ISD

Powering solutions
to extremism, hate
and disinformation

Conspiracy Clickbait

Case Study 1: Farming Facebook

Elise Thomas

About this publication

In the field of disinformation and conspiracy theories, there has been a tendency for policymakers and practitioners to focus on state-linked operations and to overlook the role of commercially motivated networks. However, the rise of a global industry producing conspiracy clickbait for profit is likely to have significant implications.

This report explores three case studies of how networks linked to individuals in Vietnam are using QAnon conspiracy theories and US political disinformation to generate revenue. These case studies illustrate that although the motive may be commercial, the effect of such networks is to deepen political division and amplify conspiracy theories and disinformation. While each individual network may only have a small impact, the cumulative impact of many such networks around the world may be profound. This growing industry is disproportionately targeted at the US, and therefore should be of particular concern for US policymakers and practitioners.

About the author

Elise Thomas is an OSINT Analyst at ISD, with a background in researching state-linked information operations, disinformation, conspiracy theories and the online dynamics of political movements. She also freelances as a journalist, and her work has appeared in Bellingcat, Foreign Policy, The Daily Beast, Wired and others. She is the author of Recommended Reading: Amazon's algorithms, conspiracy theories and extremist literature and The Long Tail of Influence Operations: A Case Study on News Front and the co-author of COVID-19 Disinformation Briefing No.4.

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Operation overview

This operation involves a network of at least 49 Facebook groups and pages sharing plagiarized political content, primarily hosted on off-platform domains. It appears likely that the business model of this content farming network is based around cultivating large, organic audiences for Facebook pages and groups, and then selling those assets off on the lucrative re-sale market.

ISD has determined that these Facebook assets are connected to each other and operate as a network through direct connections, for example pages being administrators of groups; individual user accounts acting as administrators of multiple groups all sharing the same content and exhibiting the same behavior; and through indirect indicators such as patterns of sharing behavior.

The network content is plagiarized from a range of fringe pro-Trump sources such as We Love Trump, MAGA Conservatives, Steve Bannon's War Room Pandemic, conspiracy influencer Mel K and others. As will be discussed below, the network operators have used homoglyphs to help conceal this plagiarism and to smuggle banned content onto Facebook's platform.

ISD has found strong evidence to attribute this activity to a small number of individuals based primarily in Asia, in particular Vietnam and Indonesia. ISD has chosen not to publicly identify these individuals to protect their privacy. The individuals appear to be young professionals and university students, some of whom have studied internationally in English-speaking countries and therefore likely speak the language well.

There is no indication of any political motive behind their activities. The same individuals have engaged in content farming on a range of other topics, such as 'wholesome' content or TV shows, and some of this activity is occurring alongside or even mixed in with the political content. It appears highly likely that the motive behind this network is commercial. A number of tactics and methods used by the network reflect the murky nature of the marketplace for these sorts of operations, including the use of hacked accounts and homoglyphs, a technique often used by hackers and fraudsters.

While the motive may be commercial, however, the impact is political. Unlike many politically motivated foreign influence efforts,[1] this network appears to be gaining significant authentic engagement with Facebook users around divisive and often misleading political content. This is particularly the case for users who are looking for content which has otherwise been banned from Facebook.

For example while QAnon is (in theory) banned from Facebook,[2] many Facebook users are still hungry for that content. While actual QAnon influencers have struggled to re-establish a substantial foothold on the platform, these professional content farmers evidently have the nous to evade Facebook's bans and bring QAnon content back onto the platform. In fact, the combination of high demand and relatively low competition is likely to be beneficial for them.

The business model of this network is slightly puzzling. It is not following the obvious path to monetization through running ads on its domains. The most likely explanation may be that they are farming Facebook itself. There is a lucrative market for Facebook groups and pages with large, authentic audiences. As speculation, this network may operate as a farmer and broker for Facebook assets: creating or purchasing pages and groups and using highly engaging content to attract real Facebook users, with the goal of selling those assets off when they reach a certain size.

Content

The network does not appear to produce any original content. Instead, it reproduces content likely to appeal to US-based conservative, pro-Trump and conspiracy theory audiences.

The articles reproduced on its domains are stolen from a range of sources, including fringe media sites like Gateway Pundit, pro-Trump sites such as WeLoveTrump.com, MAGAConservatives.com or AmericanLookout.com.

The narratives which the network chooses to highlight are overwhelmingly pro-Trump and anti-Democrat. They include baseless allegations of voter fraud in the US 2020 elections, and articles about supposed 'election audits' in several states which have likewise been repeatedly discredited.

