo is on the left, and account information is on the right: Account Number: 161003, Open orders: 0, and a user profile icon. A 'Sign out' button is also present. A red ribbon with 'HELP' is on the far right. A navigation bar contains links for HOME, TRADE, MERCHANT TOOLS, SECURITY CENTER, SETTINGS, and FAQ, along with social media icons for Facebook and a '+1' button.

Buy & Sell

TRADE

FUNDING OPTIONS
ACCOUNT HISTORY
CHECKOUT BUTTON

Buy bitcoins | **Sell bitcoins** | 0.6% | **0%** | 0.55%

Market Order (Buy/Sell At Market Price)

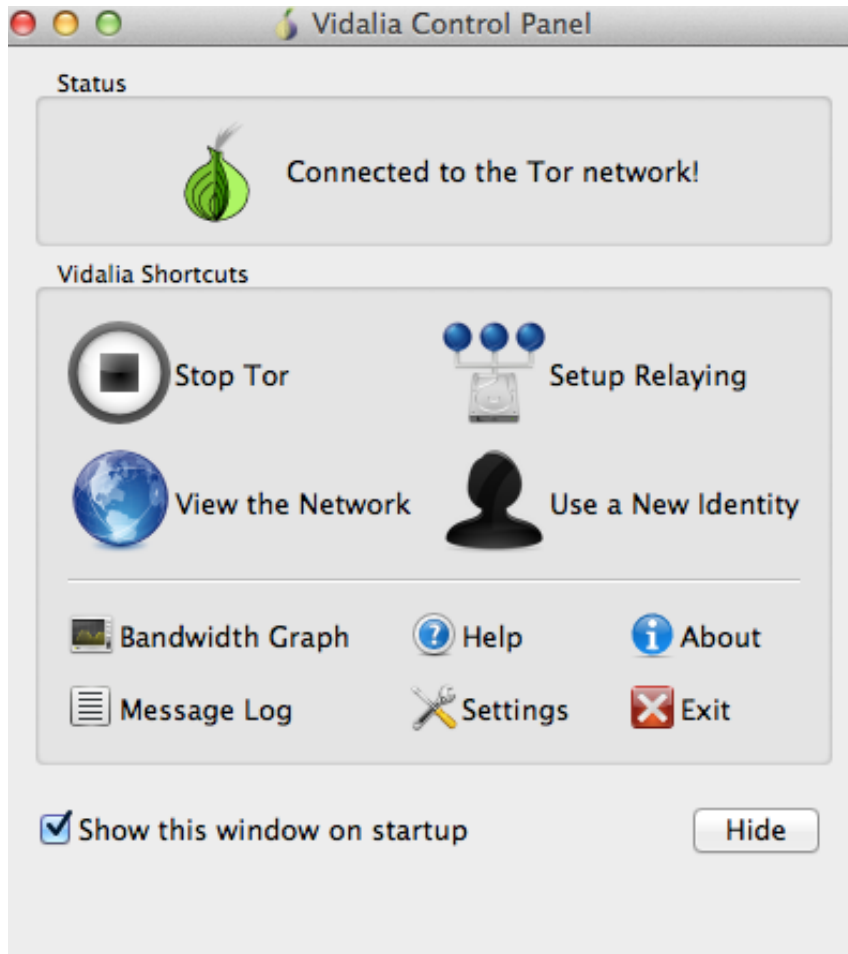
GBP in your account: £0.00016 (add more) | **Lowest Ask Price:** £6.79000

Amount of BTC to BUY | **Price per coin in GBP** | **Total to spend in GBP**

Enter amount X 6.79 = 0

BUY BITCOINS

Tor Browser: enables online anonymity



Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View his

Tor (anonymity network)

