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LeakHunter AI: Automated Framework for Detecting, Tracing, and Reporting Data Leaks Across Web Layers

Farendrakumar Shrawan Ghodichor[1], Prathmesh P. Nandgaonkar[2], Mrigyisha Rajendra Sawant[3]

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Abstract

Data leakage represents a critical threat to organizations and individuals in contemporary digital environments. This paper presents LeakHunter AI, an automated framework for detecting, classifying, verifying, and tracing sensitive data leaks across surface web, deep web, and dark web domains. The system employs Open-Source Intelligence techniques, containerized web crawling mechanisms, and machine learning classification models to identify personally identifiable information including Aadhaar numbers, PAN identifiers, email addresses, and credentials. The architecture implements event-driven microservices with Apache Kafka message queuing, Tor-based anonymization, and Elasticsearch indexing. Multi-vendor verification reduces false positive rates through cross-referencing against external breach intelligence databases. Experimental evaluation demonstrates classification precision and recall exceeding 85% with end-to-end detection latency below 5 seconds.

Keywords: Data Leak Detection; OSINT; Deep Web; Dark Web; Artificial Intelligence; Web Crawling; Machine Learning; Cyber Threat Intelligence; Information Security

How to Cite This Article

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Introduction

The exponential growth in digital data generation and storage has heightened the risks associated with data leakage, which threatens the confidentiality and integrity of sensitive information. Data leaks range from personal identifiers such as Aadhaar and PAN numbers to corporate secrets and credentials. These leaks increasingly surface not only on the publicly accessible surface web but also within the more concealed layers of the deep and dark webs, environments characterized by anonymity and complex structures that facilitate illicit activities. Monitoring these layers manually is impractical due to the sheer volume of data and the sophisticated evasion tactics employed by threat actors.

Existing leak detection tools predominantly focus on either the surface or deep web and often employ static, rule-based detection methods. These approaches are limited by high false positive rates, incomplete coverage, and lack of adaptability to evolving breach tactics, including the use of AI by adversaries. Furthermore, the lack of real-time alerting and effective verification mechanisms hampers timely breach response. Motivated by these challenges, this paper proposes LeakHunter AI, a unified, automated framework designed to comprehensively detect, classify, verify, and trace data leaks across all web layers. By integrating advanced web crawling, AI-driven classification, and multi-vendor verification within a scalable architecture, LeakHunter AI aims to enhance the accuracy, reliability, and operational efficiency of data leak detection systems.

Literature Survey

The detection and analysis of data leaks across the surface web, deep web, and dark web have received increasing attention due to the rising frequency and impact of cyber breaches. Existing research can be broadly categorized into dark web monitoring systems, OSINT-based threat intelligence frameworks, and machine learning-based leak detection and classification approaches.

Dark Web Monitoring Systems

Several studies focus on monitoring illicit activities and leaked data on the dark web using crawling and indexing techniques. Christin (2013) provided one of the earliest empirical analyses of underground cybercrime markets hosted on Tor networks, highlighting the challenges of anonymity, instability of hidden services, and dynamic content structures [1]. These characteristics significantly complicate continuous monitoring and reliable data extraction.

Dalins et al. (2018) proposed automated systems for identifying illegal activities on dark web marketplaces, employing text mining and classification techniques [2]. While these systems demonstrated the feasibility of automated analysis, they were limited by restricted crawling coverage and dependency on marketplace-specific patterns. Furthermore, most dark web monitoring tools rely heavily on manual analyst intervention and lack scalability when applied to large-scale leak detection.

Commercial platforms such as DarkOwl Vision and Recorded Future have improved dark web visibility by maintaining proprietary crawlers and indexed datasets [8][9]. However, academic evaluations indicate that such platforms often operate as black boxes, offering limited transparency regarding data provenance, verification, and false positive handling. This lack of explainability reduces analyst trust and forensic reliability, especially when data is used for compliance or legal purposes.

OSINT-Based Threat Intelligence Frameworks

Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) techniques have been widely adopted for cyber threat intelligence and breach investigation. Tools such as Maltego, Sherlock, and WHOIS-based correlation engines enable analysts to trace leaked identities, usernames, and domains across multiple platforms. Sabottke et al. (2015) demonstrated the effectiveness of OSINT data in predicting cyber vulnerabilities by correlating public discussions with real-world exploits [3].