At least two pages in the network have posed as Mel K, an influencer and online talk show host who has repeatedly promoted conspiracy theories including election fraud, as well as QAnon content and guests.

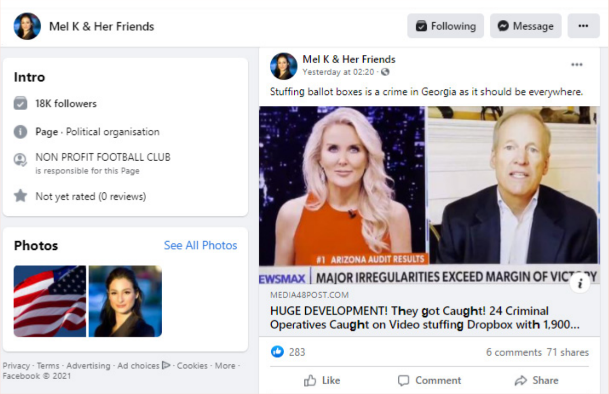
However, the most overtly QAnon content is in livestreams which the network broadcasts from a small number of its accounts.

These videos appear to be taken from a separate content farming operation on YouTube and Telegram (discussed in Case Study 2). However, these two networks do not appear to be directly connected to one another, or to the operation discussed in Case Study 3. The nature of the relationship between the three networks is murky, and is discussed further in the Discussion section.

The videos consist of a still image, usually of Trump, the White House or some other patriotic American motif, overlaid with stock footage of a person talking in one corner and an animated animal in the other. This visual content is completely disconnected from the audio, apart from some videos which include subtitles. The audio content appears to be ripped from livestreams of fringe online talk shows and podcasts, including Bannon's War Room as well as explicitly QAnon-focused shows.

As with the other content, the goal of these livestreaming pages is likely to be building up an organic following for the pages.

Fig 1: Screenshot of 'Mel K & Her Friends' page. Note the use of homoglyphs in the article title.



Mel K & Her Friends

Intro

18K followers

Page · Political organisation

NON PROFIT FOOTBALL CLUB
is responsible for this Page

Not yet rated (0 reviews)

Mel K & Her Friends
Yesterday at 02:20

Stuffing ballot boxes is a crime in Georgia as it should be everywhere.

MEDIA48POST.COM

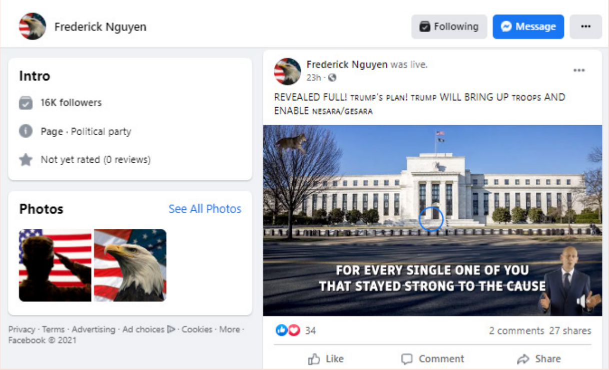
HUGE DEVELOPMENT! They got Caught! 24 Criminal Operatives Caught on Video stuffing Dropbox with 1,900...

283

6 comments 71 shares

Following
Message
Photos
See All Photos
Privacy · Terms · Advertising · Ad choices · Cookies · More · Facebook © 2021
#1 ARIZONA AUDIT RESULTS
EWSMAX
MAJOR IRREGULARITIES EXCEED MARGIN OF VICT
Like
Comment
Share

Fig 2: Screenshot of livestreamed content referencing QAnon conspiracy theories.



Frederick Nguyen

Intro

16K followers

Page · Political party

Not yet rated (0 reviews)

Frederick Nguyen was live.
23h

REVEALED FULL! TRUMP'S PLAN! TRUMP WILL BRING UP TROOPS AND ENABLE NESARA/GESARA

34

2 comments 27 shares

Following
Message
Photos
See All Photos
Privacy · Terms · Advertising · Ad choices · Cookies · More · Facebook © 2021
FOR EVERY SINGLE ONE OF YOU
THAT STAYED STRONG TO THE CAUSE
Like
Comment
Share

Facebook assets

Over the course of the investigation, ISD observed at least 49 pages and groups associated with the network. The true total number which the network has used over time is likely to be much higher, however. ISD has determined that these Facebook assets are connected to each other and operate as a network through direct connections, for example pages being administrators of groups; individual user accounts acting as administrators of multiple groups all sharing the same content and exhibiting the same behavior; and through indirect indicators such as patterns of sharing behavior.

