



OPERATIONAL AND INVESTIGATIVE MEASURES CONDUCTED TO IDENTIFY CRIMES OF ILLEGAL TRAFFICKING OF NARCOTIC DRUGS AND PSYCHOTROPIC SUBSTANCES COMMITTED THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKS

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Abstract: The article analyzes the role and importance of operational-investigative activities in identifying crimes related to the illegal trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances committed through social networks. It highlights the specific features of drug crimes carried out using digital technologies, anonymity tools, cryptocurrencies, "dead drop" schemes, and secure online channels. The article covers the types of operational-investigative measures, their capabilities in gathering initial data, detecting electronic traces in the Internet environment, monitoring encrypted communication channels, and the effectiveness of using international cooperation mechanisms and operational-technical methods. Additionally, the necessity of integrating cybersecurity, forensics, and operational activities in exposing illegal activities on social networks is scientifically substantiated. The results of the analysis provide practical recommendations for law enforcement practice.

Keywords: operational-investigative activities, social networks, online drug trafficking, narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, electronic traces, anonymity, cryptocurrency, "dead drop" schemes, encrypted channels, cybercrime, monitoring, international cooperation, digital evidence.

As we know, narcotic drugs are substances of synthetic or natural origin, preparations and plants containing narcotic substances that are included in the list of narcotic drugs and subject to control in the Republic of Uzbekistan, while psychotropic substances are substances of synthetic or natural origin included in the list of psychotropic substances and subject to control in the Republic of Uzbekistan[1].

With the development of information technologies and their widespread use on the Internet, digital platforms are increasingly being used to carry out covert activities, including the sale of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Examples include Instagram, Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp, mail.com, and other similar social networks. These messaging platforms create new opportunities for individuals intending to commit crimes, and also provide convenient means of communication, advertising, and selling prohibited materials. However, it would not be incorrect to say that government agencies are somewhat "hamstrung" in monitoring them, being aware of correspondence conducted through them, and taking measures to identify and prevent crimes committed through social networks.

A growing trend in the global community is the distribution through synthetic and digital channels. The UNODC's World Drug Report 2023 notes that synthetic substances (such as ATS, methamphetamine, and fentanyl) and their seizures have increased compared to previous years, with online channels playing a stronger role in this[2].

With the development of methods for identifying perpetrators of drug trafficking and the sale of psychotropic substances through the Internet by operational officers of internal affairs

bodies, various methods for concealing these crimes by persons engaged in criminal activity have recently begun to be developed and implemented. In particular, they use anonymity tools to conceal their identity: these include VPN networks, TORs, and SSH tunnels. For example, the TOR network allows hiding the IP address by redirecting internet traffic through anonymous proxy servers, which allows for the preservation of the user's anonymity[3].

In recent years, the drug market in Uzbekistan has largely shifted to the Telegram messenger, which is explained by its ease of use, popularity, and guaranteed anonymity. Telegram has open and closed channels (chats, bots) that provide users with the following information:

- information on narcotic drugs and their effects;
- information on methods of manufacturing and production of narcotic drugs;
- information on the methods of acquiring equipment for the consumption or production of narcotic drugs;
- information on training on obtaining profit from the sale of narcotic drugs;
- information and other information promoting the ideas of legalization of narcotic drugs.

Crimes related to the trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances on social networks can be divided into digital traces left by the criminal through the use of the Internet, mobile and computer devices. The definition of a digital track was first given by E.R. Rossinskaya, and "digital tracks" are computer information of forensic significance about events or actions that are reflected in the process of their appearance, processing, storage, and transmission in the material environment"[4]. Such tracks include IP addresses, bookmarks containing drugs, and photos of hidden places on a mobile device, correspondence in messengers with members of a criminal group or an online store bot, subscriptions to thematic Telegram channels used as a platform for hosting an online store, an account registered on the online store website, screenshots of money transfers, information about payment transactions in electronic wallets, etc.

Exposure of illegal trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances using the Internet is carried out through a complex of operational-search measures and investigative actions, most of which are carried out in accordance with the requirements of criminal procedure legislation, as well as in accordance with the rules of forensic tactics. Preliminary verification of reports of illicit drug trafficking using the Internet is carried out mainly during operational-search activities.

Results of international practices and operations demonstrate the necessity for digital cooperation. Transnational operations conducted by Interpol show that international information exchange and financial analysis are of great importance for achieving results in crimes related to cyber activities[5].

Operational-search activity is a type of activity carried out by operational units of state bodies specially authorized by the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Operational-Search Activities" dated December 25, 2012 No. 3PY-344 through the conduct of operational-search measures[6].

The detection of crimes related to the illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances committed through social networks directly depends on the timely receipt of operationally significant information. Based on the verification results of this information, law

enforcement officers can subsequently organize and conduct necessary operational-search measures to collect and form evidence, and use it as proof in criminal proceedings[7].

A.V. Shebalin[8], in his scientific work devoted to the peculiarities of the preliminary verification stage of materials on illegal trafficking of narcotic drugs committed through contactless means, expresses the opinion that the effectiveness of solving these crimes "through investigation" is low. This is because the means of proof used by investigators in investigative actions are overt, while operational-search measures can be carried out covertly. The investigator's knowledge of the algorithms used by operational officers for documenting operational-search measures allows them to visualize a clear picture of the evidence formation process and thereby increase the effectiveness of investigating such crimes.