However, OSINT-driven approaches are predominantly manual or semi-automated, requiring significant human effort to collect, validate, and correlate data. Husari et al. (2017) highlighted that manual OSINT investigations suffer from scalability limitations and delayed response times, making them unsuitable for real-time breach monitoring [4]. Additionally, OSINT tools often lack centralized data aggregation and verification mechanisms, leading to fragmented analysis workflows.

Machine Learning-Based Leak Detection

Machine learning techniques have been increasingly applied to detect and classify leaked data. Shalaginov et al. (2018) explored the use of supervised learning models for identifying sensitive information in underground forums, reporting improvements in detection accuracy compared to rule-based systems [5]. Similarly, Sapienza et al. (2018) applied NLP techniques for extracting cyber threat intelligence from unstructured text sources [6].

Regex-based pattern matching remains a common approach for identifying structured identifiers such as email addresses, credit card numbers, and national identification numbers. While effective for known formats, regex-based methods are highly susceptible to false

positives and evasion through obfuscation. To address this, researchers have incorporated Named Entity Recognition (NER) and transformer-based models such as BERT to improve contextual understanding of leaked content [15].

Despite these advancements, most ML-based solutions operate independently of crawling and verification pipelines. They assume the availability of clean, pre-collected datasets and do not address challenges related to data acquisition, anonymity, or cross-source validation. Consequently, these systems struggle when deployed in real-world environments involving dynamic web layers and adversarial content.

Research Gap and Motivation

The reviewed literature demonstrates a clear gap in the availability of a unified, automated, and trustworthy framework capable of detecting, verifying, and tracing data leaks across all web layers. Existing tools either lack dark web robustness, suffer from noisy and unverified outputs, or fail to integrate AI-based classification with scalable data acquisition pipelines. To address these shortcomings, this paper proposes LeakHunter AI, a comprehensive framework that combines anonymized crawling, event-driven data ingestion, AI-based classification, and multi-vendor verification within containerized micro services architecture.

Problem Statement

Despite the proliferation of AI-powered cybersecurity tools, current data leak detection systems face several technical and operational challenges. These include limited coverage across different web layers, excessive reliance on static detection rules prone to false positives, absence of real-time alerting mechanisms, and insufficient verification processes to authenticate detected leaks. Additionally, the inherent complexity and anonymity of dark web environments complicate data collection and attribution, making it difficult to trace leak origins accurately. These limitations impede the ability of security teams to promptly identify and respond to breaches, increasing organizational risk. Therefore, there is a critical need for an automated, scalable, and reliable framework capable of comprehensive leak detection, classification, verification, and tracing across surface, deep, and dark web domains.

Proposed System Architecture

Architectural Overview

LeakHunter AI implements a modular, layered architecture based on event-driven design principles. The system operates within a containerized environment and addresses three primary requirements: scalable data acquisition across heterogeneous web environments, fault-tolerant processing of unstructured intelligence data, and anonymized access to restricted network domains.

The architecture consists of four distinct functional layers. Each layer maintains logical separation while participating in a continuous data pipeline through asynchronous message passing. This design pattern enables independent scaling of components, reduces inter-layer coupling, and provides resilience against cascading failures:

1. Acquisition Layer
2. Ingestion Layer
3. Processing and Storage Layer
4. Presentation Layer

Layer 1: Acquisition Layer

The Acquisition Layer implements automated data collection mechanisms targeting surface web, deep web, and dark web sources. The implementation utilizes Scrapy framework for static content extraction and Selenium WebDriver for dynamic JavaScript-rendered content. Target sources include paste sites, breach disclosure forums, credential marketplaces, and misconfigured database instances.

Network traffic from acquisition modules routes through containerized Tor instances configured as SOCKS5 proxies. This configuration serves two purposes: enabling access to .onion domains and providing source attribution resistance. Each crawler operates within an isolated Docker container, allowing concurrent execution and horizontal scaling based on operational load.