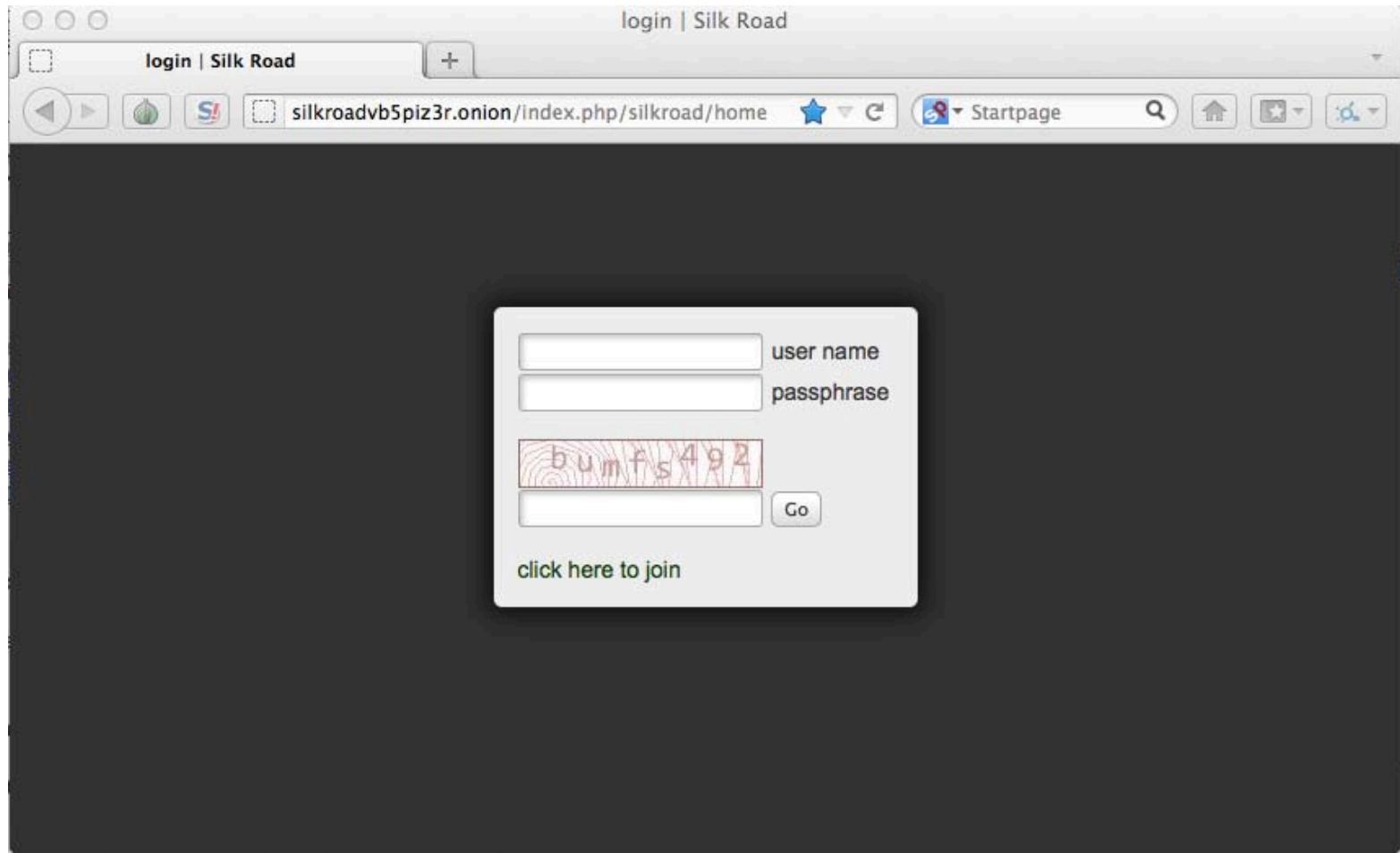
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Tor (short for **The Onion Router**)^[5] is a system intended to enable [online anonymity](#). Tor client software directs internet traffic through a worldwide volunteer network of servers to conceal a user's location or usage from anyone conducting [network surveillance](#) or [traffic analysis](#). Using Tor makes it more difficult to trace Internet activity, including "visits to Web sites, online posts, instant messages and other communication forms", back to the user^[6] and is intended to protect users' personal freedom, privacy, and ability to conduct confidential business by keeping their internet activities from being monitored.

"[Onion Routing](#)" refers to the layered nature of the encryption service: The original data are encrypted and re-encrypted multiple times, then sent through successive Tor relays, each one of which decrypts a "layer" of encryption before passing the data on to the next relay and, ultimately, its destination. This reduces the possibility of the original data being unscrambled or understood in transit.^[7]

The Tor client is [free software](#) and use of the Tor network is free of charge.