Preliminary information on crimes related to illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances committed through social networks is submitted to the Internal Affairs bodies:

- from citizens who reported or complained about a crime in person, by phone, or online;
- from persons assisting in operational-search activities (previously convicted individuals, online drug buyers, relatives and acquaintances of persons engaged in illegal drug trafficking);
- notification from medical institution employees about the admission of a person suffering from drug or psychotropic substance overdose;
- from other law enforcement officers;
- Information provided by persons detained for committing a crime about the source of acquisition of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances;
- in the process of analyzing Internet resources containing information on the sale or promotion of narcotic drugs.

Additionally, operational unit personnel can obtain the following information through operational routes and personal tracking:

- about persons involved in the illegal circulation of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances through social networks;
- Internet resources with advertising on the sale or promotion of the sale of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances through social networks;
- channels of receipt of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances through social networks, places of their storage, production and sale; methods of payment for the purchase of narcotic drugs;
- The location of objects and documents that can later be used as evidence on social networks.

It is also possible to identify the first persons involved in the sale of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances by conducting operational-search activities, which are the main tools of operational unit personnel in this regard, by listening to conversations conducted through telephones and other telecommunication devices, obtaining information transmitted through them, and obtaining information about connections between subscribers or subscriber devices. Because these measures directly serve to expose the crimes being investigated by us.

eavesdropping of conversations conducted via telephones and other telecommunication devices, obtaining information transmitted through them - a measure consisting of covert

eavesdropping, interception, and recording of conversations conducted using special technical means, including transmitted textual, graphic, and multimedia information;

obtaining information about connections between subscribers or subscriber devices - this is an event consisting in the non-disclosure of information and other data on the date, time, duration of connections between subscribers or subscriber devices (equipment used) [9];

We will consider the transparent aspects of other measures aimed at exposing crimes related to the illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances committed through social networks.

When information about the place of sale and packaging of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances is received through social networks, operational officers can detain the person buying the narcotic and conduct a survey with him. As a result, it is possible to identify the following information that is important for conducting subsequent operational-search measures after the interrogated suspect:

When surveying couriers of online stores engaged in the sale and distribution of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances through social networks, it is recommended to ask the following questions:

- Did you know that you were engaged in the sale of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances? If not, how can you prove this?

- Do you use drugs or psychotropic substances, if so, under what circumstances and when did you start using them, what drugs do you use, in what quantities, and how often?

- What is your family and financial situation, why and how were you involved in the sale of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances, how long have you been engaged in the placement of "bills"?

- How much money do you receive for selling narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances, by what method, in cash or to your card, and if transferred to your card, from which accounts or bank cards will you receive money?

- is the sale of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances your main activity or an additional one?

- How did you learn about this vacancy and how did your "employment" process go?

- from which sources did you obtain narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances, with whom did you contact for the purpose of obtaining them, in which messenger were correspondence carried out, are there telephone numbers of operators, couriers, or others? If they only contacted you through online messengers, where and from what places do you usually get drugs or psychotropic substances?

- Are you aware of information about individuals at a higher level than you who are engaged in this vice, and about the accounts and groups in messengers belonging to them?

- Do you know an online store that sold narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances, and if so, on which website is the store located, what is the store's link or address called?

- Do you know the payment methods, specific electronic payment systems they use, or bank accounts?

- to whom and for how long were narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances sold, how was communication established with their buyers, and if it was established through social networks, when and through which messengers?

- Where did you organize the hidden places for the "bookmark," did you independently choose the place for the "bookmark," and if so, to whom else did you provide information about it, did you transfer the hidden places to them in the form of a photograph, or did you transfer the coordinates of the place in the form of a "location"?

- where and when were the last "bookmark" places created?

- Do you have other narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances, and if so, where, how, and in what quantity?

- Do you know their value? - and other questions.

A prompt and targeted survey provides us with the opportunity to carry out further operational-search activities. For example, a data collection operational-search measure allows you to determine whether the information provided by the "courier" as a result of the request is true or false, and to solve the tasks of operational-search activities, it is necessary to study documents, materials, databases, information systems, and information resources, as well as to obtain relevant information about individuals and legal entities, facts, and circumstances by sending requests. With the help of a data collection operational-search measure, we get to know this person more closely by knowing certain available information about him (for example, previous convictions, recommendations, etc.).

In addition, based on the information provided by him, we can try to clarify the identity of a person who did not introduce himself to him, but supplies drugs or psychotropic substances through various fictitious accounts, based on information that may remain in the memory of our object, using an operational-search measure to identify the identity of the person. in order to obtain more information about persons suspected of committing a crime and information of operational significance, we can organize and conduct an operational-search measure of observation, consisting of direct or indirect (using technical means) covert observation and recording of the actions, events, and processes of persons, as well as operational-search measures of controlled acquisition or controlled delivery, as a result of which we can conduct an operational-search measure and all operational-search measures specified in Article 14 of the Law on Operational-Search Activities, with the involvement of specialists with the necessary scientific, technical, and other special knowledge to study the objects, items, objects, and documents obtained, in order to expose crimes related to the illegal trafficking of narcotic drugs or

When solving crimes involving the illegal trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances committed through social networks, the implementation of operational-search measures is not permitted to restrict human rights and freedoms, torture or humiliation of human dignity, disclosure of correspondence, telephone conversations, postal, telegraph and other messages, as well as restriction of free choice of place and movement, housing and personal inviolability, except for cases stipulated by law.

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