Over the course of the investigation, a large number of pages and groups were removed by Facebook, presumably for suspicious or inauthentic behavior. However, these were swiftly and smoothly replaced, with little apparent disruption to the rest of the network. It seems likely that a certain rate of attrition is a normal and expected part of this sort of Facebook farming. As pages and groups went down and were replaced, the network leveraged their existing audiences across to the new assets by using remaining pages to cross-post and inviting followers to join new groups.

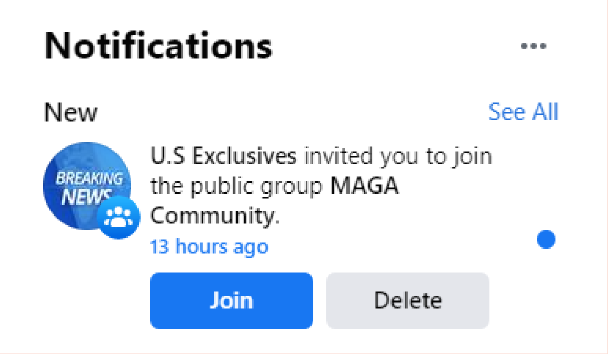
The pages and groups pose as pro-Trump political discussion spaces, fan pages for particular political celebrities (for example Candace Owens or Kayleigh McEnany) or position themselves as local news sources.

Many of these assets have tens of thousands of followers or group members, and generate seemingly organic engagement from real American Facebook users on the articles they post.

While some of the pages are newly created, a significant number have been used for a multitude of other purposes over a period of several years.

The diversity of topics and languages (including Indonesian and Portuguese) shown in the previous page names makes it seem likely that some of these assets may have been purchased from elsewhere. Others appear to be redirected from the network's other lines of content.

Fig 3: Screenshot of invitation to Facebook followers of a page in the network to join a new group. This group was created days after several previous groups were removed by Facebook.

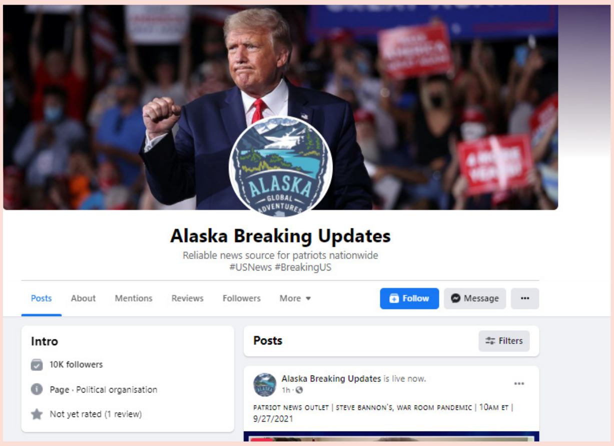


Notifications

New

U.S Exclusives invited you to join the public group MAGA Community.
13 hours ago

Fig 4: Screenshot of 'Alaska Breaking Updates', a page which is part of the network



Alaska Breaking Updates

Reliable news source for patriots nationwide
#USNews #BreakingUS

Intro

10K followers

Page · Political organisation

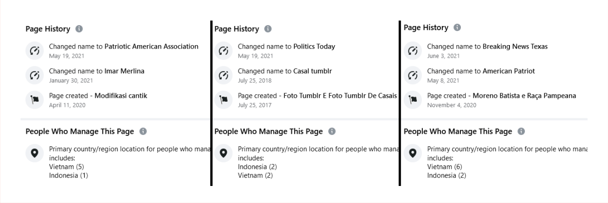
Not yet rated (1 review)

Posts

Alaska Breaking Updates is live now.
1h ·

PATRIOT NEWS OUTLET | STEVE BANNON'S, WAR ROOM PANDEMIC | 10AM ET | 9/27/2021

Fig 5: Page History panes for three Facebook pages involved in the network showing multiple name changes.



Page History

Changed name to Patriotic American Association
May 19, 2021

Changed name to Imar Merlina
January 30, 2021

Page created - Modifikasi cantik
April 11, 2020

People Who Manage This Page

Primary country/region location for people who mana
includes:
Vietnam (5)
Indonesia (1)

Page History

Changed name to Politics Today
May 19, 2021

Changed name to Casal tumblr
July 25, 2018

Page created - Foto Tumblr E Foto Tumblr De Casais
July 25, 2017

People Who Manage This Page

Primary country/region location for people who mana
includes:
Indonesia (2)
Vietnam (2)

