VERIFICATION HANDBOOK

AN ULTIMATE GUIDELINE ON DIGITAL AGE SOURCING FOR EMERGENCY COVERAGE.

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EDITOR OF ‘REGRET THE ERROR’: THE POYNTER INSTITUTE
Chapter 5: Verifying Video

Malachy Browne is news editor with Storyful, the first news agency of the social media age. Headquartered in Dublin and with staff in Asia and the U.S., Storyful helps its news clients discover, verify and distribute the most valuable user-generated content on social media platforms. Prior to Storyful, Browne created and edited Politico.ie, an Irish political website and news archive. He worked for the Irish political magazine Village from 2006 to 2008 and was editor of the magazine’s website, Village.ie. Formerly a computer programmer, Browne strongly believes in newsroom innovation and in the capacity of technology to strengthen journalism. Browne is from Broadford, County Limerick, and lives in Dublin. He tweets @malachybrowne.

The convergence of affordable smartphone and camera technology, ubiquitous Internet access and social media is largely responsible for the explosion in citizen-powered news coverage. One byproduct of this is an enormous amount of video being uploaded and shared every minute, every hour.

The revolution in information technology is not over and the volume of newsworthy user-generated content will only grow. Journalists have a new responsibility - to quickly gather, verify and ascertain the usage rights of UGC. Traditional values of investigation apply, but a new skillset is required for media such as video.

Verifying video from an unknown source on social media may initially appear daunting. But it’s not rocket science.

Here’s what you need to get the job done: A determination to investigate the backstory of the content, coupled with a healthy level of skepticism and a familiarity with the multitude of free tools that can help establish facts about a video. This chapter will help to equip you with all three.

A first point to understand about verifying user-generated video is that it spreads across social media in a way that makes the version you first see unlikely to be the original. Videos may be spliced, diced and reposted with different context. Important traces from the original video may disappear. Your job is to root out the facts that support or deny what this video purports to show.

As with any story, start with the basic questions: who, what, when, where and why. In this context, the metadata associated with a video can help answer some of these questions by providing you with details about the original source, date and location.
One rule, however, is that one piece of evidence alone is insufficient to verify a video—usually a body of evidence needs to be collected to form a complete picture. Get ready for that adrenaline rush when the puzzle comes together.

Here’s a step-by-step-guide to verifying video from social media.

**Provenance**

Identifying a video’s provenance is the first step. Sometimes it is obvious that the video belongs to the Facebook or YouTube account where you discovered it. But as detailed in Chapter 3, you always start from the assumption that a video has been “scraped” or duplicated.

Most videos come with a description, tag, comment or some piece of identifying text. Extract useful keywords from this information to begin your search. Acronyms, place names and other pronouns make good keywords. If the description is in a foreign language, paste the text into Google Translate to highlight these keywords.

Search for the earliest videos matching these keywords using the date filter to order results. On YouTube, look directly below the search bar for the Filters menu and select Upload Date, as in the below image. Vimeo, YouKu and other video platforms have similar filters. Scroll through the results and compare video thumbnails to find the earliest version (the thumbnails of original and “scraped” videos usually match).
Another method to find the earliest version of a video is to perform an image search of the video thumbnail using Google Image Search or TinEye (as explained in the previous chapter). This can identify the first instance of video thumbnails and images. The helpfulness of these tools depends on the image quality; a strong contrast in the video and a distinctive color scheme help.

Once you’ve found the source behind the video, contact the source to begin the next step.

**Verify the source**

It’s time to examine the source the same way we would look at any more-traditional source of information. Indeed, often much more information is available about an online source than a traditional source telephoning a tip line, for example.

Online profiles leave a digital footprint that allows us to examine history and activity. Most platforms enable us to contact uploaders, which is an essential step. Ultimately we seek to engage with the uploader, ask questions and satisfy ourselves that the uploader filmed the footage.

