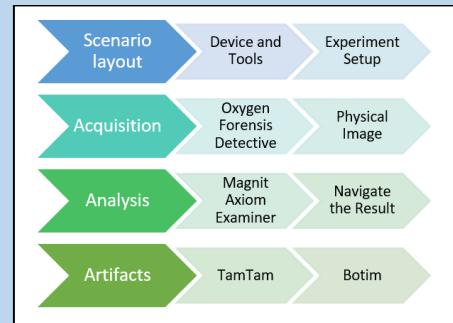


Mobile Forensics Analysis for Instant Messaging Applications Namely TamTam and Botim

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Abstract: Cybercrimes are rapidly increasing in parallel with the usage of digital tools. Criminals can use many methods to carry out their crimes such as mobile phones and instant messaging applications. Because of that, it is important to investigate the ability to retrieve evidence from mobiles that may be involved in cybercrime. This research aims to perform a mobile forensic analysis to retrieve evidence from specific instant messaging applications. To this end, an experiment was conducted to mimic the scene of illegal messages, delete them, and investigate the ability to retrieve deleted files. According to the result, this research successfully obtained text messages, multimedia data, and contact lists. The research's novelty can be derived from its ability to retrieve deleted data, demonstrating the feasibility of retrieving evidence from instant messaging applications that have not been investigated before. In future work, analyzing these applications under other operating system platforms may offer valuable artifacts for investigators.



Keywords: Cybercrime, digital forensics, mobile forensics, physical acquisition, artifacts.

Introduction

Criminals are increasingly turning to technology to carry out their nefarious activities. From cyberattacks on businesses and governments to online harassment of individuals, digital crime is a growing problem that requires sophisticated solutions [1]. Many solutions are offered by researchers to fight against digital crimes such as using machine learning [2], and digital forensics [3]. The process of gathering, analyzing, and preserving digital evidence for use in court cases is known as "digital forensics." [4]. Young users are encouraged to use new technologies [5], which may lead to misuse. Instant messaging (IM) applications are widely used for communication on mobile devices; see Figure (1). Such applications have completely changed the way

we interact. Users may now participate in real-time, multimedia-rich conversations anywhere in the world utilizing these tools, which go beyond the limitations of traditional text messages and voice calls. In a time when information is shared quickly, apps like TamTam and Botim have become essential resources for millions of users, they perfectly capture the ever-changing world of instant messaging, where users prioritize simplicity, privacy, and the smooth integration of different media formats. These applications contain valuable data that can be relevant to criminal investigations. For example, IM apps may store chat logs, multimedia files, geolocation data, and other information that can be used to build a case against a suspect [6].

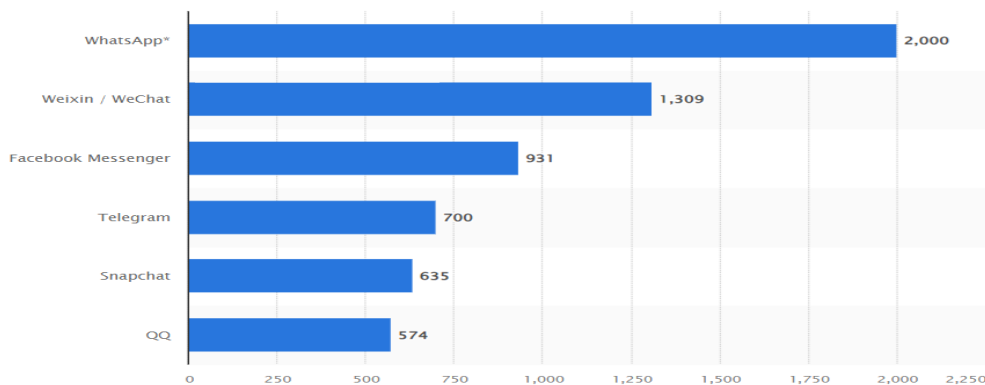


Figure (1): Based on monthly active users (in millions), the most widely used mobile chat apps worldwide [57]

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This research focuses on two specific IM applications (TamTam and Botim) and explores the digital artifacts that can be retrieved from these applications on the Android operating system. As mentioned before, IM applications have become a critical source of evidence in cybercrime investigations, and forensic investigators require reliable and effective methods to retrieve artifacts from these applications. Because of that, this study aims to perform digital forensics analysis for TamTam and Botim instant messaging applications and investigate the ability to retrieve artifacts under the Android operating system.

