

A Case Study In Public Data Release: Flight Path of Malaysia Airlines MH370

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On March 8, 2014, Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing lost contact with air traffic control shortly after takeoff. The plane is believed to have been diverted onto a path that eventually lead it to crash somewhere in the South Indian Ocean. The only clue we have to its final location is a set of satellite communication signals that continued up to the end of the flight. Under intense public pressure, the satellite signal communication logs were released, even though the data had not been fully analyzed by the search experts and it was not thought that the public would have the expertise to make use of them. Against expectations, members of the public proved capable of generating their own reconstructions of the flight path, in parallel with those of the official investigation. In this talk I will review the timeline of the flight and the details of the satellite communications system, describe the public data products that have been released along with the analyses that members of the public have performed to date, and finally discuss lessons learned about a public data release.