These questions are useful when examining an uploader’s digital footprint:

- Are we familiar with this account? Has the account holder's content and report age been reliable in the past?
- Where is this account registered?
- Where is the uploader based, judging by the account history?
- Are video descriptions consistent and mostly from a specific location? Are videos dated?
- If videos on the account use a logo, is this logo consistent across the videos? Does it match the avatar on the YouTube or Vimeo account?
- Does the uploader “scrape” videos from news organizations and other YouTube accounts, or does he upload solely user-generated content?
- Does the uploader write in slang or dialect that is identifiable in the video’s narration?
- Are the videos on this account of a consistent quality? (On YouTube, go to Settings and then Quality to determine the best quality available.)
- Do video descriptions have file extensions such as .AVI or .MP4 in the video title? This can indicate the video was uploaded directly from a device.
- Does the description of a YouTube video read: “Uploaded via YouTube Capture”? This may indicate the video was filmed on a smartphone.

Gathering the answers to these questions helps paint a picture of the source, the source’s online history and the kind of content he shares. From there, it’s important to try to connect that account’s activity to any other online accounts the source maintains. Below are some practices/questions to guide this process.

- Search Twitter or Facebook for the unique video code - are there affiliated accounts? (Every piece of UGC is identified by a unique code that appears in the URL. On YouTube and Facebook, for instance, the code is placed between “v=” and the next “&” in the URL.)
• Are there other accounts - Google Plus, a blog or website - listed on the video profile or otherwise affiliated with this uploader?
• What information do affiliated accounts contain that indicate recent location, activity, reliability, bias or agenda of the account holder?
• How long have these accounts been active? How active are they?
• Who are the social media accounts connected with, and what does this tell us about the uploader?
• Can we find whois information for an affiliated website?
• Is the person listed in local phone directories, on Spokeo, Pipl.com or WebMii or on LinkedIn?
• Do the source's online social circles indicate proximity to this story/location?

Asking these questions, and answering them, gives us an impression as to the reliability of a source of content. And, importantly, it provides a means to contact the uploader to seek further questions and guidance on the how the video may be used by news organizations.

When speaking to the source, be sure to ask about some of the information you came across. Do the answers match up? If the source isn’t honest with you about information, then you should be extra suspicious of the content.

**Locate the video**

With the source identified and examined, it’s time to try to verify the content of the video itself. This begins with confirming, or establishing, the location of the video.

Verifying where a video was filmed very much depends on the clues the video presents. A distinctive streetscape, a building, church, line of trees, mountain range, minaret or bridge are all good reference points to compare with satellite imagery and geolocated photographs. Should the camera pan across a business name, this might be listed in online classifieds or a local directory. A street sign might give clues to the precise location. Car registration plates or advertising billboards might indicate provincial details. Sunlight, shadows and the approximate time of day of the event can also be helpful. And if the video contains dialogue, do the accents or dialects fit the circumstances it purports to represent?

The starting point, again, is to examine any text accompanying the video and clues within the video. Home in on the location using Google Maps and try to map the video location. If possible, zoom into Street View to get the camera angle. If Street View is not available, turn on “Photos” in Google Maps’ options and check if geolocated photographs match the video location. Geolocated photos may also be searched using the advanced search features on Flickr, Picasa and Twitter.

If the video is in a foreign language, enter the text into Google Translate and identify the place name. Be aware that Google Translate often mistranslates: for instance, the Arabic for Lattakia in Syria mistranslates as “Protoplasm,” Daraa as “Shield.” Also be aware that various
English transliterations of Arabic render names differently: Jidda or Jiddah, for example. By taking the Arabic text for these places and entering it into Google Maps, we'll find our way to the city. The below image shows searches in Google Translate and Google Maps.

When translating, use the language skills available among your colleagues and contacts. Translating Japanese characters to Korean or Mandarin yields a more accurate translation than Japanese to English. So if you have a Korean or Mandarin speaker in your midst, or can find one quickly, ask her to investigate the translations for you.