Silk Road login page



Silk Road marketplace

Welcome! | Silk Road

messages 0 | orders 0 | account \$1.83

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- Acknowledging Heroes



Like ebay: customer feedback



bookmark this item

postage options:

Worldwide tracked (\$0.65) ?

Description

For sale we have 10 x Orange Star Very high MDMA content 180mg. These are one of the best pills around at the moment.

This item will be shipped the next day for free using a tracked service in secure packaging.

Please view our info page for more info including our reship/refund policy.

Unfortunately we cannot ship to Australia at this time.

Any questions dont hesitate to send us a message here and we will get back to you asap.

All payments will be through silk road using bitcoins.

Customer reviews

rating	review	freshness
5 of 5	Received after extension. All pills intact, bubble wrapped, no vac seal but sent stealth with printed labels. Will update once tried.	5 days
5 of 5	Arrived swiftly and safely. Excellent pills, very powerful!	9 days
5 of 5	Super quick delivery, and excellent quality.	15 days
5 of 5	Excellent product, thank you	15 days
5 of 5	All good. Quick turn around, decent packaging, excellent product.	22 days

Christin (2012)

Origin		Acceptable destinations	
Country	Pct.	Country/Region	Pct.
U.S.A.	43.86%	Worldwide	49.70%
Undeclared	16.28%	U.S.A.	35.13%
U.K.	10.14%	European Union	6.19%
Netherlands	6.51%	Canada	6.04%
Canada	5.91%	U.K.	3.65%
Germany	4.50%	Australia	2.87%
Australia	3.19%	World. excpt. U.S.A.	1.39%
India	1.22%	Germany	1.03%
Italy	1.02%	Norway	0.70%
China	0.97%	Switzerland	0.61%
Spain	0.93%	New Zealand	0.57%
France	0.82%	Undeclared	0.26%

Table 2: **Top 12 most frequent shipping origins (left), and acceptable shipping destinations (right).** Certain sellers ship to multiple destinations, hence the rightmost column totals more than 100%.

B2C (ordinary online shops)


- Online retailers of ‘legals highs’
 - Bring new dealers into the market after first personal-use purchase
- ‘Virtual pharmacies’
 - Allows customers without a valid prescription to make purchases
 - Global aspect allows buyers and sellers to skirt local regulations on sales of particular drugs
 - E.g. some drugs only licensed in some countries

Social networking

- Facebook was used for selling mephedrone
 - Currently ‘benzo fury’ (popular ‘legal’)
- Twitter
 - Linked to online classifieds

Facebook: storefront page for 'benzo fury' sales (legal)

facebook Judith



Benzo Fury

Friend request sent | Suggest friends | Message

Lives in Manchester, United Kingdom
From Manchester, United Kingdom

About | Friends 14 | Photos | Map | Likes 6

Do you know Benzo? If you know Benzo, send him a message.