Page History

Changed name to Breaking News Texas
June 3, 2021

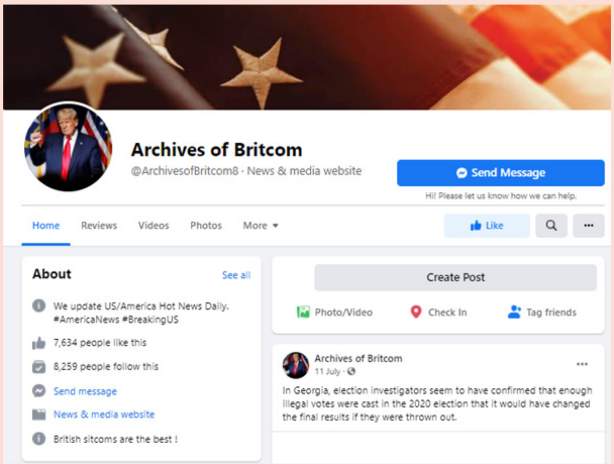
Changed name to American Patriot
May 8, 2021

Page created - Moreno Batista e Raça Pampeana
November 4, 2020

People Who Manage This Page

Primary country/region location for people who man
includes:
Vietnam (6)
Indonesia (2)

Fig 6: Screenshot of 'Archives of Britcom' Facebook page



Archives of Britcom

@ArchivesofBritcom8 · News & media website

Send Message

Hi! Please let us know how we can help.

About

See all

We update US/America Hot News Daily. #AmericaNews #BreakingUS

7,634 people like this

8,259 people follow this

Send message

News & media website

British sitcoms are the best !

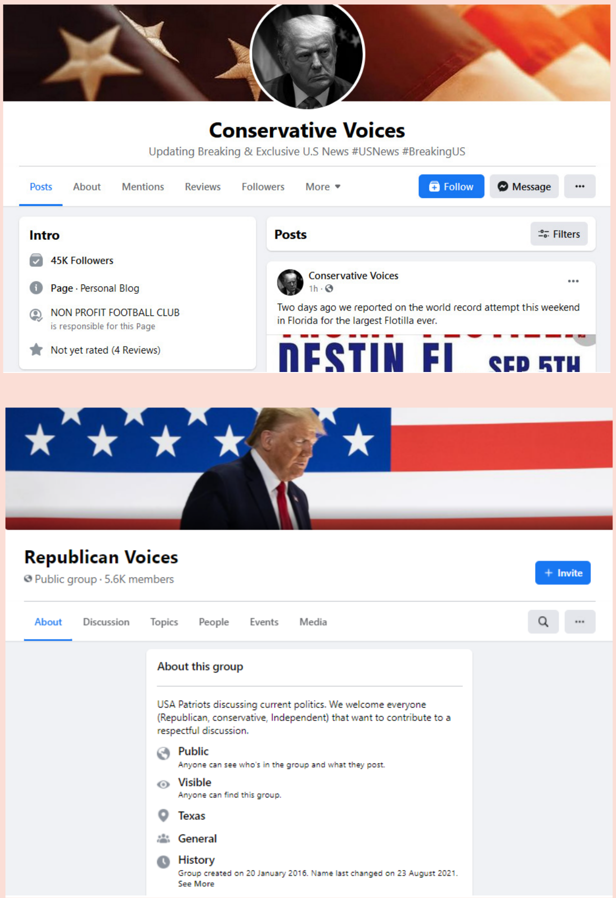
Create Post

Archives of Britcom

11 July ·

In Georgia, election investigators seem to have confirmed that enough illegal votes were cast in the 2020 election that it would have changed the final results if they were thrown out.

Fig 7: Screenshots of page and group



Conservative Voices

Updating Breaking & Exclusive U.S News #USNews #BreakingUS

Intro

45K Followers

Page · Personal Blog

NON PROFIT FOOTBALL CLUB
is responsible for this Page

Not yet rated (4 Reviews)

Posts

Conservative Voices

1h ·

Two days ago we reported on the world record attempt this weekend in Florida for the largest Flotilla ever.

Republican Voices

Public group · 5.6K members

About this group

USA Patriots discussing current politics. We welcome everyone (Republican, conservative, Independent) that want to contribute to a respectful discussion.

Public
Anyone can see who's in the group and what they post.

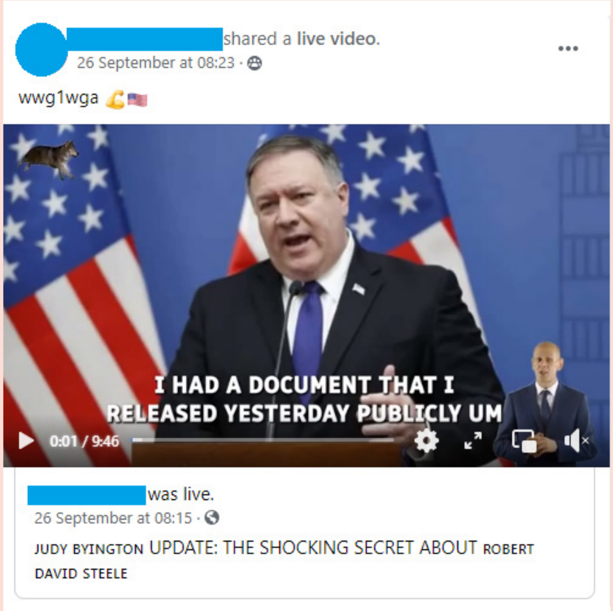
Visible
Anyone can find this group.

