# Criminologist reveals why murderers often leave a digital trail despite risks



A criminologist has illuminated why many murderers leave behind a digital trail of evidence, even with the knowledge that law enforcement can use this information against them. Professor David Wilson from Birmingham City University, who frequently appears on ITV's "This Morning," explains that some offenders may be driven by a psychological need to be seen and acknowledged, effectively engaging with a virtual audience through their actions.

In today's digital age, individuals inadvertently create extensive records through social media, emails, and location tracking, making them vulnerable to capture. Wilson highlights that while this phenomenon has grown with advanced technology, the urge to leave traces of one's existence is not a new concept—it is deeply rooted in human behaviour. Even infamous historical figures, such as Jack the Ripper, who taunted police with letters, demonstrate that the propensity for self-expression has long existed among criminals.

Modern cases provide stark illustrations of this trend. Take the example of Bryan Kohberger, a criminology student whose digital footprint included incriminating internet searches and location data linking him to the grisly murders of four students in 2022. Similarly, Chris Watts, convicted of murdering his wife and children, was undone by mobile data and surveillance footage that contradicted his fabricated narrative. Such cases reveal a disturbing pattern: even those aware of potential digital scrutiny often fail to eliminate incriminating evidence from their online presence.

Wilson posits that this carelessness may not stem solely from a purposeful desire to document one’s acts but often arises from emotional turmoil during the commission of the crime. Frequently, offenders do not think rationally; rather, they act impulsively and in distress. In the heat of the moment, they may even search online for information on disposing of bodies, as seen in the case of Anurag Johri, the "Google killer," whose internet history fatally connected him to his crime.

Data from the Office for National Statistics reveals deeper societal issues, underpinning the motivations for murder in the UK. Wilson highlights that the majority of murder victims are men, with a significant portion resulting from altercations among young males, often escalated by substance abuse. He notes that intoxication can lead to a temporary lapse in judgment where an individual feels compelled to assert their identity through violence, typically following a perceived slight or disrespect.

Moreover, Wilson draws attention to the alarming statistic that two women are murdered weekly by current or former partners. This trend, he argues, reflects deeply ingrained misogynistic attitudes within society. To combat this, he asserts that men must reflect on and discuss the roots of such aggression and work collectively to redefine masculinity.

The issue of digital footprints in criminal investigations extends beyond mere convenience; it also encompasses the broader implications for law enforcement and society. With increasing reliance on digital evidence, as underscored by various studies, police forces face the ongoing challenge of adapting their strategies to deal effectively with crimes deeply entwined with technology. The permanence of digital traces complicates privacy matters and highlights the urgent need for enhanced training among officers, enabling them to navigate this evolving landscape proficiently.

Wilson’s insights serve as a reminder that understanding the criminal mind requires a nuanced approach that considers societal norms, technological impacts, and psychological underpinnings. In a world where digital footprints are virtually indelible, both individual accountability and systemic improvements in law enforcement practices remain critical to mitigating the consequences of such offences.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-14687147/criminologist-murder-killer-evidence.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-14687147/criminologist-murder-killer-evidence.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.bcu.ac.uk/business-law-and-social-sciences/staff/sociology-and-criminology/david-wilson)
3. Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-14687147/criminologist-murder-killer-evidence.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.bcu.ac.uk/business-law-and-social-sciences/staff/sociology-and-criminology/david-wilson)
4. Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-14687147/criminologist-murder-killer-evidence.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://cacm.acm.org/news/a-digital-trail-is-forever/), [[3]](https://www.murdoch.edu.au/news/articles/fighting-crime-in-a-digital-world)
5. Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-14687147/criminologist-murder-killer-evidence.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR890.html), [[6]](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-91735-7_5)
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8. Paragraph 8: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-14687147/criminologist-murder-killer-evidence.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://cacm.acm.org/news/a-digital-trail-is-forever/), [[5]](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR890.html)
9. Paragraph 9: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-14687147/criminologist-murder-killer-evidence.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.bcu.ac.uk/business-law-and-social-sciences/staff/sociology-and-criminology/david-wilson), [[5]](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR890.html)
10. Paragraph 10: [[3]](https://www.murdoch.edu.au/news/articles/fighting-crime-in-a-digital-world), [[7]](https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003195283-11/use-digital-evidence-homicide-investigations-dana-wilson-kovacs-helen-jones-fiona-brookman)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-14687147/criminologist-murder-killer-evidence.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://cacm.acm.org/news/a-digital-trail-is-forever/> - This article discusses the permanence of digital footprints and their implications for privacy. It highlights how online activities, such as social media posts and search histories, create lasting records that can be traced back to individuals. The piece emphasizes the challenges in maintaining privacy in the digital age and the potential consequences of leaving a digital trail, including the risk of personal information being exposed or misused.
3. <https://www.murdoch.edu.au/news/articles/fighting-crime-in-a-digital-world> - Dr. Michael Wilson, a criminologist at Murdoch University, is leading research to enhance police capabilities in investigating cybercrime. The study surveyed over 400 police officers in Queensland and New South Wales, revealing a general lack of preparedness among general duty officers to handle cybercrime offenses. The findings underscore the need for additional training and resources to equip law enforcement with the necessary skills to combat online crime effectively.
4. <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/business-law-and-social-sciences/staff/sociology-and-criminology/david-wilson> - Professor David Wilson is an emeritus professor of criminology at Birmingham City University, specializing in serious violent crime, particularly murder and serial murder. He has worked with various British police forces and has been involved in high-profile cases. Wilson is also known for his media appearances and has authored several books on criminology and criminal justice.
5. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR890.html> - This RAND Corporation report examines the role of digital evidence in the U.S. criminal justice system. It identifies and prioritizes needs related to the collection, management, analysis, and use of digital evidence. The study highlights the increasing importance of digital devices in investigations and prosecutions, emphasizing the necessity for law enforcement to effectively acquire and utilize digital information to solve crimes.
6. <https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-91735-7_5> - This chapter discusses the role of forensic intelligence and traceology in digital environments, focusing on the detection and analysis of crime patterns. It highlights how digital traces, such as data from mobile devices, can inform investigative practices and contribute to solving crimes. The chapter emphasizes the importance of integrating digital evidence into forensic analysis to enhance crime detection and prevention strategies.
7. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003195283-11/use-digital-evidence-homicide-investigations-dana-wilson-kovacs-helen-jones-fiona-brookman> - This chapter explores the increasing role of digital evidence in homicide investigations. It examines how police forces in England and Wales incorporate digital data from mobile devices into their inquiries. The study highlights both the opportunities and challenges associated with extracting and analyzing digital information, contributing to discussions on optimizing the use of digital traces in criminal investigations.