The research aimed to achieve the following goals: -

1. Analyze application integration for forensic analysis: examine how well the Galaxy J7 Prime's TamTam and Botim applications integrate and function to decide whether or not they are appropriate for retrieving forensic evidence.
2. Perform device acquisition for evidence retrieval: in the context of a forensic investigation, carry out a thorough physical acquisition of the mobile phone to gather all relevant information, including system files, application data, and user-generated content.
3. Extract and examine forensic artifacts: from the obtained device data, locate, extract, and examine digital artifacts associated with the IM applications, placing special emphasis on the recovery of text messages, multimedia files, and logs that could be used as forensic evidence.
4. Examine the Possibility of Data Recovery: Determine if it is possible to retrieve data that has been destroyed, particularly from the TamTam and Botim applications. This assessment should consider the consequences of forensic inquiries and the retrieval of data that has been purposefully deleted.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 describes the present related studies' results. Section 3 describes the methodology and development for conducting the forensics analysis. Section 4 draws the paper's overall conclusions.

Literature Review

This section presents an overview of TamTam and Botim applications, a definition of mobile forensics, a general overview of the mobile devices' data acquisition techniques and challenges utilized by digital forensic investigators, and lastly, a discussion about related studies in the field will be provided.

TamTam and Botim Applications

TamTam is a free messenger that can be used on both mobiles and PCs. TamTam offers different capabilities such: as channels, video calls, voice calls, and geolocation services. Botim is another free messenger application working on both mobiles and PCs, using Botim will make you able to send and receive images, and text messages. Perform video, audio calls, and group chats [7–9].

Mobile Forensics

Retrieval of electronic evidence from mobiles under regulated and appropriate investigative scientific circumstances is known as mobile forensics. [10]. This branch has become essential as a result of the expanding need for mobile-based services, an increase in users, and sporadic improvements in mobile technologies like accessibility and widespread as well as the quickly developing Internet of Things (IoT) technology, which requires device connectivity. [11].

Challenges of Acquiring Mobile Phones

Because of the rising variability of mobile operating systems and their supporting features, mobile forensics is inherently interdisciplinary and challenging. In addition to legacy phones with core features and smartphones, information obtained from a variety of digital electronic devices, including personal digital assistants (PDAs), tablets, and navigation systems is included in mobile forensics. The development of mobile forensics is being influenced by complex systems, the appearance of new types of devices, and the mounting pressure on device manufacturers to build more sophisticated safety features for their products, making the gathering of evidence more challenging [12].

Mobile Devices Data Acquisition Techniques

Acquiring data from mobile devices can be achieved using one of two main ways, logical acquisition, and physical acquisition [13]. It may be possible to obtain a logical copy of the device without having to root it, and this method can deliver virtual files of the data that is kept in the memory., whereas the physical version may require rooting the device which may cause problems [14]. The investigator must be aware of forensics tools to choose the most appropriate instrument for each case. In certain circumstances, investigators just need specific and significant data. In some cases, however, complete extraction of the mobile device's physical memory and internal storage files is necessary to recover erased data and conduct a thorough forensic examination [15].

Used Forensic Analysis Tools

Magnet AXIOM and Oxygen Forensic Detective were used to perform the analysis in this research. Both tools are considered essential tools in the field of digital forensic analysis, each of which provides a wide range of potent features designed to satisfy the complicated needs of forensic investigations. Call logs, text messages, multimedia material, and geolocation data are just a few of the many types of digital data that Oxygen Forensic Detective may collect, decode, and analyze. Its ability to adapt to a variety of platforms and devices, which lets investigators follow a complete digital trail, is what makes it so strong [16]. Similarly, Magnet AXIOM is excellent at recovering artifacts and obtaining data from cloud accounts, mobile phones, and PCs. It is distinguished by the smooth integration and correlation of data it offers, giving investigators a thorough picture of a subject's digital activity. These technologies' simple graphical user interfaces, sophisticated search features, and effective reporting tools make the normally difficult work of gathering and analyzing information easier. It makes sense to use Oxygen Forensic Detective and Magnet AXIOM because they may speed the examination of digital evidence, and improve the effectiveness of investigations [17,18].