Texas

General

History
Group created on 20 January 2016. Name last changed on 23 August 2021.
See More

Fig 8: Screenshot of post from a likely hacked account



[redacted] shared a live video.

26 September at 08:23 ·

wwg1wga 💪🇺🇸

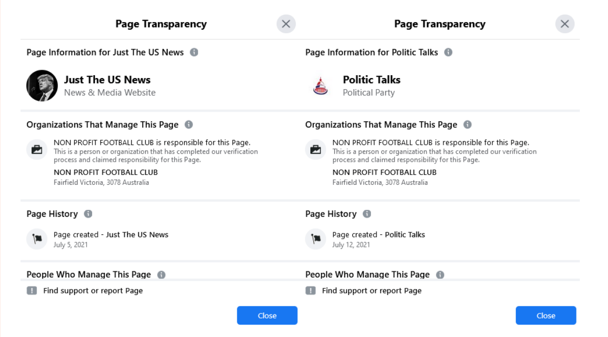
I HAD A DOCUMENT THAT I RELEASED YESTERDAY PUBLICLY UM

[redacted] was live.

26 September at 08:15 ·

JUDY BYINGTON UPDATE: THE SHOCKING SECRET ABOUT ROBERT DAVID STEELE

Fig 9: Screenshots of page transparency panes for two pages involved in the network, showing they are managed by 'NON PROFIT FOOTBALL CLUB' located in Fairfield in Melbourne, Australia.



Page Transparency

Page Information for Just The US News

Just The US News
News & Media Website

Organizations That Manage This Page

NON PROFIT FOOTBALL CLUB is responsible for this Page.
This is a person or organization that has completed our verification process and claimed responsibility for this Page.

NON PROFIT FOOTBALL CLUB
Fairfield Victoria, 3078 Australia

Page History

Page created - Just The US News
July 5, 2021

People Who Manage This Page

Find support or report Page

Page Transparency

Page Information for Politic Talks

Politic Talks
Political Party

Organizations That Manage This Page

NON PROFIT FOOTBALL CLUB is responsible for this Page.
This is a person or organization that has completed our verification process and claimed responsibility for this Page.

NON PROFIT FOOTBALL CLUB
Fairfield Victoria, 3078 Australia

Page History

Page created - Politic Talks
July 12, 2021

People Who Manage This Page

Find support or report Page

In the example above, a page which was previously used for content farming relating to British TV shows has been re-purposed for US political content but, as can be seen, the page has not been thoroughly cleaned of previous content.

The names of the groups and pages which the network operates are a useful indication of the audiences they are targeting. Over the course of ISD's investigation the network cycled through several groups, with names including 'US Conservatives', 'MAGA Community', 'Conservative Talks' and 'Republican Voices.' Pages likewise have names clearly intended to draw in US conservatives, Republican supporters and Trump fans.

There have also been clear efforts to specifically cultivate popularity among QAnon followers. For example, posts from apparently hacked accounts sharing network content into groups use the QAnon catchphrase 'WWG1WGA'.

According to Facebook page transparency data, a number of the pages used in the network are managed by an organization called 'NON PROFIT FOOTBALL CLUB' which has completed Facebook's verification process. This organization appears likely to have been verified during the period in which one of the network operators was studying in Melbourne, Australia, and may have been a legitimate page at the time before being repurposed for other ends.

The use of recycled assets appears to help the network to easily and efficiently compensate for the assets they lose to Facebook moderation.

Domains

ISD's investigation has identified five domains being used by the network for political content at the time of investigation in August and September 2021. As with the Facebook assets above, it seems likely that there may have been other domains used in the past by the same network.

