

# The Underworld Wide Web

## Good things you can learn from bad people

by Andrew Trabulsi

**With her custom-made pink Kalashnikov strapped across her chest,** Claudia Ochoa Felix, aka the Kim Kardashian of organized crime, holds her iPhone up for a selfie. The alleged *sicaria* (hitwoman) and mother of three has thousands of followers, and Felix is happy to keep them entertained. Gaining infamy for an Instagram post featuring her young son blanketed in a pile of cash, Felix ensures the world sees only what she wants it to see. After all, it's not just part of her image; it's business. In a line of work dependent on the projection of power, criminals use social media to exude influence, intimidate rival gangs, and connect with their clients.

Through Twitter, Snapchat, and Telegram, narcotics kingpins and terrorists have become rock stars, establishing cult followings in an industry where identity is as important as violence. For these deviant actors, ambient communications technology not only bolsters their images in front of a mass-audience, it also facilitates intimate connections that can be used to raise funds, coordinate attacks, and target victims. Operational logistics, once orchestrated by terrorists over coffee tables in safe houses, can now take place over the Sony PlayStation network.

### Deviant Media for Fun and Profit

Deviant media confers legitimacy on criminal groups, terrorists, po-

litical activists, and insurgents by fetishizing illicit acts for an audience that considers them a form of reality entertainment. Tomorrow's mosaic of ambient communications tools will increasingly enhance the capacities of criminals. What today is done on social media will tomorrow take place with real-time streaming, personal drones, voice-commanded Internet of Things devices, and compromised intelligent agents.

Legitimate enterprises should take note of the way criminals come up with new ways to use communications technology. For example, in the same way a criminal organization might hack an Internet of Things system to identify the highest value and softest targets, thus enabling them to plan attacks and execute their strategies, a food manufacturing and processing company might access the purchasing decisions of a household through a smart refrigerator to help them decide which markets to enter, or which products to develop.

### Your Organization Can Learn From The Organization

Just like any organization, criminal enterprises need management principles and operational guidelines. Today, terrorist recruitment is initiated on social media and then moved to secure messaging applications like Telegram or Kik. Tomorrow, such activities could take place securely in an encrypted virtual or mixed-reality meeting space. Why go to the



Mexican Claudia Ochoa Felix, 29, is the alleged leader of a drug cartel hit squad called Los Ántrax, part of the violent Sinaloa Cartel. Thousands of people follow her on Instagram and Twitter, where she posts photos of a lavish lifestyle, often posing in a bikini and high heels.



trouble and expense of flying to Ankara and then getting smuggled into Syria, when radicalization and training can happen in a high-resolution metaverse?

The corporate world can follow suit. VoIP has already changed the nature of recruiting, allowing interviews to take place remotely. How will a mixed-reality world further change recruitment efforts? How might it change the way a sales team connects with clients?

Today, criminals use encryption applications like Telegram and PGP

**Through Twitter, Snapchat, and Telegram, narcotics kingpins and terrorists have become rockstars, establishing cult followings in an industry where identity is as important as violence and intimidation.**

to confound their enemies. Secure communications are just as important for hitwomen as saleswomen. Just like Claudia Ochoa Felix, it's important to have control over what information is public, and what is private.

The new world of ambient communications can be used to project power as well as design and carry out tactics and operations. Whether you're the *jefe* of a drug cartel, or a decision maker in a modern corporation, developing mastery of these technologies will be critical to organizational success in the future.