



D27 Debunking a ‘Snuff Film’ by Locating Its Source

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be briefed on an approach to systematically searching the web and digital databases to determine the provenance of digital data.

The examination of web-derived content is increasingly common in the evaluation of digital evidence. This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by providing one example of a systematic approach to determining the provenance of such data.

Hypothesis: There are multiple facets to the examination of image and video data; often examination of the content of the data is sufficient, but determination of the provenance may be of equal importance.

Methods: A putative snuff film was presented to a medical examiner office, and an evaluation was requested to determine if further investigation was required. Examination of the content of the video was performed which demonstrated it to be contrived. In addition, the provenance of the video was in question. It was suspected that this was downloaded from the web. To answer this question, a structured search strategy was developed and employed; involving conventional search engines, commercial and open databases, and automated agents (often called “spiders” or “avatars”). The examination of content was presented in a paper in a previous AAFS meeting. This presentation concentrates on search strategies and evaluation of provenance separate from examination of the video or metadata itself.

In order to evaluate the provenance of such a video, it is necessary to examine web sites devoted to this kind of imagery. Numerous discussion groups exist in which these videos are critically discussed by aficionados, many of whom are as critical of content as are experts in content analysis. Chat rooms exist on the internet in which these videos are a topic of discussion. Multiple versions of the same video may be present. In cases where the video is old, it may be that the data has been removed from the net, and it is necessary to locate and search archives of deleted web pages. In some cases, these videos may have been discussed in the news or other non-web media, in which case a search of media databases may be appropriate.

Results: The search revealed multiple discussions of the video in question, including an interview with the producer, the location of the film company that produced the video, the date the video was produced, the motivation of the video, and previous forensic evaluations of the video. The search also provided other examples of both contrived snuff film and examples of footage of real killings. One of the videos downloaded by an intelligent agent during this search was in turn later submitted for evaluation by another agency as yet another possible homicide. In this latter case, the video was real footage of a real homicide, taken in Chechnya. Thus, a single comprehensive search, if the data is appropriately archived locally, may provide a shortcut for later cases.

Impact: Putative snuff films and related imagery are not only more numerous, but also more widespread than ever before. They occasionally cause consternation to local law enforcement when they are perceived as possible real footage. This is particularly true when real footage is integrated into the contrived video. Examination of the video itself, metadata, and searching for the provenance of the data provides different data, each of which may be useful in the investigation.

Snuff Film, Digital Video, Image Analysis