Related Work

Many studies in the literature performed a forensic analysis for instant messaging (IM) applications. Some of these studies investigated the ability to retrieve artifacts from different applications under the IOS operating system [19–22], windows platform [23–30], and Android operating system. As soon as this study performs the forensic analysis under the Android operating system, we will discuss some studies in the Android environment.

The study of [31], analyzed WhatsApp, WeChat, Viber, and Telegram applications. The study aimed to locate where the user data is stored in the mobile file system and show how these applications store data in the Android OS. In the end, they were

able to retrieve some text messages only. The WeChat application's database file location is examined by [32]. The database files are recovered with the use of reverse engineering methods. However, with the latest version of the WeChat app, the methods employed and discussed in this research are no longer relevant. The Telegram artifacts are addressed in [33], however, the writers were unable to find the location of the conversation database storage. They just talk about the various conversation modes offered by Telegram and its level of security. The author of [34] goes into great depth about the forensically significant artifacts that Telegram Messenger stores. Their methods for reconstructing contact lists, text and non-textual communications, and voice call log files are also covered in the study. This paper was able to acquire the metadata information about the message details only, and the actual text communications could not be obtained.

The study of [35], performed a forensics analysis for Yahoo Messenger, and Google Talk, on iPhone devices, and they were able to retrieve the conversation log and passwords [36]. Analyzed WhatsApp, Viber, and Tango applications on Android mobiles and retrieved chat logs and history, sent and received multimedia files. The study of [37], conducted a forensics analysis for Telegram, Line, and Kakao talk messenger on Android OS, and they were able to retrieve private chat, secret chat, and hidden chat from them. [38], were able to retrieve account information and messages from the Instagram application on Android OS.

The mentioned studies were able to retrieve some artifacts from different applications but they do not illustrate what kind of data acquisition they performed for the analysis, and this is an important point when performing such an analysis. The normal thing for a cybercriminal is to delete files related to his crime. For example, in the case of electronic blackmail, the criminal deletes the conversation between him and the victim to erase any evidence proving his guilt. In this case, the forensic analysis will not make sense if not recover deleted files.

Some of the studies were able to retrieve metadata information about the message details only. Others were able to retrieve text messages. This research was able to retrieve text messages, contact lists, and multimedia messages successfully.

This will contribute to the body of knowledge by:

1. Offering a methodology to perform a forensics investigation for TamTam and Botim applications that may be used in cybercrimes.
2. Highlight the importance of performing the physical acquisition to retrieve deleted files.
3. A better understanding for forensic practitioners, law enforcement agencies, and policymakers about the tools involved in the investigation process.
4. Demonstrating the feasibility of retrieving evidence from TamTam and Botim applications.
5. Clarifies the significance of data safety and privacy due to the prevailing belief that deleting data from mobile phones will erase it forever and it can't be retrieved.

Materials and Methods

The general framework for conducting this study is illustrated in Figure (2).

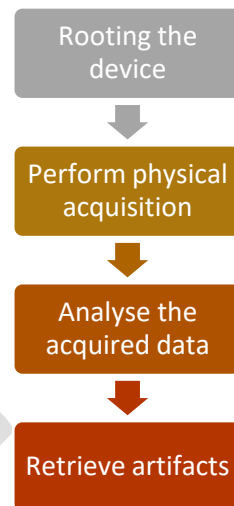


Figure (2): The general framework used in the study

As shown in Figure (2), the first step in the framework was rooting the device to gain elevated access to it. This gives the user full access to the internal functions of the device by allowing them to change system files and configurations. Then a physical acquisition was performed to gain all data including deleted ones. Then we analyze the acquired data and navigate the result to retrieve artifacts from the mentioned applications.

The methodology used in this paper consists of four phases which are: 1. The Experiment setup phase. 2. Acquisition phase. 3. Analysis phase. 4. Artifacts phase. In this section, we will discuss each phase separately. See Figure (3), which illustrates the methodology used to conduct this study.

