

What is OSINT?

I read an article about Open Source Intelligence (OSINT). OSINT means getting and using information from public sources like social media, news, and public records. It is used in business, cybersecurity, and journalism. I think it is useful because it is cheap and fast. But it can also cause problems with privacy, because it may need to track what people do online. It should follow the law and respect privacy.

Case: TikTok Hearing

I also read about the TikTok hearing in the U.S. Congress. The Fudan Development Institute said the hearing was about data privacy and how OSINT tools are used in national security and politics. Social media gives information, but it can also be a risk.

Definition: OSINT is one of the well known sources of intelligence, or intelligence gathering disciplines. Although the term “open source intelligence” has been in use for more than three decades, to this day there is no standardized definition of the term, which is defined as intelligence derived from publicly available information that is collected, analyzed, and shared to assist in a specific investigation.

Examples: OSINT sources include IP addresses, search engine results (e.g., Google Chrome), public government records, and online forums. These data points are gathered primarily from the Internet and used for investigative purposes.

Traditional Sources: In addition to online content, OSINT can also come from printed books, newspapers, periodicals, television and radio broadcasts, photographs, and other offline materials.

Technique: Image Geolocation

📌 What it is:

- Image geolocation means finding out where a photo was taken by looking at details in the image. People use maps, landmarks, signs, or sunlight to help figure it out.

🔍 How it works:

- Look for signs, buildings, mountains, or other landmarks in the photo
- Use Google Maps or Street View to compare and match the location
- Use clues like shadows, weather, and language to confirm the place

💡 Why it is useful:

- Check if a photo is real or fake
- Find where a photo posted online was taken
- Help in news checking or investigations

📷 Example:

- Someone posted a protest photo and said it was taken in a certain country. A researcher looked at the buildings and signs in the photo and used Google Street View to find the same spot. It turned out the photo was taken in a different city two years ago.

Social Media Survey

-  According to Statista, more than 3.6 billion people used social media in 2020, and this number is expected to grow by another billion by 2025. The massive volume of user-generated content—such as posts, photos, comments, and profiles—is a rich source of open-source intelligence (OSINT).

OSINT from social media includes:

-  **User activity:** Posts, avatars, photos, likes, comments
-  **Personal data:** Names, aliases, emails, birthdays, education, job history
-  **Connections:** Friends, family, followers/following
-  **Groups:** Interest-based communities and membership logs
-  **Investigation:** Detect cybercriminal networks, track accomplices, or locate missing persons by analyzing digital footprints

1 When OSINT Goes Too Far

OSINT can be risky if used the wrong way. Public data is still personal in some cases. Looking at someone's social media or location without permission can be a privacy problem.

2 OSINT: Powerful, But Dangerous

The TikTok case shows that using apps to collect open data may cause national security fears. The TikTok hearing in the U.S. showed that even public data from social media can be a security risk. Lawmakers feared the data might be used by foreign governments.

3 Think Before You Search: OSINT Risks

We must always ask: Is this legal? Is this respectful? This shows OSINT can be powerful but also dangerous if misused.

OSINT Summary



OSINT reveals both potential and responsibility in the digital age.

- OSINT demonstrates the enormous potential of the information age. It helps us understand the world, solve problems, and reveal the truth through publicly available information. From cybersecurity to social surveys, the applications of OSINT are expanding.
- However, while we use these tools, we must also maintain respect for privacy, ethics and the law. Through this exploration, we have not only mastered a variety of practical intelligence gathering methods, but also enhanced our awareness and sense of responsibility in the world of digital information.