

DRAAIBOEK ELIOT HIGGINS (19 nov) - College Tour, de Podcast!

Hello, Hello! Tonight, we dive into the world of digital detective work with a true pioneer in open-source investigations. Our guest started as the anonymous blogger Brown Moses, but he didn't stay in the shadows for long. In 2014, he founded Bellingcat, a platform that's now world-famous for breaking major stories—starting with the MH17 crash investigation that changed everything. From identifying the Russians behind Alexei Navalny's poisoning to exposing Kremlin hit squads, he's tracked down war criminals and held aggressors accountable—all from his computer screen. With Bellingcat, he's revolutionized investigative journalism and is on a mission to empower others through open-source techniques. Along with the students here in Leiden, I am interviewing Bellingcat-founder Eliot Higgins!

01 - Youth/ student

When you were in high school, what were you like in terms of sex, drugs and rock & roll?

You're a smart guy. But in your book you wrote that you were a high school-dropout who "did not thrive at college." How come?

But then, you were also rejected from a journalistic training program, at BBC and ITN: what did they tell you? Why were you rejected?

02 - Start Bellingcat

Before you started as Brown Moses and started Bellingcat, you worked at office jobs in Leicester, a big difference in comparison with your current job: what happened?

The Arab Spring conflicts drove your interests: why?

[Filmpje 1.0 Triebert \(B-roll: 1:23:30\)](#)

How was Bellingcat founded?

It is the 10 year anniversary of Bellingcat. How did Bellingcat as a platform change over the years after it became more and more well-known?

What's the difference between standard journalism and the kind of research Bellingcat executes?

Why should journalism students study the way Bellingcat operates?

Studentenvragen

How do you choose the subjects that you investigate?

With the current events happening around the world, Trump's victory, the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, is it still possible to bell the cats?

03 - MH17

In 2014, Malaysia Airlines-flight MH17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine. All passengers and crew members lost their lives. After the attack, it was unclear who was responsible. You and your team found out who did it.

Let's take a look.

Filmpje stoet/ kisten uit vliegtuig (wereldnieuws)

- aankondiging NOS journaal
- daarna filmpje stoet & kisten

Can you briefly explain the OSINT process utilized by you and your team to acquire these findings?

Your revelations about the attack had a huge impact on our country: what was the impact of this investigation on your life?

Filmpje Eenvandaag MH17 - wreckage (+NOS uitleg clip)

Is it difficult to keep this distance between you and what you research? Most journalists prefer to be as close to the flame as possible?

What were the biggest challenges in analyzing the open-source images around MH17?

Filmpje Joris Hentenaar

→ Reageren

Bernette Vraag?: There might be people in the audience tonight that knew passengers of MH17, do you feel a connection to the victims and their relatives? Does the event still impact you in your daily life?

After your MH17-revelations, Russia Today said you were an “amateur-general, home-garden-and-kitchen expert and former video gamer”: are they afraid of you?

Studentenvragen

04 - Russia

[On X](#) you made a joke about winning the Russian Nobel Prize, because Russia declared Bellingcat as a foreign agent: how does this label affect your work?

What do these restrictions say about your work?

05 - Personal (un)safety

You've said before that you've been targeted by multiple cyberattacks, you never eat at hotels, receive threats: how do you cope with this?

Do you have an example of a frightening situation you were in as a consequence of your job?

Your investigations on for example MH17 and Navalny really impacted the reputation of Russia. People have been murdered for less... Are you afraid of this?

How does your family deal with this?

Studentenvragen

06 - Social media / Fake news

Social media is your data gold mine, on the other hand there is an infinite amount of fake news being posted. Do you see social media as a blessing or a curse?

Recently you locked your X-account and started posting on Blue Sky: what's behind this?

For a long time you fought this battle on twitter to counter the spread of fake news and misinformation, mostly in direct conflict with the owner of the platform Elon Musk. Why do you find this important?

If mister Musk was sitting in my chair, what would you want to say to him or ask him?

Musk was for a time the 19th highest rated player in Diablo 4, in what competitive video game would you be able to beat him? (World of warcraft?)

Filmpje Hans Pool

→ Vraag Hans beantwoorden (In 5 years, can you still tell which online footage is real and what's not?)

How do you ensure open-source research does not include fake information?

Will the truth prevail in the end?

It seems that there is a growing number of people who don't want to see or believe the truth. What does Bellingcat then amount to?

Online you provide an OSINT toolkit to teach and supply everyone with research methods. What does it contain, how successful has this been for Bellingcat?

There could be a dangerous aspect to this where, like invasion of privacy? What do you think of this?

You've talked about the negative risks of AI, can't these tools also help you with your investigations?

Studentenvragen

07 - Personal

In an interview with a Dutch newspaper, you've said you don't want your children to post photos of themselves online, because you're afraid of the risks AI could cause. What are you afraid of?

And what about you? Are you afraid of your own safety online?

08 - trauma/ mental health

During your investigations, you saw every way a human body could be harmed (CHECK quote BOEK): how do you cope with this?

In interviews with Voxweb and Time magazine you spoke about your 'terrible anxiety', what are you anxious about?

Filmpje Christo Navalny

What will the future of Bellingcat look like?

You've said you were really shy when you were younger, did your time at Bellingcat also change your personality and view?

How did your work change your faith and trust in humanity?

Will the future of journalists (wijzen naar zaal) be more difficult or easier in your opinion?

- Regarding possible restrictions that journalists might face, especially since Trump won the elections?

Filmpje 2.0 Triebert

(Vraag Triebert beantwoorden, creative dream)

Waar heeft Christiaan Triebert het hier over? (vraag over muziek)

Brown Mozes album snippet

Who is Eliot besides Bellingcat?

End

What's your best advice for the students in this lecture hall?

Back-up

(What would be the consequence for your job if you did? → leaving X)

What does your music mean to you?