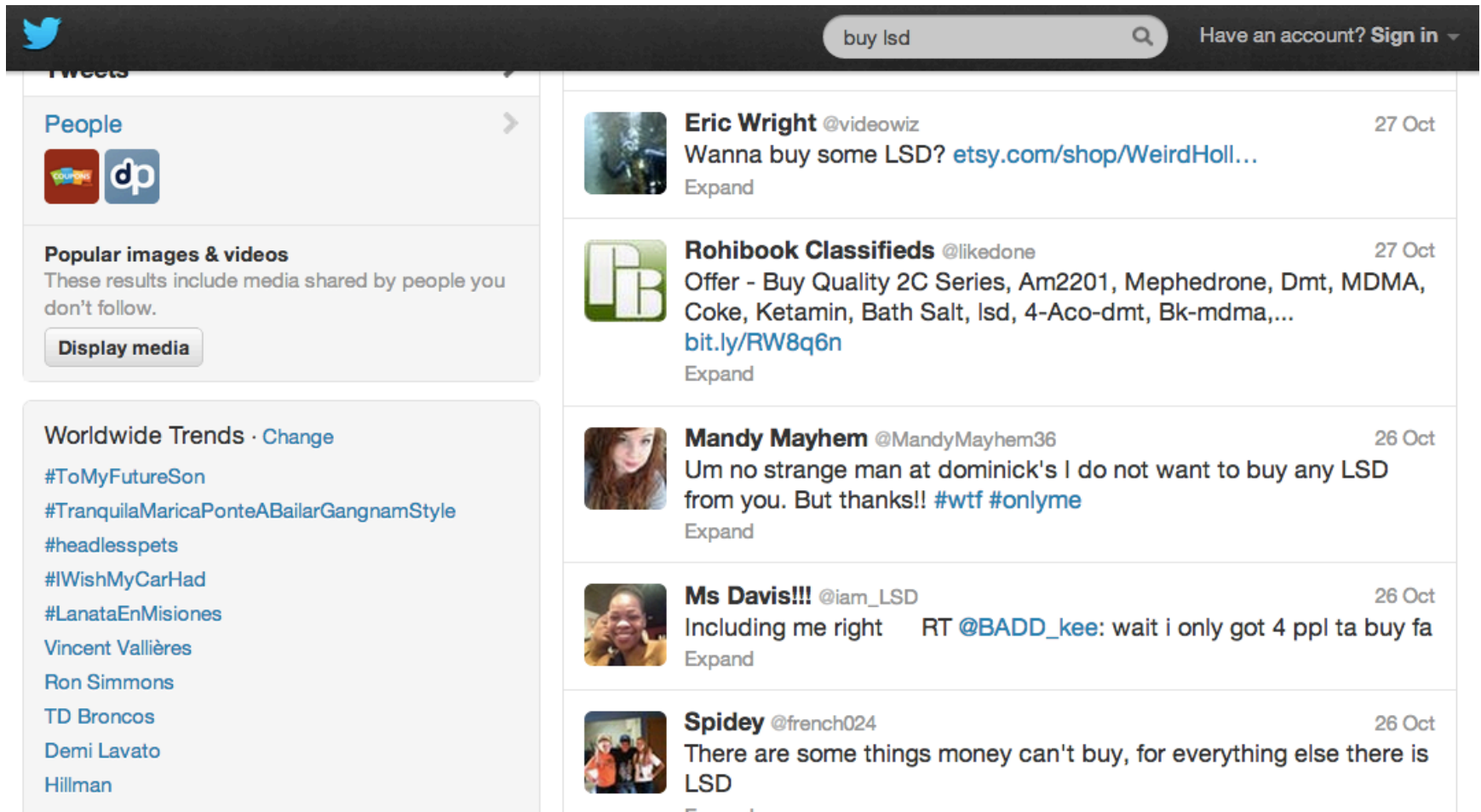
Info

About **1** Representing a online RC company that is new to the market, and simply looking to build a client base on delivering quality Benzo Fury that will keep you coming back again in the future, the ethos of the business is as simple as that - www.benzo-fury.me
We have a opening special going live now...
Please consider us.
Please Wish us luck, will plan to keep everyone posted on our early steps to hopefully a successful relationship...
Lives in Manchester, United Kingdom

Friends See All



Twitter search 'buy LSD'



The image shows a screenshot of a Twitter search results page for the query "buy LSD". The page layout includes a top navigation bar with the Twitter logo, a search bar containing "buy lsd", and a "Sign in" link. The main content area is divided into a left sidebar and a right main feed.

Left Sidebar:

- People:** A section with a right-pointing arrow, showing profile icons for "countrys" and "dp".
- Popular images & videos:** A section with the text "These results include media shared by people you don't follow." and a "Display media" button.
- Worldwide Trends · Change:** A list of trending hashtags and names: #ToMyFutureSon, #TranquilaMaricaPonteABailarGangnamStyle, #headlesspets, #IWishMyCarHad, #LanataEnMisiones, Vincent Vallières, Ron Simmons, TD Broncos, Demi Lavato, and Hillman.

Main Feed (Tweets):

- Tweet 1:** Eric Wright @videowiz (27 Oct). Text: "Wanna buy some LSD? etsy.com/shop/WeirdHoll..."
- Tweet 2:** Rohibook Classifieds @likedone (27 Oct). Text: "Offer - Buy Quality 2C Series, Am2201, Mephedrone, Dmt, MDMA, Coke, Ketamin, Bath Salt, lsd, 4-Aco-dmt, Bk-mdma,..."
- Tweet 3:** Mandy Mayhem @MandyMayhem36 (26 Oct). Text: "Um no strange man at dominick's I do not want to buy any LSD from you. But thanks!! #wtf #onlyme"
- Tweet 4:** Ms Davis!!! @iam_LSD (26 Oct). Text: "Including me right RT @BADD_kee: wait i only got 4 ppl ta buy fa"
- Tweet 5:** Spidey @french024 (26 Oct). Text: "There are some things money can't buy, for everything else there is LSD"

... link to online classified ad...