These domains are:

1. socialtimenews.com
2. vtc-news.com
3. readydailytimes.com
4. media48post.com
5. hottodaynews.com
6. breaking99times.com

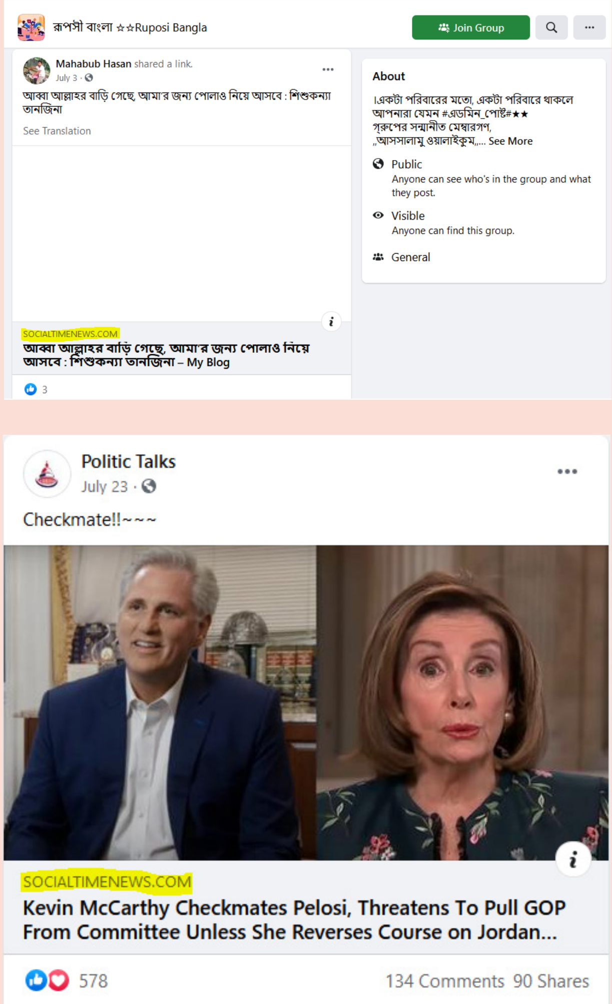
Domains 1-4 on this list were registered in June and July 2021, and are linked to the same Google Analytics account also used by the network for other content lines such as TV shows and 'wholesome' content. Hottodaynews.com and breaking99times.com were registered in around the same period but are not linked to the Google Analytics account.

CrowdTangle data shows that in June and July, these domains were used to share news and articles to Facebook in Bangla. This appears to have been activity unrelated to the current network's operations. Around July 3rd, however, there is an abrupt change in behavior from the domains as they suddenly begin posting in English about US political and conspiracy topics. It seems likely that on or around July 3 the domains were sold on by their original creators to the network operators in Vietnam.

The network operators have made little if any effort to make the sites look like legitimate news organizations. In several cases, they have not even bothered to replace the default header image for the 'Jannah news' theme they have used for the sites.

Another notable aspect of the domains is that, as of September 2021, they do not appear to be running advertisements. This combined with the lack of effort in disguising the domains as legitimate news sites suggests that the domains themselves are tools to an end rather than the focus of the network's business model. This supports the theory that the network is primarily about farming Facebook assets.

Fig 10: Screenshots showing behavioral shift by socialtimenews.com domain.



রূপসী বাংলা ☆☆Ruposi Bangla

Mahabub Hasan shared a link.
July 3 ·

আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আমা'র জন্য পোলাও নিয়ে আসবে : শিশুকন্যা তানজিনা

See Translation

SOCIALTIMENEWS.COM

আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আমা'র জন্য পোলাও নিয়ে আসবে : শিশুকন্যা তানজিনা – My Blog

3

About

।একটা পরিবারের মতো, একটা পরিবারে থাকলে আপনারা যেমন #এডমিন_পোষ্ট#★★
গ্রুপের সম্মানীত মেম্বারগণ,
„আসসালামু ওয়ালাইকুম„... See More

Public
Anyone can see who's in the group and what they post.

Visible
Anyone can find this group.

General

Politic Talks
July 23 ·

Checkmate!!~~~

SOCIALTIMENEWS.COM

Kevin McCarthy Checkmates Pelosi, Threatens To Pull GOP From Committee Unless She Reverses Course on Jordan...

578

134 Comments 90 Shares

Fig 12: Screenshot of socialtimenews.com, readydailytimes.com and vtc-news.com home pages, captured September 29th 2021