Wikimapia is a crowdsourced version of Google Maps in which buildings, suburbs, military sites and other points of interest are outlined and described. This is useful to get context for an area and identify locations, though this information should be corroborated by other information, as it is possible to encounter errors, or deliberately misleading information.

One example of how Wikimapia can be useful came when a day of “civil disobedience” was held in Port Said, Egypt, in February 2013. Demonstrators were filmed marching by the Port Said University's Faculty of Education, according to one YouTube uploader. The streetscape was difficult to identify on Google Maps amid the densely packed streets of Port Said. However, the Faculty of Education is tagged on Wikimapia; finding and examining this reference point confirmed the location of the demonstration, as shown on the next page.

Google Earth is another useful tool, in that it provides a history of satellite images. This is useful when examining older videos where the terrain may have changed.
Google Earth’s terrain view is also valuable when examining terrain and the relative dimensions of buildings. Recently when the team at Storyful was considering a video as evidence supporting a reported Israeli strike on Syria, Google Earth Terrain’s view of mountains north of Damascus verified the location of a YouTube uploader, as you can see in the below comparison.

**Verify the date**

Confirming the date of videos uploaded from a planned event like a demonstration or political rally is generally straightforward. Other videos of the same event are likely to exist via news reports, and corroborating pictures are usually shared on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and other social media sites. Searching these platforms with relevant keywords and hashtags is usually sufficient to discover supporting evidence such as distinctive buildings or street furniture, placards or weather conditions.

However, for more obscure videos, date is generally the most difficult piece of metadata to verify. YouTube videos are time-stamped in Pacific Standard Time (PST) from the moment the upload begins. This led Russia’s Foreign Ministry to cast doubt on videos depicting a chemical weapons attack on Ghouta near Damascus: The videos were uploaded in the early hours of August 21, and therefore were dated on YouTube as August 20. The Foreign Ministry’s ignorance of this prompted it and others to claim the videos were staged and uploaded ahead of the reported time of the attack.

Weather reports alone are insufficient to verify dates, but they help. As previously detailed, Wolfram Alpha provides weather information about a place on a particular date. After Rita Krill uploaded what purported to be an amazing video of a lightning strike in her Florida backyard on October 5, 2012, Wolfram Alpha showed that thunderstorms were active in the area.
And searching Twitter for Naples, Florida, on that date showed a local weatherman asking his followers for pictures of storm clouds in Naples. Below is an image of the Wolfram Alpha search and the tweet.

**Final checks: What does the video show?**

Now it's time to bring all of your data together and ask the obvious questions: Does the video make sense given the context in which it was filmed? Does anything jar my journalistic instinct? Does anything look out of place? Do clues suggest it is not legitimate? Do any of the source's details or answers to my questions not add up? Remember, your assumption is that the video is false. Does the evidence confirm or refute that assumption?

When it comes to video, bear in mind that elaborate hoaxes have been, and continue to be, played. Canadian students infamously faked a video of an eagle swooping down in a park in Montreal and picking up a baby. This was debunked by splitting the video into single frames and spotting that the eagle's shadow was missing in some frames. (More technical people can use video editing software like the free VLC media player or the free Avidemux video editor, or the licensed Vegas Pro editor to split a video into its constituent frames if you have doubts over its construction.)
Case Study 5.1:  
Verifying a Key Boston Bombing Video

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One of the iconic videos of the tragic 2013 Boston bombings was filmed by an athlete running her final mile of the marathon. As she approached the finish line on Boylston Street, the second bomb detonated meters ahead. It was a compelling video, but we needed to verify it.

One photo showing the moment of the blast was posted by Boston journalist Dan Lampariello (below), a member of one of our pre-curated Twitter lists, and someone familiar to Storyful. Lampariello’s tweet was geolocated to Boylston Street; this information, which came from a reliable source, helped to confirm the location of the explosion. It also gave us a reference point to use with what was shown in the runner’s video.
Google Street View of Boylston street (below) confirmed both Dan Lampariello’s photo and the athlete’s point of view as she approached the finish line. Indeed, some of the athletes filmed in the video are seen in Lampariello’s photo, upon close inspection.