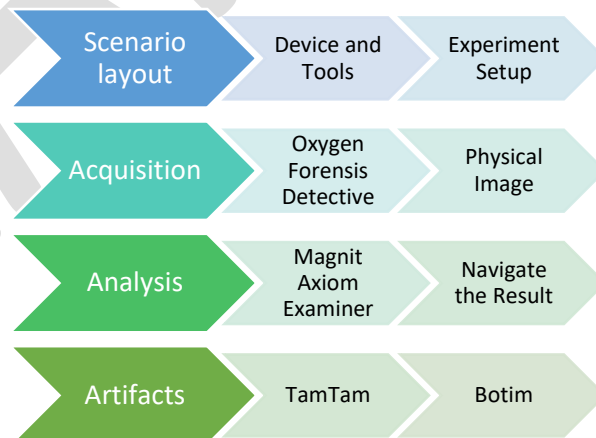


Figure (3). Methodology

As shown in Figure (3), our methodology consists of four steps which we will discuss in a separate section.

Scenario layout

In this phase, we perform an experiment to simulate a crime scenario in which the criminal uses an IM application for illegal purposes and then deletes the messages to dispose of the evidence. So, we install the mentioned applications on two mobile devices, sending and receiving messages and finally, we delete the messages and the applications.

Devices and Tools

To perform the forensics analysis, this paper uses different types of devices and software illustrated in

Table 1.

Table 1. Tools and Devices used to perform forensics investigation

	Devices & Tools	Description
1	HP laptop Intel(R) Core (TM) i5	Perform the forensics analysis
2	USB cable	USB connector to connect mobile device and PC
3	Samsung Galaxy J7 Prime OS: Android version 8.1.0 Storage: 16 GB internal storage	Smart mobile to be analyzed
4	Samsung Galaxy A52s OS: Android version 12	Smart mobile For experiment setup
5	TamTam v2.29.1	Application
6	Botim v2.7.9	Application
7	Magnet axiom	Analysis tool
8	Oxygen forensic detective	Analysis tool

As shown in

Table 1, this paper uses Galaxy J7 Prime and Galaxy A52s mobile phones to conduct experiments. Two different forensics tools were used; Oxygen forensics for acquisition and Magnet axiom for analysis, both tools were installed on an HP Core i5 laptop.

Experiment Setup

In this research, experimental work was performed as follows:

- Install the TamTam, and Botim applications from the Google Play Store on both devices Samsung Galaxy J7 Prime, and Samsung Galaxy A52s.
- Start using the application within both devices (adding numbers, contact list...etc.).
- Sending and receiving data between both devices (J7 Prime and A52s).
- Take a logical image of the Samsung Galaxy J7 Prime device (using the Magnet axiom process).
- Delete the conversation.
- Take a logical image of the Samsung Galaxy J7 Prime device again (using the Magnet axiom process).
- Take a physical image of the Samsung Galaxy J7 Prime device (using Oxygen Forensic Detective).
- Navigate the image to retrieve artifacts (using the Magnet axiom examine).

Acquisition

This research performed a physical acquisition technique using the Oxygen forensic detective tool. Oxygen Forensic Detective is a robust mobile forensic tool that combines powerful data extraction, analysis, and reporting capabilities. The tool supports both logical and physical extractions from a wide range of mobile phones, including smartphones and tablets running on different operating systems such as iOS, Android, and others. It can acquire data through various methods, including cable connections, wireless connections, and even through cloud backups. It assists investigators in uncovering and analyzing mobile data to analyze it and aid in the successful conclusion of crime investigations.

Analysis

The analysis was performed using the Magnet axiom tool. Magnet AXIOM is a preferred choice in mobile forensics due to its comprehensive device support, powerful analysis features, recovery tools, and collaborative functionalities. It empowers investigators to efficiently collect and analyze digital evidence, aiding in the successful resolution of cybercrime cases and facilitating efficient reporting and collaboration among investigators. It enables the creation of detailed reports with customizable templates, annotations, and bookmarks, making it easier to present findings and collaborate with other forensic professionals.

Results and Discussion

The experiment conducted in this research yielded significant findings in the domain of mobile forensic analysis. Through an examination of the TamTam and Botim applications on the Galaxy J7 Prime, various data artifacts were successfully retrieved. These artifacts included text messages, multimedia files, and contact lists, demonstrating the applications' potential as sources of forensic evidence. Notably, the research also explored the feasibility of recovering deleted data, and the results indicated a promising ability to retrieve information that had been intentionally erased by the user.