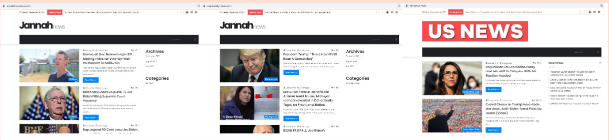
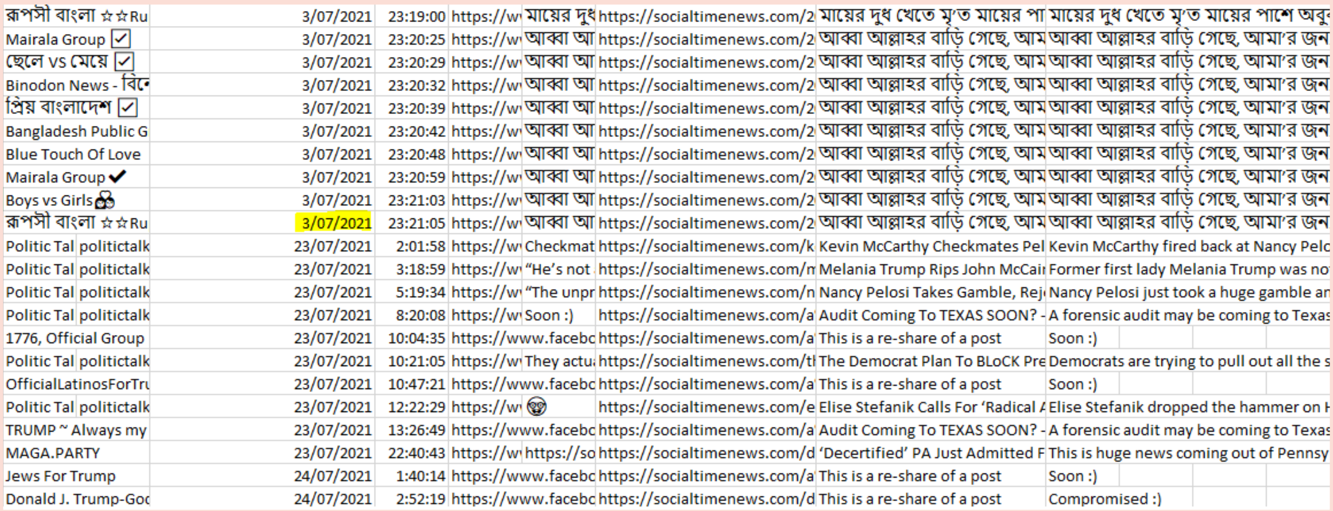
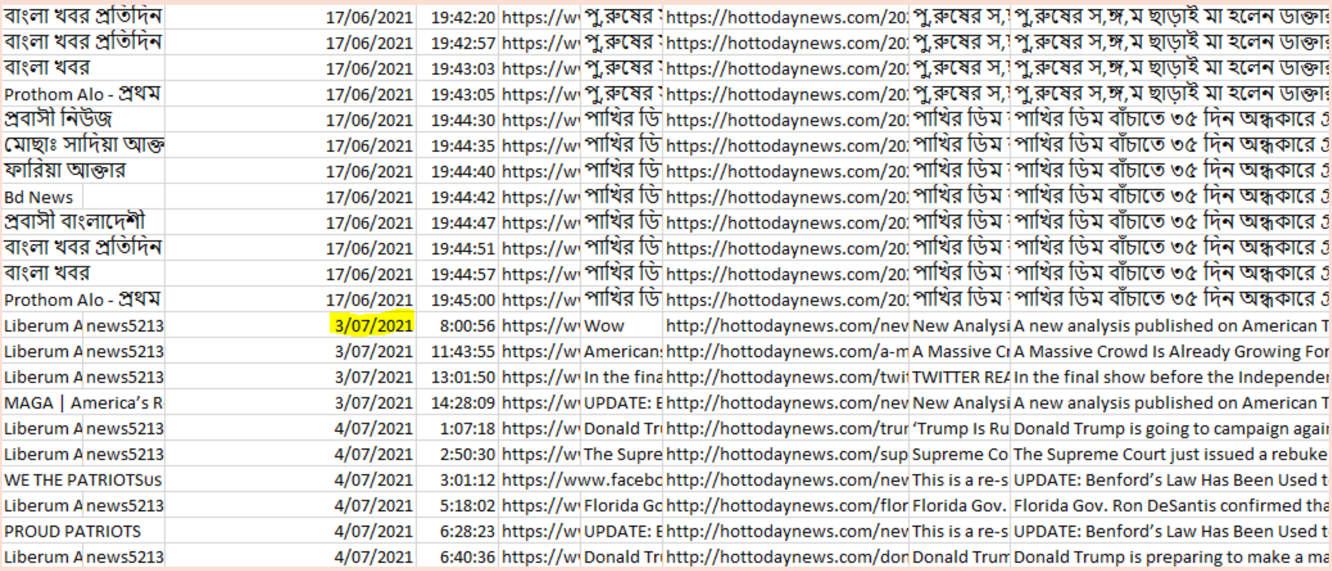


Fig 11: Screenshots of CrowdTangle data for two domains, showing behavioral shift on July 3rd.