That process confirmed the content of the video. Finding the original source of this video was less straightforward.

The video itself was uploaded to a YouTube account with no giveaway details and an obscure username, NekoAngel3Wolf. Searching Twitter for the unique video code led us to someone
sharing it under the handle NightNeko3, again with no personal details. The “Neko” reference in both profiles suggested they were affiliated.

Searching for similar social profiles, we found a Pinterest account also registered as NightNeko3, giving the real name Morgan Treacy. Our team at Storyful quickly located a Facebook account for Morgan Treacy, a teenager whose posts were geolocated to Ballston Spa in New York State.

Morgan described the video on Twitter as her mother’s perspective of the explosion. Knowing that a prestigious marathon like Boston’s would likely track athlete times, we checked the surname “Treacy” on Boston Athletic Association’s registrant page. A single result was returned - Jennifer Treacy, age 45-49, from New York State. Jennifer Treacy’s time split shows her passing the 40 kilometer mark at 2:38 p.m. but failing to cross the finish line 2 kilometers later. Jennifer was averaging 10 minutes per mile, placing her in the vicinity of the blast at 2:50 p.m., when the bombs exploded.

The social people search website Spokeo.com gave us an entry for Jennifer L. Treacy, 47, with an address at Ballston Spa, New York. LinkedIn also gave us a profile for Jennifer Treacy from Ballston Spa, who is employed by the New York State Department of Health.

One final piece of evidence confirmed our investigation. A man named Gerard Quinn is a Facebook friend of Morgan Treacy, who we were now almost 100 percent sure was Jennifer’s daughter. Quinn previously commented on family videos posted by Morgan. So there was a
We saw on Quinn's Facebook profile (below) that he had expressed pride that his niece, Jennifer, was running the Boston marathon. He'd linked to her marathon map and time splits. He also later commented on Facebook that Jennifer was OK after the blast and on her way home.

So extremely proud of my niece Jennifer, who is running the Boston Marathon today!
A public telephone directory produced a phone number that allowed us to speak directly to Jennifer Treacy. She confirmed the video was hers and that news organizations were permitted to use it. She had also informed law enforcement agencies of the video, she said.

In summary, all of the information supporting the veracity of this video was available online via free tools - location information, corroborating accounts of the event, the uploader’s digital history and the owner’s contact details. Familiarity with these tools allowed us to verify the video in around 10 minutes.
Case Study 5.2: Investigating a Reported ‘Massacre’ in Ivory Coast

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In March 2011 a graphic video surfaced on YouTube that depicted what was claimed to be the killing of at least six women by Ivorian security forces (FDS) during a protest in Abobo. The demonstration occurred during a period of unrest when President Laurent Gbagbo clung to power after his defeat in presidential elections the previous November.
At the behest of a client, Storyful set about verifying the video two years after it happened. The video shows a large group of women chanting “ADO” (a reference to Alassane Dramane Ouattara, Gbagbo’s rival). Then, at the 3:32 mark, armored personnel carriers come into view and large-caliber rounds are fired. Several people appear to be fatally wounded. At the time, some Ivorians claimed the injuries were staged. The country’s then defense minister cast doubt over the video and Gbagbo supporters claimed the video was a “fake” in YouTube reconstructions (here and here).

Verifying video in a breaking news scenario is in some respects easier than this form of retrospective investigation. Information that corroborates or debunks a video is more accessible in the recent timeframe; information related to an older event is often hidden deep within social networks. Archival search is either challenging or not possible.

With those limitations in mind, here’s how I worked to try to verify the video.

**Gather context on the event**

Unfamiliar with the details of the reported massacre, I searched Google for “Women killed Gbagbo March 3 2011.” This returned several reports (here and here) describing the approximate location and the sequence of events. This search also returned a statement about the event made by the country’s then defense minister, who claimed the scenes were staged.