Because the aim of the study, research is concerned with searching for TamTam, and Botim artifacts in the internal storage of the device, we will highlight the artifacts related to them only.

TamTam Application Artifacts

The forensic analysis of the TamTam application revealed critical data storage locations within the device. Messages and contacts associated with the TamTam application were identified and recovered from the file path `userdata.bin - Entire Disk (EXT-family, 11.24 GB)\data\ru.ok.messages\databases\cache.db` (see Figure 4). This discovery is significant as it demonstrates that even after users attempt to delete their communication history, residual data can still be retrieved from the device.

Magnet AXIOM Examine v5.4.0.26185 - 107

File Tools Process Help

FILTERS Evidence Artifacts Content types Date and time Tags and comments Profiles Partial results Keyword lists Skin tone Type a search term... GO ADVANCED

Artifacts

EVIDENCE (13) Column view

Hasan (a)

userdata.bin

PREVIEW

5/26/2022 6:47:43 PM
عائده
كيتك

5/26/2022 6:47:48 PM
Received
عائده
5/26/2022 6:47:48 PM

5/26/2022 6:47:49 PM
Received
عائده
5/26/2022 6:47:49 PM

5/26/2022 6:47:57 PM
Received
عائده
فيهم عندي

Sender	Sender...	Reci...	Recipi...	Message	Message Tim...	Status	Res...
Hasan	584904190608	عائده	584913132182	عائده حح	5/26/2022 6:45:49 PM	Sent	Text
Hasan	584904190608	عائده	584913132182		5/26/2022 6:45:55 PM	Sent	
Hasan	584904190608	عائده	584913132182		5/26/2022 6:45:50 PM	Sent	Text
Hasan	584904190608	عائده	584913132182		5/26/2022 6:46:16 PM	Sent	Audio
Hasan	584904190608	عائده	584913132182	ابعت نص وصورة	5/26/2022 6:46:27 PM	Sent	Text
عائده	584913132182	Hasan	584904190608	طيب	5/26/2022 6:47:40 PM	Received	Text
عائده	584913132182	Hasan	584904190608	كيتك	5/26/2022 6:47:43 PM	Received	Text
عائده	584913132182	Hasan	584904190608		5/26/2022 6:47:48 PM	Received	Text
عائده	584913132182	Hasan	584904190608		5/26/2022 6:47:49 PM	Received	Text
عائده	584913132182	Hasan	584904190608	هههم عندي	5/26/2022 6:47:57 PM	Received	Text
عائده	584913132182	Hasan	584904190608	طيب	5/26/2022 6:48:42 PM	Received	Text
عائده	584913132182	Hasan	584904190608		5/26/2022 6:50:04 PM	Received	Picture
عائده	584913132182	Hasan	584904190608	يلا بيعين الله	5/26/2022 6:51:14 PM	Received	Text

ALL EVIDENCE 109,111

REFINED RESULTS 10,362

WEB RELATED 7,691

COMMUNICATION 36,371

- Android Call Logs 1,076
- Android Contacts 1,195
- Android SMS/MMS 295
- Android Snapchat Sent Snaps 1
- Android WhatsApp Accounts Information 1
- Android WhatsApp Contacts 2,207
- Android WhatsApp Messages 31,140
- Android WhatsApp Profile Pictures 431
- Android WhatsApp User Profiles 1
- LINE Messages 1
- TamTam Messenger Contacts - Android 3
- TamTam Messenger Conversations - Android 2
- TamTam Messenger Messages - Android 13
- TextPlus Calls 5

SOCIAL NETWORKING 2

Building picture comparison - 0% VIEW DETAILS CANCEL

Time zone UTC+0:00

Magnet AXIOM Examine v5.4.0.26185 - 107

File Tools Process Help

FILTERS Evidence Artifacts Content types Date and time Tags and comments Profiles Partial results Keyword lists Skin tone Type a search term... GO ADVANCED