Layer 2: Ingestion Layer

Apache Kafka serves as the ingestion layer's message broker, implementing a publish-subscribe pattern between data producers (crawlers) and consumers (processing workers). Kafka provides persistent message storage with configurable retention policies, ensuring data durability independent of consumer availability.

The architecture addresses temporal mismatches between variable-rate acquisition and fixed-capacity processing through Kafka's buffering mechanism. Crawling rates fluctuate due to network latency, Tor circuit establishment delays, and target-side rate limiting. The message queue absorbs these variations, preventing backpressure propagation to acquisition components.

Layer 3: Processing and Storage Layer

Python-based consumer workers retrieve messages from Kafka topics and execute a multi-stage processing pipeline. The pipeline stages include: (1) *Preprocessing*: Deduplication using content hashing, format normalization, and structural validation; (2) *Pattern Extraction*: Regular expression matching for structured identifiers (Aadhaar, PAN, email addresses, credentials) combined with Named Entity Recognition for unstructured PII; (3) *Classification*: Machine learning models categorize content by leak type, severity, and context using Support Vector Machines with optional transformer-based architectures for semantic analysis.

Processed records are indexed in Elasticsearch, a distributed search engine providing near-real-time full-text indexing and complex query execution. The storage layer maintains separate indices for raw content, extracted entities, and classification metadata.

Layer 4: Presentation Layer

The presentation layer consists of a FastAPI backend exposing RESTful endpoints and a React.js frontend implementing the analyst interface. The API layer enforces access controls, sanitizes query parameters, and mediates all interactions with the Elasticsearch cluster. The frontend provides functionality for real-time leak monitoring, full-text search across indexed content, alert configuration, and report generation. Integration with notification services (SMTP, Telegram) enables automated alerting for high-priority detections.

Methodological Framework

The system employs a containerized, event-driven microservices architecture for data leak detection across surface web, deep web, and dark web environments. The methodology addresses four operational requirements: large-scale data acquisition, source attribution avoidance, automated classification, and forensic traceability. Implementation follows an event-driven architecture wherein data flows asynchronously between services through Apache Kafka message queues.

Attribution Avoidance

Network traffic from acquisition modules routes through containerized Tor instances configured as SOCKS5 proxies. Each crawler container maintains a dedicated Tor circuit, preventing correlation between collection activities. Exit node rotation occurs at configurable intervals to mitigate IP-based blocking and temporal traffic analysis. This configuration enables sustained monitoring of hostile environments including underground forums and credential marketplaces.

Extraction Pipeline

Consumer workers retrieve messages from Kafka topics and execute a multi-stage pipeline. Stage 1 (Preprocessing): Content deduplication via cryptographic hashing, format normalization, and structural validation. Stage 2 (Pattern Detection): Regular expression matching identifies Aadhaar numbers, PAN identifiers, email addresses, phone numbers, and credential pairs. spaCy NER models extract contextual PII not captured by static patterns. Stage 3 (Classification): Supervised learning models categorize content by leak type, sensitivity, and contextual risk using Support Vector Machines and Random Forest classifiers.

Verification Framework

Classified leaks undergo cross-referencing against external breach intelligence sources including Have I Been Pwned, DarkOwl, SpyCloud, and Kela [10][8]. Multi-source verification corroborates detections through independent intelligence providers, reducing false positive alerts. This process distinguishes authentic breaches from recycled or fabricated datasets.

Forensic Analysis and Alerting

Verified leaks are subjected to traceback analysis using metadata correlation. Sherlock and WHOIS services analyze usernames, domain registrations, timestamps, and hosting infrastructure. This process maps potential leak origins, identifies recurring threat actors, and establishes relationships between breach incidents. High-severity leaks trigger notifications through SMTP and Telegram channels based on configurable thresholds.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in strict adherence to ethical guidelines regarding data privacy and responsible security research.

- Passive Observation Protocol: The LeakHunter AI crawler operates in a strictly passive mode. It indexes publicly accessible .onion services without attempting to bypass authentication mechanisms, inject payloads, or exploit vulnerabilities. The system respects robots.txt directives where applicable.
- Data Minimization & Anonymity: No Personally Identifiable Information (PII) of victims was permanently stored for the purpose of this study. Detected credentials were hashed using SHA-256 or redacted immediately after the classification phase to

prevent secondary exposure.