- http://soonclassified.com/health/beauty-products/buy-quality-2c-series-am2201-mephedrone-dmt-mdma-coke-ketamin-bath-salt-lsd-4-aco-dmt-bk-mdma-a-pvp-mdpv-etc-6344.htm?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter
- Also: craigslist

P2P Internet forums: 'Topix'

Comments

Showing posts 1 - 20 of 24

< prev page | [next page](#) >

Go to last page | Jump to page:



Wilmslow, UK

Nov 22, 2011

#1 | Judge it! | Report Abuse | Reply »

BUD CRONIC WEED IN MANCHESTER WILL [DROP OFF](#) ANYWHERE
call after 8pm



Manchester, UK

Nov 28, 2011

#2 | Judge it! | Report Abuse | Reply »

Will you do it for anyone, any age, as-long as they keep quiet? Get back to me quick.



Since: Jan 12

4

Oldham, UK

Jan 21, 2012

#3 | Judge it! | Report Abuse | Reply »

Hey are you still dropping off if you are let me know. my no is [XXXXXXXXXX](#). Call me and let me know what you have got. B the way i live in oldham, is that alright.



Manchester, UK

Mar 1, 2012

#5 | Judge it! | Report Abuse | Reply »

Is this legit?



Since: Nov 11

6

Crewe, UK

Mar 7, 2012

#6 | Judge it! | Report Abuse | Reply »

should be legit
no ones losing or coming to any harm so there no problem [in my eyes](#).
weed will be legal some day..



Manchester, UK

Mar 14, 2012

#7 | Judge it! | Report Abuse | Reply »

is this legit c... ..?



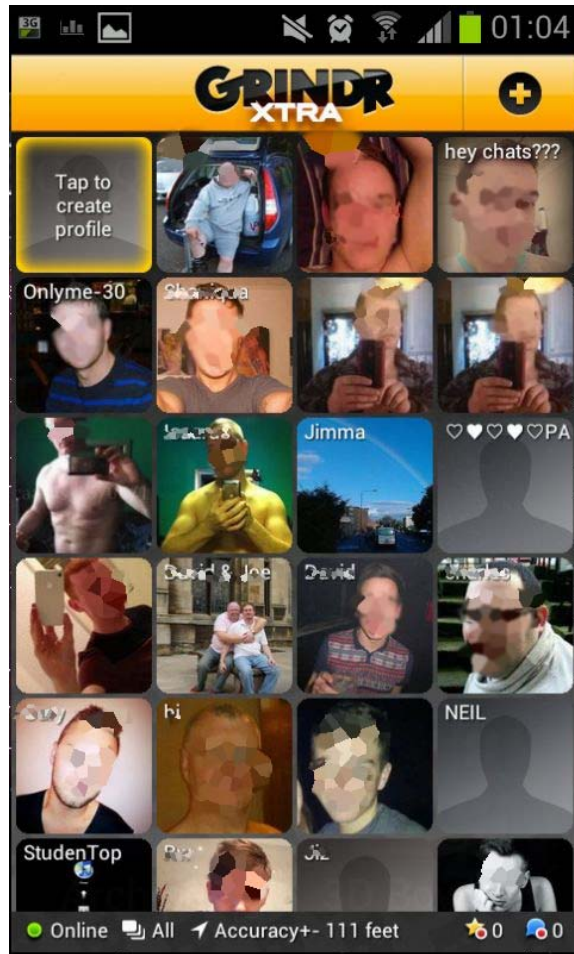
London, UK

Mar 17, 2012

#8 | Judge it! | Report Abuse | Reply »

I deliver oldham area and surroundings all day every day call anytime message me i will be on here regular.

P2P platforms: grindr



The argument



Contacts and Papers

1. 'Dealers in Disguise: The Virtualisation of Retail Drugs Markets'
 - Judith Aldridge (judith.aldridge@manchester.ac.uk)
 - Majid Yar (m.yar@hull.ac.uk)

2. 'The Year of the Cat': the UK Mephedrone Market in the Year Prior to Prohibition
 - Judith Aldridge
 - Rebecca Askew (Rebecca.Askew@manchester.ac.uk)