Artifacts

EVIDENCE (3) Column view

584904190608 (b)

userdata.bin

DETAILS

ARTIFACT INFORMATION

Contact ID 584904190608

Profile Name Hasan

Updated Date/Time 5/31/2022 1:08:45 PM

EVIDENCE INFORMATION

Source userdata.bin - Entire Disk (EXT-family, 11.24 GB)\data\r.u.ok.messages\databases\cache.db

Recovery method Parsing

Deleted source

Location Table: contacts(_id: 1)

Evidence number userdata.bin

Contact...	Profi...	Web...	Abo...	Avat...	Updated Date/...	Source
584904190608	Hasan				5/31/2022 1:08:45 PM	userdata.bin - Entire Disk
595620880129	AS2s				5/28/2022 7:00:00 PM	userdata.bin - Entire Disk
584913132182	عائده				5/30/2022 11:17:10 PM	userdata.bin - Entire Disk

ALL EVIDENCE 109,111

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- Android Call Logs 1,076
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- TamTam Messenger Conversations - Android 2
- TamTam Messenger Messages - Android 13
- TextPlus Calls 5

SOCIAL NETWORKING 2

Building picture comparison - 0% VIEW DETAILS CANCEL

Time zone UTC+0:00

Figure (4): TamTam Artifacts; a) TamTam messages. b) TamTam contact list.

As illustrated in (Figure 4, a), the messages that were sent using the TamTam application were successfully retrieved post-deletion. This finding is crucial for forensic investigations, as it indicates that vital communication evidence can be preserved despite deliberate erasure by users. Furthermore, (Figure 4, b) displays the recovered contact list from the application, which, in this experiment, contained the three contacts that were saved during the setup phase. This reinforces the capability of forensic tools to recover essential user data even in scenarios where the application has been partially or fully uninstalled.

Botim Application Artifacts

Similarly, the analysis of the Botim application revealed key storage paths and data structures within the device's internal storage. The data relating to the Botim application was found in the directory "media\0\Android\data\im.thebot.messenger\files", as shown in Figure 5. This directory contained various artifacts, including log files, media files, and hex files, all of which are of potential interest in a forensic investigation.

Particularly noteworthy is the recovery of photo messages, which were retrieved after the user had deleted them. These images were stored in the path "userdata.bin - Entire Disk (EXT-family, 11.24GB)\media\0\Android\data\im.thebot.messenger\files\Media\BOT\Images\8363ec9e88141127b8241ec1883ff96b.jpg". The ability to recover such media files is particularly important in cases where visual evidence plays a critical role in the investigation.

Because forensic tools are sensitive and security-related, Oxygen Forensic Detective and Magnet AXIOM use proprietary techniques and approaches that they do not publicly publish. To recover erased data, digital forensics programs frequently combine different methodologies, which can differ throughout

solutions. However, these are the popular methods for recovering erased data in the field of digital forensics: -

1. File Carving: File carving is a technique used to recover files based on their headers, footers, and internal data structures. Even if a file has been deleted, remnants of its data may still exist on the storage medium. Forensic tools can identify these remnants and reconstruct deleted files.
2. Journaling and Logging: Many file systems maintain a journal or log that records changes made to the file system, including file creations, modifications, and deletions. Forensic tools can analyze these logs to reconstruct the history of file operations and recover deleted files.
3. Unused Space Analysis: When a file is deleted, the space it occupies on the storage medium is marked as "free" or "unused." Forensic tools can scan the unused space to identify and recover fragments of deleted files.
4. Metadata Analysis: File metadata, such as timestamps and file attributes, can provide valuable information about the existence and characteristics of deleted files. Forensic tools often analyze metadata to reconstruct the timeline of file activities [39,40].

Overall, the results of this study underscore the importance of thorough forensic analysis in mobile investigations. The successful recovery of deleted data from both TamTam and Botim applications highlights the potential for obtaining crucial evidence from instant messaging platforms that have not been widely studied before. These findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge in mobile forensics, offering new insights and methodologies for future investigation.

