The New Abolitionist Information Community

Information Sources Review

Jessica Berger

San Jose State University
Abstract

Despite the illusion that we live in the land of the free, every country on Earth including the United States of America is tarnished by slavery (Bales & Trodd, 2013). This paper provides an analytical overview of two information sources written for the New Abolitionist Information Community (NAIC). The first citation by Anette Brunovskis and Rebecca Surtees is from the bi-monthly peer-reviewed academic journal International Migration. The second source is from the community-based Stop Enslavement web domain whose Stop Trafficking! Newsletter is published on a monthly basis. To secure funding and legislative buy-in, members of the NAIC value data that reliably communicates salient issues related to human trafficking. Additionally, this group requires heuristic information with which to guide rescue missions. Whereas the community-based resource provides a heuristic framework suitable for actionable intervention, the peer-reviewed article ameliorates research methodology concerning human trafficking, thereby potentiating greater legislative and economic support. Together, community-based and peer-reviewed information sources offer the promise of a free world in the future to those enslaved around the planet today. Nine-year-old Vivienne Harr freed 500 slaves with the money she earned running a lemonade stand. She stated, “I didn’t think of all the reasons why I couldn’t. I thought of all the reasons why I must” (Orenstein, 2015).

**Keywords**: human trafficking, child labor, modern slavery, information seeking
Introduction

Despite the illusion that we live in the land of the free, every country on Earth including the United States of America is tarnished by slavery (Bales & Trodd, 2013). The New Abolitionist Information Community (NAIC) is an international movement seeking to right this egregious wrong. With a variety of educational, ethnic, geographic, professional, and religious backgrounds, the NAIC is as diverse as it is forward thinking (U.S Department of Health & Human Services, 2015). Numerous agencies are successfully freeing people from bondage (http://www.freetheslaves.net/). Included in this group are the U.S. National Human Trafficking Resource Center, the NGO Free the Slaves, and the Interfaith Stop Enslavement anti-trafficking forum. The work to be done is staggering. Fortunately, myriad organizations share in the overarching mission of education, advocacy, policy change, survivor empowerment, and prevention of slavery. This paper will analyze two disparate information sources utilized by the NAIC. In the process, readers will discover how the unique content and formats of a community-based resource and a scholarly article serve their differing purposes in a most complementary fashion.

Valued information

To secure funding and legislative buy-in, members of the NAIC value data that reliably communicates the scope of the problem. Additionally, this group requires heuristic information to guide the liberation of trafficking victims. This type of information retrieval can be as dangerous as the rescue missions themselves. Literature critical of this community decries its definition of slavery as too broad, too vague, and generally overblown. To counter these claims, the NAIC prizes antislavery metadata that accurately articulates the evolving linguistics of human trafficking. Thus, it is imperative that the NAIC produces scholarly research utilizing scientifically verifiable methods. This group also seeks daily information via online blogs, forums, and RSS feeds about legislative updates and anti-trafficking victories (http://www.freetheslaves.net/). Finally, the NAIC especially appreciates any information that prevents human trafficking.

Peer-Reviewed Resource

The first resource to be examined is a research-based article from a peer-reviewed journal positioned months after the event within the information cycle. The APA citation for this piece follows below:

This article was published in the year 2010. With an impact factor of 0.679, *International Migration* is a bimonthly demographics journal published by Wiley-Blackwell. Brunovskis and Surtees cite fifty-two scholarly sources in addition to their own original research. Thus, the final product is a hybrid, sharing components of both primary and secondary information. The purpose of Brunovskis’ and Surtees’ research is to improve modern day slavery research design. They state:

…The solution is not entirely (or perhaps even primarily) about new methods. Rather, we would argue that it is as much about how we use current methods to greater effect and with careful attention to their limitations and ethical constraints (2010, p.3).

These findings will help their intended audience of NAIC scholars to improve future research practices and outcomes. With lives at stake, Brunovskis and Surtees (2010) expend supreme academic effort uncovering the bias inherent in creating primary information sources on the subject of human trafficking.

**Peer-reviewed resource: time frame, geography, and scope**

It took Brunovskis and Surtees less than one year between the research process and publication of their groundbreaking work. The intrepid duo travels through Albania, Moldova, Norway, Serbia and the Ukraine to conduct face-to-face interviews with individuals surviving through various stages along the trafficking continuum. The scope of this international journey includes people who are at-risk for enslavement, those who are violently trafficked, newly escaped slaves, and victims who have been liberated for several months. Brunovskis and Surtees (2010) also analyze the data gathering methods of their NAIC peers. From these combined studies, they found that their intended audience of contemporary antislavery scholars should ameliorate current research practices by accounting for “…methodological and ethical issues …when conducting research with trafficked persons – including unrepresentative samples, access to respondents, selection biases by ‘gatekeepers’ and self selection by potential respondents” (p.1).

**Peer-reviewed resource: value, credibility and limitations**

This article provides value to the NAIC by demonstrating how antislavery research itself can be traumatizing to those in recovery from trafficking. It also disproves the theory that frontline reports about slavery
are exaggerated. The researchers’ credentials loan extra authority to this study. Author Anette Brunovskis is affiliated with the Institute for Applied International Studies in Oslo, Norway; her co-author, Rebecca Surtees is a senior researcher at Nexus Institute. Their article was cited eleven times in the Web of Science. Providing even more clout to this article is its accomplished editor, Elzbieta Gozdzia of Georgetown University, whose authoritative “Data and research on human trafficking: a global survey” collocates the international findings of several peer reviewed journals. Since Brunovskis’ and Surtees’ primary research is conducted in Europe, their findings are necessarily biased towards a European framework. This could significantly limit the transferability of their results. Moreover, there is a gap in the data omitting information about labor trafficking victims.