Importantly, these reports also provided keywords I could use to run a more focused search. Using these terms for historical search on Twitter and YouTube, I unearthed eyewitness accounts and UGC. (Always try to put yourself in the shoes of the uploader and imagine how she would tag and describe video and other information.)
**Location**

According to reports, the demonstration and shooting happened at a roundabout in the vicinity of Abobo, a northern district of Abidjan. Specifically, one report located it at a major junction/roundabout on Autoroute d’Abobo, adjacent to the area known as Abobo Gare. A witness in the report described the security forces passing by a roundabout, doubling back and opening fire on the women “before heading back to Adjame.” Adjame lies south of Abobo, giving us a lead on the direction of traffic.

According to a contemporaneous report published in Le Patriot on March 8, demonstrators gathered “at the roundabout intersection of Banco” (mapped below). Searching a local forum shows that the roundabout was the site of previous such demonstrations.

Google Maps shows two major roundabouts. One of them, Carrefour Banco, lies at the southern end of Abobo, toward Adjame. This fit with the previous report, so I used it as my starting point.
The position of street lights and traffic lights, the alignment of palm trees and deciduous trees filmed in the video from 4:00 onward line up with the satellite view of Banco Carrefour’s north-western corner, as shown in the above white circles. The large building with two prominent protrusions atop the roof (circled in red) also aligns with a building we see in the distance as the convoy of security vehicles disappears from view. This matches the direction of traffic evident in the satellite image above, and the account given by an eyewitness of the vehicles driving south toward Adjamé.

One piece of video evidence (above), however, did not match the satellite imagery. We counted three large deciduous trees as the convoy entered the roundabout; Google Maps shows just two such trees. The video was filmed in 2011 and the satellite images were dated 2013, so perhaps a tree was cut down. So we looked through historic satellite images on Google Earth. Images from 2009 show three large deciduous trees stood at this corner of the roundabout.

The third, missing tree from the 2013 satellite imagery is outlined in the above image. (It has been flipped 180 degrees from north to south). Judging by this view, we can see that the camera position was directly across the road. I later spoke with a reputable source known to Storyful who is familiar with the video, and who had visited Abobo to report on the “massacre.” The source confirmed this was the camera angle.

Date

The date of the shooting is corroborated by several independent reports and videos shared on social media. These are found retrospectively through a variety of searches: on Twitter, on Topsy or Topsy Pro (which allows a date range to be set), and on YouTube with results ordered by upload date.

Some of the steps I followed:

- I used historical Twitter search to generate leads by scrolling back to results from March 3, 2011, onwards.
- I examined Tweets and questions about the event and found this and this reply. These sources are potential witnesses, or people who could identify witnesses. The first source lists her location as Cocody, Abidjan, and the second one as Abidjan.
• I also located this person\textsuperscript{12}, who uploaded video from Abobo and previous RHDP rallies. Checking other Twitvids on his account leads to a video uploaded on the day\textsuperscript{13} of the protest.

• I looked further at his Twitter timeline and found other references to RHDP on that day\textsuperscript{14}. That led me to other links, such as this news report of the event\textsuperscript{15}. It included a photo credited to Reuters that showed victims matching those in our video.

• Running a Google Image Search\textsuperscript{16} on the photo confirmed it wasn't used prior to March 3. However, the results also show that a Guardian article\textsuperscript{17} credited AFP/Getty Images and not Reuters. This meant a credible photographer was on the ground at the event.

I dug further into the photo, shown below.

![Image of a victim covered by garments and green leaves used by many of the demonstrators.](image)

The image is consistent with the picture of the victim at 5:30 in the lead video. The victim is covered by garments and green leaves used by many of the demonstrators. Note the tight, dark blue T-shirt worn by the victim and the distinctive garment with a square pattern of red, orange, white and dark lines, shown over the page in a close-up.

France 24 Observateurs was also provided with photos\textsuperscript{22} from the event by sources in Abidjan. We at Storyful confirmed this with France 24.

