Executive Summary

Online Marketing of Illegal Drugs in Thailand 2024

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Introduction:

In the digital age, the distribution of illicit drugs and unregulated medications has rapidly shifted from physical storefronts (offline) to online platforms, particularly social media, where sellers can easily reach a broad target audience. This research aims to monitor, analyze, and evaluate trends in online drug marketing.

Objectives:

1. To monitor and analyze trends in illicit drug and unregulated medication marketing and related offenses on the internet.
2. To explore systematic approaches to online drug prevention.

Methodology:

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining participant observation, qualitative surveys, and quantitative surveys. Data collection was conducted from January to October 2024.

Key Findings:

The study identified 2,622 distinct online drug and unauthorized pharmaceutical sellers. Of these, 79.4% were narcotic drug sellers, with 61.1% being recurring or previously known sellers. Sellers were found in 53 provinces, with the highest concentrations in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Chonburi, Pathum Thani, and Nonthaburi.
Twitter was the most commonly used platform (84.8%), followed by Facebook (11.0%).
In terms of product categories, central nervous system stimulants were the most prevalent (75.3%)—including crystal methamphetamine, methamphetamine pills, ecstasy, and cocaine. This was followed by depressants (13.0%) such as heroin, methadone, and LSD; mixed substances (6.9%) including products like "collagen," "happy water," intoxicating candies, and infused coffees; and new psychoactive substances (16.0%) such as ketamine, hallucinogenic mushrooms, 2CB, and Egyptian blue lotus.

The estimated total number of sellers in 2024 was approximately 80,637 accounts, equivalent to 1,642 per one million social media users.

A total of 11,046 drug-related posts were collected. Most posts (98.1%) aimed to build customer relationships and enhance product awareness through visuals and textual descriptions of drug types, symptoms, methods of use, and paraphernalia. About 59.6% of posts focused on encouraging purchases by providing sales procedures, delivery methods, and pricing. Common marketing strategies included giveaways, free shipping, discounts, and quality guarantees. LINE was the most frequently used channel for conducting transactions, more so than direct messaging on social media platforms or phone calls. Bank transfers were the preferred method of payment, surpassing cash-on-delivery and electronic wallets.

Thaikla, K. (2024). Drug marketing and sales on the internet in 2024 [in Thai]. Bangkok: Office of the Narcotics Control Board.

Compared to previous years, prices for some substances (e.g., methamphetamine pills, ketamine, heroin, hallucinogenic mushrooms, cocaine) increased, while others (e.g., crystal meth, LSD, 2CB) decreased.

Recommendations:

To establish sustainable and effective prevention measures, we recommend:
- **Strengthening multi-sectoral collaboration** and building robust cooperative networks for monitoring and managing digital offenses.
- **Leveraging technology** for prevention, tracking, monitoring, and analyzing online drug sales trends.
- **Creating a safe digital ecosystem** and promoting the use of tools and applications for identifying and tracking offenders.
- **Promoting education and awareness** about drugs, methods of avoidance, and self-protection against online drug access.
- **Fostering safe online communities** to prevent at-risk groups from accessing drug-related information or engaging in transactions.

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