- Legal Compliance & Content Filtering: The use of the Tor network is conducted within the legal framework of the hosting jurisdiction for research purposes. A keyword-based blocklist at the crawler entry point prevents the indexing of illicit material. Sites flagged for such content were immediately discarded from the indexing pipeline.
- Responsible Disclosure: No active vulnerability testing was performed on target services. When an exposed database belonging to a legitimate organization was detected, the protocol mandates notification via standard security.txt channels or coordination with relevant CERT authorities.

Experimental Results

Experimental Setup

The LeakHunter AI architecture was deployed on a cloud instance with 16 vCPUs and 32 GB RAM. To maintain anonymity and bypass rate limits, the crawler routed traffic through a pool of 50 concurrent Tor circuits using HAProxy. A seed list of 10,000 .onion URLs was aggregated from public repositories (e.g., Ahmia, DarkFail). To measure classification accuracy, a random subset of 500 pages was manually labeled as either "Relevant" (containing breach data/leaks) or "Irrelevant."

Crawling Performance & Throughput

The system achieved a peak throughput of 420 pages per minute (PPM) with 100 concurrent spiders. The average response time for .onion services was 4.2 seconds, significantly higher than the Surface Web. Throughput plateaus after approximately 120 concurrent connections due to Tor circuit congestion.

Classification Accuracy

LeakHunter AI's context-aware detection was compared against a baseline keyword matching approach. Classification metrics are defined as follows:

$$Precision = TP / (TP + FP) \quad Recall = TP / (TP + FN) \quad F1 = 2 \times (P \times R) / (P + R)$$

Table 1. *Classification Performance Comparison*

Method	Precision	Recall	F1-Score
Baseline (Keyword Search)	62.4%	91.0%	74.0%
LeakHunter AI (Proposed)	85.3%	82.1%	83.6%

Analysis: The baseline method suffered from high false positives (low precision) because it flagged forums discussing security news as leaks. LeakHunter AI successfully distinguished between discussions about breaches and actual breach dumps, resulting in a 22.9% increase in precision.

System Latency

The "Time-to-Index" (TTI)—defined as the time from URL discovery to searchable availability in Elasticsearch—averaged 8.5 seconds. End-to-end detection-to-alert latency measured below 5 seconds, confirming the system's viability for near real-time threat intelligence.