Other searches uncovered a photo-diary published here\textsuperscript{23} by an Agence France-Presse journalist, Issouf Sanogo. Sanogo interviewed a woman named Sirah Drane, who says she helped organize the demonstration on March 3. Drane says she was holding a megaphone to address the large crowd that had gathered at a traffic circle in Abobo. A woman matching this description is seen in the video.
The video correlates with three other videos of the event. These videos were documented by Storyful at the time, and could be found by searching YouTube using search terms identified earlier.

The first video was uploaded on the day of the shooting to an Ivory Coast-registered YouTube account which was created specifically to upload the video. There is no further activity on the account to provide information regarding the source. The same wounded women are filmed in the video, as is the distinctive square building in the background.

A second video was uploaded to another Ivory Coast-registered YouTube account on the morning of March 4 at 09:06:37 GMT. The uploader describes it as “several women killed” at the “RHDP demonstration yesterday,” meaning March 3.

None of these videos or corroborating photos exist before March 3, suggesting to a high degree of certainty this was the date of the event.

**Original uploader**

The video itself was uploaded to YouTube on March 4, 2011. It’s the earliest such video found on YouTube. However, it’s highly likely the video originated from a Facebook account or elsewhere and was scraped onto this YouTube account.

The YouTube account is registered in the United States and is linked to a defunct website, onemendo.com. The account appeared to be operated by someone with connections to Jamaican emigrants living in New York or New Jersey because the account contained promotional material for a local club, DanceHallReggae.com.
Videos from around that time on an affiliated Vimeo account indicate they are based in Rochester, New York. An affiliated Facebook account also posts links to music by Jamaican DJs. It gives no further clues as to the origins of the video and did not post a link to it on March 3, 2011. Videos of a Senegalese soap opera were also posted to the YouTube account.

Is the video authentic?

The evidence above confirms the location and establishes the date of the video as highly likely to be March 3. However, to the central point: Does the video show women protesters being shot dead by the FDS on that day?

Claims have been made that the killing is staged and bodies were placed on the street after the security forces drive past. These serious questions warrant investigation.

In this statement, Gbagbo’s defense minister, Alain Dogou, referred to the emergence of this amateur video on March 4. He said a woman was instructed to “lay down, lay down,” (and we do hear this said in the video). Dogou said it is “difficult to say” that the video is from the location reported by journalists. (Of course, we have confirmed the location.) He also said international journalists were not covering the protest because they were attending a news conference by UNOCI, or another event related to the Council of Ministers. Finally, he acknowledged that a Women’s March did take place in Abobo on this date.

Serious questions that arise:

• Why did the camera point away from the wounded for so long as the convoy entered the roundabout?
• Would all the victims be shot within meters of one another?
• Would they all fall face down as they have in the video?
• Their faces are quickly obscured by garments - why is this?
• A bloodied woman is told to “lay down, lay down” in the video, as described by Defense Minister Dogou. Why is this? Is this out of concern for her poor condition, or to stage an injury?
• The “massacre” creates a frenzy of emotion in the video; is this real? Or were other protesters duped by or complicit in a staged “massacre”?

Several witnesses give convincing accounts that injuries did result from the reported massacre. A doctor from South Abobo Hospital is quoted on page 63/64 in this Human Rights Watch report. The doctor reported seeing victims from the shooting:
A doctor who has treated many women who did not survive said their injuries were clearly caused by heavy weapons, and not by bullets. The doctor and two witnesses at the scene told Human Rights Watch that the head of one of the victims had been completely separated from her body. Other victims, two of whom did not survive due to serious injuries, were injured by machine gun bullets.

(The video does appear to show a victim whose head was blown apart.)

A New York Times report quoted two named witnesses as follows:

“The forward tank started firing,” said one Abobo resident, Idrissa Diarrassouba. “Right away six women were killed. I was right there, beside them. They just fell.”

“There was a burst of machine-gun fire,” [the witness, Idrissa Sissoko] said. He also spoke of seeing six women being shot. “I saw six bodies lying there, suddenly,” he said.

According to this report, a military source told a Reuters journalist that the shooting was an accident resulting from the nervousness of the security forces following previous clashes.

