# Digital Verification: On the Frontline

**LSE** **blogs.lse.ac.uk**/polis/2016/06/22/digital-verification-on-the-frontline/

In the digital race to publish breaking news across social media platforms, Alastair Reid argues that the industry-wide scramble to instantly release new information often bypasses proper source verification. The result: reputable news organizations hastily disseminating outdated (or falsified) photos in association with recent, unrelated events. First Draft News,  where Reid is managing editor, aims to to make digital verification an industry-wide standard practice by providing thorough, streamlined and free guidance to the process of verifying information.

*This report on a talk by Alastair Reid of First Draft News by Polis Summer School student Veena McCoole*

This repeated oversight, exemplified in several fake news stories on the websites of leading publications, may have contributed to falling consumer trust in the news, as recently reported in the Digital News Report 2016 by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Reid, who works with journalists and organizations to adapt to a shifting media landscape and navigate sources, explained that the rising influence and legitimacy of independent blogs and websites are saturating the internet and making it more difficult than ever to distinguish between fact and fiction.

The rapid speed that dictates the industry's behavior, coupled with the increasingly crowdsourced nature of journalism (most events are covered first by individuals on the scene with their smartphones), means it is more important than ever for journalists to exercise swift and accurate fact checking when sourcing from third parties. Errors such as misusing a copyrighted resource can damage more than a company's credibility, it can land them in hefty lawsuits and cause serious financial damage.

One of the several online tools Reid uses to aid journalists in image verification is through an online mechanism called Reverse Image Search, available as a Chrome plugin called REVEYE. This tool allows the user to upload any photograph, and within seconds, some aspects of the online history of the photograph will be generated, enabling anyone to see if and where a picture has been published on the internet. Another useful verification method is examining the EXIF data of an image file or video thumbnail; doing so yields a comprehensive set of information including the coordinates at which the image was captured, the device used to capture it, the altitude and direction at which it was captured, and so on.

*Image: an example of EXIF data for a photograph Alastair took in the classroom before his Polis LSE presentation.*

A recent example of this was when a group of British men holidaying in Ayia Napa claimed to have ended up on a boat to Syria. The story was punctuated by a few captioned images of the men taken with Snapchat *(below).*



Source: Independent article exposing hoax

Interestingly, Reid also discussed ramifications of source material distributed within the newsroom; some journalists

suffer from PTSD after repeatedly viewing horrifying and graphic footage while censoring content for publishing.

First Draft News hosts events and free training at institutions such as the New York Times and the Guardian, and offers free livestreams of these workshops online.

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