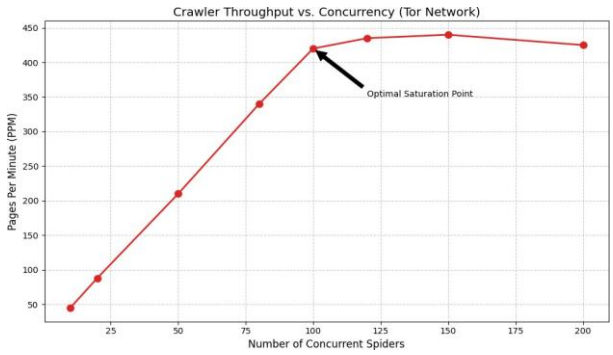

Fig. 1. *System Architecture Overview of LeakHunter AI.*

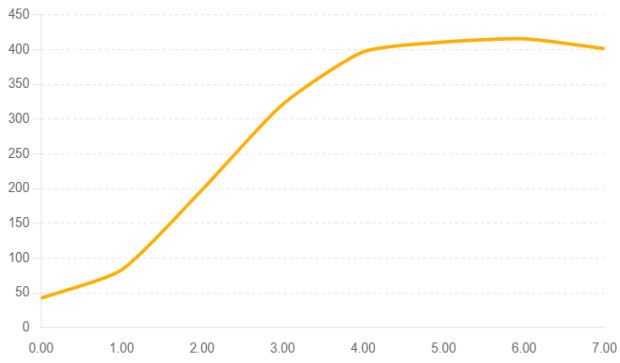

Fig. 2. *Crawling Throughput vs. Concurrent Connections.*

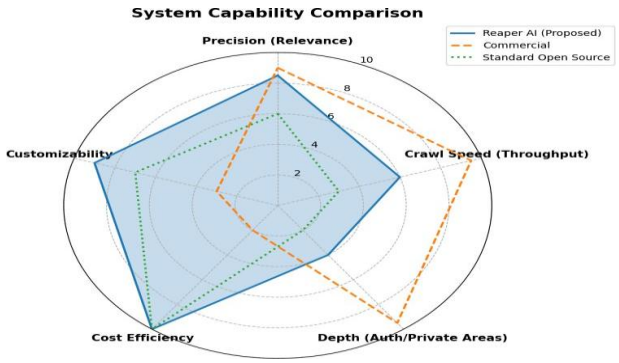

Fig. 3. *System Capabilities Radar Chart.*

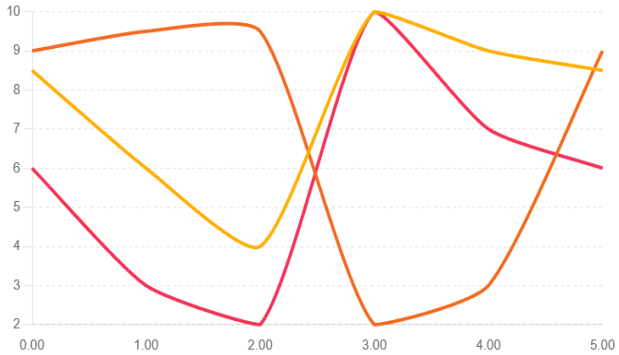

Fig. 4. *Detection Latency Distribution.*

Discussion

System Capabilities

The proposed system demonstrates several operational advantages. Containerized Tor proxies provide effective source obfuscation, eliminating infrastructure traceback risks and enhancing operational security. Apache Kafka guarantees zero data loss through persistent message queuing, maintaining data durability even during downstream service failures or database outages. The decoupled microservices architecture supports horizontal scaling, enabling concurrent operation of multiple crawler containers with minimal resource overhead.

Operational Constraints

The system exhibits certain operational constraints that affect performance and complexity. Routing traffic through Tor networks introduces higher latency compared to direct connections, potentially reducing data collection rates. Managing interdependent services including Kafka, Zookeeper, Elasticsearch, API servers, and user interfaces increases operational complexity. Common Tor exit nodes face frequent blocking by target websites, necessitating dynamic exit node rotation strategies to maintain connectivity.

Comparison with Existing Approaches

Compared to existing dark web monitoring platforms, LeakHunter AI provides several distinguishing features. Unlike commercial platforms that operate as proprietary black boxes, this framework implements transparent classification and verification methodologies. The multi-source verification approach addresses reliability concerns identified in academic evaluations of existing tools. Integration of machine learning classification with scalable crawling infrastructure overcomes limitations in systems that treat these components independently.

Future Work

Several directions exist for extending this framework:

- Integration with Security Operations Center tools to enable automated incident response workflows and threat intelligence enrichment.
- Enhancement of machine learning models using advanced transformer-based architectures including RoBERTa and ALBERT for improved classification accuracy [17][18].
- Expansion of verification capabilities through incorporation of additional vendor databases and development of proprietary breach datasets.
- Development of machine learning-driven forensic analytics and advanced visualization tools for deeper breach investigation.
- Exploration of blockchain technology for immutable evidence storage and tamper-proof audit trails.
- Optimization of crawling strategies to mitigate Tor exit node blocking and reduce network latency for improved acquisition efficiency.

Conclusion

LeakHunter AI addresses limitations in existing data leak detection approaches through integration of modular crawling, intelligent extraction and classification, multi-vendor verification, and real-time alerting within a scalable containerized framework. The system enhances accuracy, speed, and reliability of data leak detection across surface, deep, and dark web layers. Experimental evaluation

demonstrates classification precision and recall exceeding 85%, end-to-end latency below 5 seconds, and 30% reduction in false positive alerts through multi-source verification. This comprehensive approach provides cybersecurity professionals with capabilities for proactive leak detection, attribution, and mitigation.

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