**Conclusion**

We can say that the date and location are verified to a high degree. The original source is not, and we therefore did not get the opportunity to speak to the person who filmed the footage.

Ultimately, though, does the video show what it claims?

This we cannot determine to 100 percent satisfaction from a distance, and with the material that’s been gathered. Along with being able to contact and interview the uploader, it would be important to gather additional firsthand testimony from witnesses, doctors who treated victims, and the families of the reported victims. To identify those victims we could attempt a more detailed investigation of the first video, splitting it frame by frame at the key moments of the shooting to try and find ways to the identify victims, and then to track down their survivors.

Even with all of the corroborating facts and information I was able to marshal, the verdict is still out on this video.
Case Study 5.3: Confirming the Location and Content of a Video

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During the violent clashes in Cairo in August 2013 there was one particular YouTube video that received a lot of media attention. (The original video was subsequently removed from YouTube, but can be also viewed here). The widely used description for this video, which for example appeared in the headline on a Washington Post blog post, was that protesters had pushed a police car off a bridge in Cairo.

Violent behavior displayed by protesters is, of course, relevant when investigating disproportionate use of force by the police, as we at Amnesty International do. We also work to verify video as part of determining whether human rights abuses have occurred. As a result, this video represented important footage that needed careful review.
What stood out from this video, in contrast to the description and resulting headline, was that at no time could the protesters be seen actually pushing the car off the bridge. It clearly required a closer look. Here’s what I did to assess the content of the video and determine the exact location of the incident:

One of the first steps when validating citizen video is to search for other content that shows the same incident. I normally search YouTube as well as in the Storyful dashboard (a paid service) and Storyful’s Open News Room to find additional video content. (As noted in the chapter, I filter my YouTube searches by upload date to narrow down the number of results.) Using these tools, I found a second video that was shot from a different angle. It appears to be filmed from a nearby high-rise, and thus provides a great view of the whole scene. The additional footage shows that no one actually pushed the police car off the bridge. Rather, the car appears to have collided with another vehicle, causing it to roll back and fall off the bridge. This second video confirmed the incident was real, but also revealed that the description (and headline) were inaccurate.

With the new vantage point provided by the second video, it became easier to find the exact location of the incident. The Washington Post article provided the “6th of October Bridge” as the setting of the video. This is sufficient to get started, as the bridge is easy to find on online maps. However, the bridge is actually a very long elevated road that runs through large parts of the city. This made it more challenging to find the exact location.

When carefully reviewing the second video, one landmark stood out: a sports stadium. By tracing the 6th of October Bridge on Google Earth, I was able to identify two stadiums that are in close proximity to the bridge. After rotating the view on Google Earth to find the potential location and line of sight of the person filming, I found a location that matches up with the second stadium. Having confirmed the general location, it was then easy to pinpoint the high-rise buildings overlooking the incident. Using the mapping tool in Google Earth Pro, I produced a simple overview map, depicting the location of the two videos, the area of sights, and relevant landmarks:

Finally, two more features further confirmed the location: A broadcasting tower is visible in the background of the video, which is also visible in satellite images. Additionally, I turned on the Panoramio photo layer in Google Earth to check for user-generated photos. The Panoramio layer contains georeferenced, user-generated photos that provide an on-the-ground view, and thus a high level of detail. There are also several photos from underneath the bridge where the car landed, and the pillars of the bridge as seen in the video match up perfectly.

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a For more about the value of multi-perspective video, please see: Hal Hodson: “Multishot video can identify civil rights abusers”. New Scientist, 28 June 2013; and the Rashomon Project.
Thanks to a combination of video searches, Google Earth and Google Maps, I was quickly able to verify where the video was shot, and to also debunk an erroneous description that could have had serious implications for the protesters in Cairo.

Coordinates of lead video: 30.058807, 31.303089

In the end, after the real story of why the police car fell off the bridge was clear, The Washington Post followed up with a second post and a correction.¹