



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Case study

Fact-checking reports of human rights violations

How Amnesty International uses Signal monitor to verify eyewitness reports of human rights violations

As the leading international human-rights organisation campaigning against injustice and rights violations, [Amnesty International](#) have to ensure that their information is watertight. With the pandemic nature of human-rights violations, verifying the facts of eyewitness reports is paramount to Amnesty's mission and can prove a difficult task in vulnerable parts of the world marred by political or economic instability.

Despite their significance and widespread use in investigations globally, eyewitness reports have been under fire for years and trust in them as a reliable source of information and evidence has dramatically decreased. As the [New England Innocence Project](#) states, eyewitness "misidentification [has] contributed to approximately 71% of the more than 300 wrongful convictions in the United States overturned by post-conviction DNA evidence."

Understandably, the high-stakes nature of Amnesty's role in investigating and campaigning against human rights violations requires absolute certainty in their evidence. In response to this evermore pressing issue Amnesty established the Digital Verification Corps (DVC).

THE DIGITALISATION OF EYEWITNESS VERIFICATION

The Digital Verification Corps (DVC) was established in September 2016 to help researchers at Amnesty International corroborate eyewitness accounts of human rights violations depicted on social media.

This verification work is an increasingly integral stage in the research process and is often the first step in the identification of crimes. Content verified by the DVC often becomes significant evidence used in Amnesty International's campaigning for justice.

The DVC employ a team of specialists who enlist and train volunteers to manually monitor and review content in the form of video footage, images and media mentions to authenticate claims of human rights abuse. The sheer quantity and varying degrees of quality of the content, as well as the obvious distressing nature of what it contains, results in a challenging process.

The DVCs workload has exponentially increased as news is instantaneous and events are increasingly frequently reported on social media first. The team needs to act quickly but also be thorough in its efforts to cross-reference and fact-check details with official statements and news reports from reputable sources. The DVC used to use Tweetdeck Lists to organise tweets by Twitter accounts, but this was inefficient and required a lot of sifting of content.

***"We had to do a lot of pruning of TweetDeck Lists to get the right results."** Sam Dubberley*

To counter these challenges and their frustrations with the increasingly time-consuming nature of their work, the Digital Verification Corps implemented Signal monitor.

We spoke to Sam Dubberley, the manager of the DVC at Amnesty International, about the work they

undertake and how Signal monitor has transformed how they deliver such an integral service.

ZEROING IN WITH SIGNAL MONITOR

Sam and his team use Signal monitor as part of their verification process workflow. Using the metadata associated with the social media post, the team use Signal monitor to quickly find reports of an event occurring at a given location within a specified date range.

***"The long octopus arms of Signal extend to previously unknown news sources across the world."** Sam Dubberley*

The simplicity of the interface enables them to swiftly surface news stories from local - sometimes obscure - sources and provides a rough translation for non-English language content. These articles are then cross-referenced within the Signal platform against better-known, more reputable news sources as required.

A file detailing the relevant articles with links to each is exported from the Signal platform and sent to the researcher working on the case. Additionally, Sam has set-up real-time email alerts based on certain search terms to keep ahead of relevant breaking news and on top of stories that continue to roll and evolve.

***"Signal monitor is super-easy to use."** Sam Dubberley*

VERIFICATION TRANSFORMATION

The amount of time and effort it takes for the Digital Verification Corps team to verify content has substantially decreased since they started using Signal monitor. The team no longer needs to manually wade through tweets. The smart media monitoring technology ensures that they can glean all the information and locate all the stories they need within the platform - able to export

the results at the touch of a button. Within the first few weeks of using Signal monitor, the team were able to quickly and successfully corroborate an eyewitness video of an extrajudicial execution in Mexico by locating a local Spanish language news story. From this starting point, Amnesty International researchers went on to compile sufficient evidence to call upon the authorities to perform an impartial, independent investigation. The news story can be read [here](#) and an [open letter](#) to Enrique Peña Nieto, the President of Mexico, was issued on 25 May 2017 requesting this investigation.

***"We were able to discover relevant news from sources we didn't know existed."** Sam Dubberley*

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[About Amnesty International](#)

Amnesty International is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation that campaigns against human rights abuses. Their mission is to expose facts through research to educate and mobilise people and lobby governments and businesses. The movement has over 7 million members and supporters globally.

[About Sam Dubberley](#)

Sam Dubberley heads up the Digital Verification Corps at Amnesty International. Sam is the co-founder of Eyewitness Media Hub, and his career in broadcast news spans more than ten years'.