

Using digital tools to protect anonymous whistleblowers world-wide

Background Information

An anonymous whistleblower is considered to be a person that informs someone in authority about an illegal or immoral activity without revealing their identity.

The term digital tool is used to label software, programs, applications, platforms, online and offline resources that can be used with digital devices such as computers or mobile devices.

Whistleblowers play a vital role in exposing corruption and misconduct in organizations and governments worldwide. However, speaking out against such wrongdoings often puts them at risk of retaliation, harassment, violence or lead to other issues in their private life. To protect whistleblowers, it is essential to provide them with secure and confidential means of communication and information sharing so it becomes impossible to track them and reveal their identity. Digital tools have become an essential tool in this regard, as they allow whistleblowers to share information while keeping their identities anonymous. Some digital tools used to protect whistleblowers are:

1. **Secure messaging apps:** These apps use end-to-end encryption to protect the communication between the whistleblower and the recipient of the information. This means that only the intended recipient of the message can read it, and that the message is protected even if it is intercepted by a third party. For example, Signal is a widely used messaging app that provides end-to-end encryption, and it's open source which allows experts to verify its security. WhatsApp and Telegram also offer end-to-end encryption, but they are closed-source which means that experts cannot verify the security of the encryption.

2. **Anonymous browsing:** Tools such as Tor and VPNs (Virtual Private Network) allow whistleblowers to access the internet anonymously and protect their IP address, location, and other personal information from being tracked. Tor is an open-source software that routes the internet traffic through a network of volunteer-run servers, encrypting the data and hiding the IP address of the user. VPNs encrypt the internet traffic, making it difficult for anyone to track the user's location or internet activity.

3. **Secure file sharing:** Platforms such as SecureDrop and GlobaLeaks allow whistleblowers to securely share documents and information with journalists and other organizations. These platforms use encryption and other security

measures to protect the anonymity of the whistleblower. SecureDrop is an open-source platform that is widely used by news organizations to receive information from whistleblowers. GlobaLeaks is another platform that allows whistleblowers to share information with multiple organizations at the same time.

4. Anonymous social media: Platforms such as Yik Yak and Whisper allow users to share information anonymously and without revealing their identity. These platforms are usually based on a location, and the users can share information and messages with people near their location. However, it's worth noting that these platforms have been criticized for their lack of security and privacy protection.

It is important to note that while these digital tools can provide a measure of protection, they are not foolproof. Whistleblowers should be aware that even with the use of these tools, their identity can still be revealed if they are not careful with the information they share or if they are targeted by a sophisticated attack. Therefore, it is important to combine the use of these tools.

Using digital tools to protect whistleblowers is crucial to support the fight against corruption and misconduct. These tools help to ensure the anonymity and security of whistleblowers, allowing them to share information without fear of retaliation.

UN involvement

The United Nations have recognized the importance of protecting whistleblowers in the fight against corruption and has established several mechanisms to support and protect them. For example, the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) which was adopted by the General Assembly in 2005, encourages states to protect whistleblowers, and it's considered as a global framework to combat corruption. The UN has also established the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) which works to promote the rule of law and fight against corruption, the office has a mandate to strengthen the legal frameworks to protect whistleblowers. Additionally, the UN Global Compact, a voluntary initiative launched by the UN in 2000, encourages companies to adopt sustainable and socially responsible policies, and one of its principles is to support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights and to make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

In conclusion, the UN recognizes the importance of protecting whistleblowers as a key element in the fight against corruption, and it has established various mechanisms and initiatives to support and protect them.

Questions to consider

1. What are the potential risks and limitations of using digital tools to protect whistleblowers?
2. What are some other measures that can be taken to protect whistleblowers in addition to digital tools?
3. Does your country have a clear opinion on this subject?
4. Has your country adopted any measures to protect anonymous whistleblowers?
5. If your country is a member of the European Union, what measures does the EU take regarding this topic?

Useful links and resources

<https://www.whistleblowers.org/what-is-the-european-whistleblower-directive/>

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/ft-uncac/focus-areas/whistleblower.html>

<https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/digital-tools/66587>

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/whistle-blower/>

<https://uncaccoalition.org/whistleblower-protection-implications-for-the-united-nations-and-the-uncac/>

<https://www.transparency.org/en/publications/whistleblower-protection-and-the-un-convention-against-corruption>

<https://www.mirrorfly.com/blog/best-secure-messaging-app/>

<https://securedrop.org>

<https://www.torproject.org>

<https://en.reset.org/globaleaks-providing-a-safe-space-for-whistleblowers/>