Community based resource

Next, we’ll evaluate the second article, listed in APA style formatting below:


The Stop Trafficking! Newsletter is a monthly online community-based publication suitable for desktop printing, provided by the Stop Enslavement web domain whose intended audience, purpose, and use, is to:

…Serve as a forum for exchange among religious congregations and their collaborating organizations: to promote awareness of human trafficking, to exchange best practices in advocacy for and empowerment of survivors of human trafficking; and to recommend actions to counter human trafficking.
(http://www.stopenslavement.org/)

Community based resource: credibility, time frame and content

The online information community represented by this newsletter consists of more than one hundred convents, including the Sisters of Divine Providence. Showcasing their collective humility, the writers’ and publishers’ scholarly credentials cannot be evaluated since the newsletters’ creators are anonymous. However, the Stop Trafficking! Newsletter has been published without fail on a monthly basis since its “Inaugural Issue” in August of 2003. Its January 2015 issue promulgates online safety, referencing three online articles from the F.B.I. website. These homogenous citations range in age from a few months to three years old. The article describes how traffickers capture their victims by misusing metadata embedded in photos posted by minors online. Readers may be shocked to read about the grisly crimes committed against these innocents. Moreover, such stories serve to
redouble readers’ motivation to adopt the child safety tips provided by the *Stop Trafficking! Newsletter*. Reiterating information from the primary F.B.I. reports, this article is positioned as a secondary source in the information cycle.

**Community based resource: value, scope, and limitations**

This article is written for everyone who cares about preventing child enslavement and is biased towards the Catholic Sisterhood. Because the article’s scope and content redresses sex trafficking of minors using online technology, its international value will endure throughout the era during which social media and slavery coexist. Notably, the publication is available in both Spanish and English. This article adds value to the *NAIC* as a tool for the prevention of sex trafficking of children. A suggestion for further research would be to analyze the efficacy of these preventative measures through double blind studies. Like the peer-reviewed article, this resource omits information about child labor trafficking.

**Compare and Contrast**

Smallbone’s (2011) recapitulation of Halpern’s (2007) *question template* forms the basis for a comparative analysis of the aforementioned articles. Both pieces are clearly written with their target audiences in mind, allowing the reader to follow an argument through to its logical conclusion. The community-based article provides hands-on, practical methods for preventing the trafficking of children. However, it does not add to the body of scientific knowledge needed to secure greater anti-slavery funding. While the peer-reviewed article revealed barriers to unbiased data collection, its key weakness is its total lack of *immediately actionable* anti-slavery information. However, the peer reviewed article will indeed further the *NAIC*’s imperative to clearly articulate the scope of international slavery in order to foment global action. Perhaps these variations in utility hinge upon the articles’ intended audience and differing purposes. For instance, the scholarly writers cannot act as first-line liberators since such activity blurs the boundaries of their data-collecting role in the interview process.

**Conclusion**

A major difference between the community and peer-reviewed articles stems from the variability in their long and short-term goals. The community-based information source broadcasts un-vetted but useful information in real time. The mercurial nature of this asset makes it an unsuitable addition to the burgeoning archives of well-researched anti-slavery knowledge. The inability to verify the creators’ credentials redoubles this assertion. However, the community-based resource meets the critical goal of providing heuristic information to the *NAIC*. Conversely, while the peer-reviewed article did not deliver any anti-trafficking tips, its utility lies within its precise
data. This precision undergirds the evolving antislavery vocabulary in such a manner as to justify broader support for the movement. Modern day abolitionists have access to numerous blogs, listservs, newsletters, professional organizations and videos. Together, the community based and peer reviewed literature harmonize sweetly, offering the promise of a free world in the future to those enslaved today.

**Reflections**

This project challenged my beliefs about modern day slavery. I have been a participant in the *New Abolitionist Information Community* since 1999 and learned more from this assignment than I did over the course of the last ten years. Previously, I had envisioned the adoption of a multi-disciplinarian approach by the *NAIC*. I discovered that this is already happening. It was a pleasant surprise to be introduced to the worldwide, scholarly, and multi-talented community of Abolitionists. By practicing the search techniques in the modules, I unearthed a compendium of profession-specific continuing education modules aimed at helping trafficking victims, plus two encyclopedias covering the topic.

**Slavery linked to detention centers and international migration**

It was uplifting to obtain a panoramic view of the breadth and scope of the *NAIC*. However, a catastrophic concept emerged through this research, linking together international migration patterns, government detention centers, and human trafficking. Equally unsettling was the retrieval of modern day human trafficking maps. These depict today’s slave trade routes ensnaring the entire planet, laying bloody tracks across the world from Mumbai to Boston, Norway to Nepal, Europe to Africa and on and on anon. I discovered that slavery is entrenched in every industry imaginable. The research revealed that the issue of contemporary slavery is as complex and inscrutable as human nature itself. **On the bright side, every effort counts.** Nine-year-old Vivienne Harr freed 500 slaves with the money she earned running a lemonade stand. She stated, “I didn’t think of all the reasons why I couldn’t. I thought of all the reasons why I must” (Orenstein, 2015).
References


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