Centre for Digital Trust and Security

Seedcorn Final Report 22/23

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| Project Title: Modern slavery and digitisation in ‘fast fashion’ supply networks: the transparency dividend |
| Project Investigators: Jon Davies, Rose Broad, Amy Benstead |
| Project overview:The aim of this project is to assess the role and effectiveness of digital tools when tackling modern slavery in ‘fast fashion’ supply networks, which will benefit stakeholders within business to improve transparency, and those within regulation to better oversee business activity. Digital tools such as Blockchain, and real-time tracking of companies’ annual modern slavery transparency statements will develop understanding of how the transparency ‘dividend’ can be better understood and improved upon in the fast fashion sector. A mixed-methods approach will be adopted, including semi-structured interviews with professionals connected to the garment sector and/or digital platforms; a desktop analysis of companies’ transparency statements; along with a network analysis of key actors and challenges in the garment sector to assess key points of vulnerability and intervention. The project will contribute to improving ‘digital trust’ via a more thorough understanding of the nexus between digital tools, modern slavery, and supply network transparency. |
| Key findings:* Digital technology is poorly understood within industry and regulation, and is therefore applied in a limited, haphazard manner.
* Based on the above, tools such as Blockchain have potential to improve accountability in the industry but many businesses do not use it.
* A lack of commitment to improving accountability and tackle systemic problems like labour exploitation is a key reason behind the non-use of technological tools.
* Use of technology is not well embedded in modern slavery transparency statements – in many cases technology is not even referred to.
* Key recommendations are for manufacturing and its associated labour supply to be brought within the remit of the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) to improve the chances of oversight; also for government, industry, regulation, and the third sector to ramp up efforts to advise businesses on the benefits of using digital technology tools such as Blockchain and AI to monitor supply chain activity.
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| Outputs to date:Journal article is in development (see below). |
| Were all planned outcomes achieved?If not, how did you mitigate non-achievement?All key outcomes have either been achieved or are intended as follow-up activities. The empirical data collection was a success and write up and dissemination of key results and recommendations will continue into the 2023-24 year. |
| Planned activities post-project:1. Dissemination through presentations and conference attendance during 2023-24.
2. Write up a journal article to set out key findings and discuss implications – aim for submission in January 2024.
3. Develop a larger grant application working with colleagues from within and beyond UoM – aim for submission in June/July 2024.
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