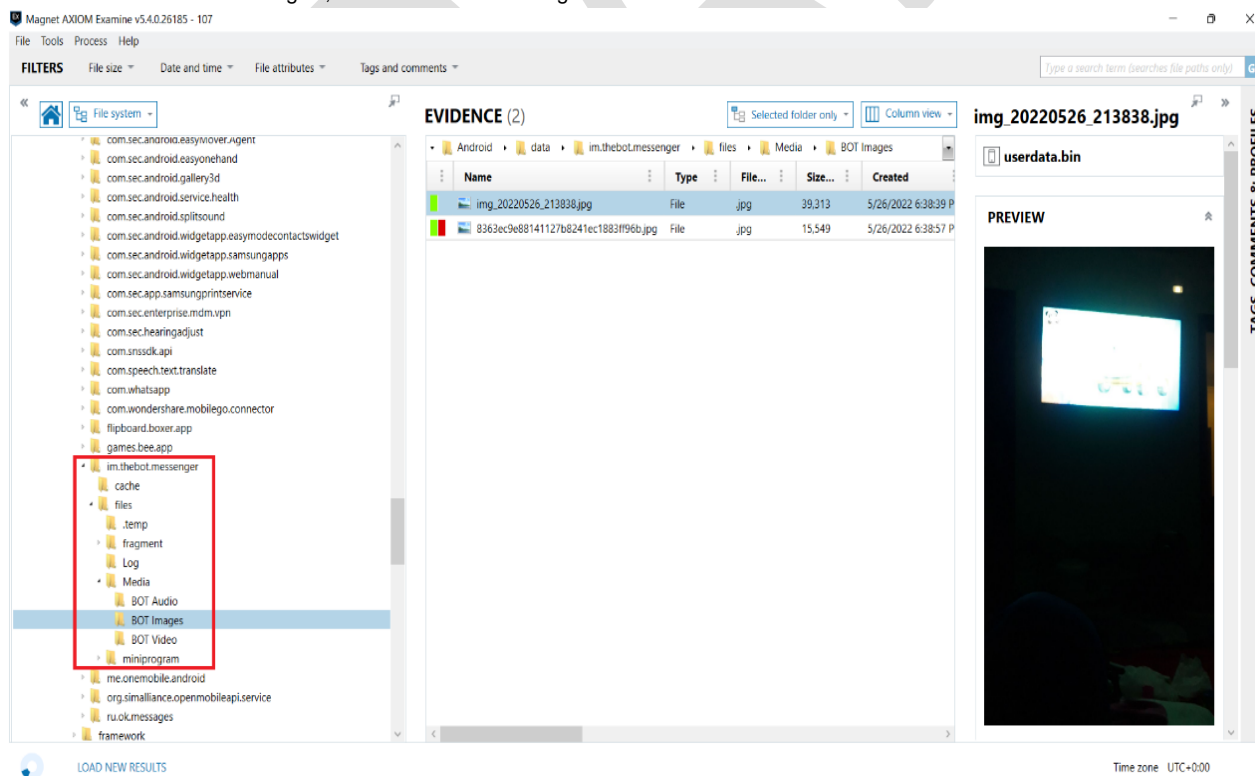


Figure (5): Botim Application Artifacts.

Conclusion

This study performed a forensics analysis for instant messaging applications that have not been discussed before in the literature namely; TamTam, and Botim applications. This study was investigated using the Oxygen Forensic Detective tool. A physical analysis was employed to retrieve artifacts related to the mentioned applications from an Android mobile phone (J7 Prime). The findings of the study were: - First, the authors were able to retrieve text messages, photos, voice messages, and contact lists from the TamTam application. Second, the multimedia files within the Botim application were retrieved. The results of the present study do not conflict with the general framework of the instant messaging forensics studies in the field [41–47]; [48–56] The limitations of the study were as follows: First, finding a suitable forensics tool was hard, because of the varied number of mobile types, software, and applications of anti-forensics techniques. Second, time limitations. In future work, the analysis of mentioned applications on PCs (Windows or MAC operating systems) may offer additional information for investigators in the forensics field.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable

Consent for publication

Not applicable

Availability of data and materials

The study team gathered the information utilized in this article, and it will be provided to additional researchers upon request.

Author's contribution

The authors confirm their contribution to the paper as follows: study conception and design: Aburbeian, A.H, Owda, M and Owda, A; theoretical calculations and modeling: Aburbeian, A.H and Owda, M; data analysis and validation, Aburbeian, A.H, Owda, M and Owda, A; draft manuscript preparation: Aburbeian, A.H, Owda, M and Owda, A. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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