রূপসী বাংলা ☆☆Ru		3/07/2021	23:19:00	https://w	মায়ের দুধ	https://socialtimenews.com/2	মায়ের দুধ খেতে মৃ’ত মায়ের পা	মায়ের দুধ খেতে মৃ’ত মায়ের পাশে অবু
Mairala Group ☑		3/07/2021	23:20:25	https://w	আব্বা আ	https://socialtimenews.com/2	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আম	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আমা’র জন
ছেলে vs মেয়ে ☑		3/07/2021	23:20:29	https://w	আব্বা আ	https://socialtimenews.com/2	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আম	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আমা’র জন
Binodon News - বিনে		3/07/2021	23:20:32	https://w	আব্বা আ	https://socialtimenews.com/2	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আম	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আমা’র জন
প্রিয় বাংলাদেশ ☑		3/07/2021	23:20:39	https://w	আব্বা আ	https://socialtimenews.com/2	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আম	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আমা’র জন
Bangladesh Public G		3/07/2021	23:20:42	https://w	আব্বা আ	https://socialtimenews.com/2	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আম	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আমা’র জন
Blue Touch Of Love		3/07/2021	23:20:48	https://w	আব্বা আ	https://socialtimenews.com/2	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আম	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আমা’র জন
Mairala Group ✔		3/07/2021	23:20:59	https://w	আব্বা আ	https://socialtimenews.com/2	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আম	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আমা’র জন
Boys vs Girls👫		3/07/2021	23:21:03	https://w	আব্বা আ	https://socialtimenews.com/2	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আম	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আমা’র জন
রূপসী বাংলা ☆☆Ru		3/07/2021	23:21:05	https://w	আব্বা আ	https://socialtimenews.com/2	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আম	আব্বা আল্লাহর বাড়ি গেছে, আমা’র জন
Politic Tal	politictalk	23/07/2021	2:01:58	https://w	Checkmat	https://socialtimenews.com/k	Kevin McCarthy Checkmates Pel	Kevin McCarthy fired back at Nancy Pelo
Politic Tal	politictalk	23/07/2021	3:18:59	https://w	“He’s not	https://socialtimenews.com/m	Melania Trump Rips John McCair	Former first lady Melania Trump was no
Politic Tal	politictalk	23/07/2021	5:19:34	https://w	“The unpr	https://socialtimenews.com/n	Nancy Pelosi Takes Gamble, Rej	Nancy Pelosi just took a huge gamble ar
Politic Tal	politictalk	23/07/2021	8:20:08	https://w	Soon :)	https://socialtimenews.com/a	Audit Coming To TEXAS SOON? -	A forensic audit may be coming to Texas
1776, Official Group		23/07/2021	10:04:35	https://www.facebc		https://socialtimenews.com/a	This is a re-share of a post	Soon :)
Politic Tal	politictalk	23/07/2021	10:21:05	https://w	They actu	https://socialtimenews.com/tl	The Democrat Plan To BLoCK Pre	Democrats are trying to pull out all the s
OfficialLatinosForTru		23/07/2021	10:47:21	https://www.facebc		https://socialtimenews.com/a	This is a re-share of a post	Soon :)
Politic Tal	politictalk	23/07/2021	12:22:29	https://w	😲	https://socialtimenews.com/e	Elise Stefanik Calls For ‘Radical A	Elise Stefanik dropped the hammer on H
TRUMP ~ Always my		23/07/2021	13:26:49	https://www.facebc		https://socialtimenews.com/a	Audit Coming To TEXAS SOON? -	A forensic audit may be coming to Texas
MAGA.PARTY		23/07/2021	22:40:43	https://w	https://so	https://socialtimenews.com/d	‘Decertified’ PA Just Admitted F	This is huge news coming out of Pennsy
Jews For Trump		24/07/2021	1:40:14	https://www.facebc		https://socialtimenews.com/a	This is a re-share of a post	Soon :)
Donald J. Trump-Goo		24/07/2021	2:52:19	https://www.facebc		https://socialtimenews.com/d	This is a re-share of a post	Compromised :)



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বাংলা খবর		17/06/2021	19:43:03	https://w	পু,রুষের	https://hottodaynews.com/20	পু,রুষের স,	পু,রুষের স,ঙ্গ,ম ছাড়াই মা হলেন ডাক্তা
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মোছাঃ সাদিয়া আক্ত		17/06/2021	19:44:35	https://w	পাখির ডি	https://hottodaynews.com/20	পাখির ডিম	পাখির ডিম বাঁচাতে ৩৫ দিন অন্ধকারে
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Liberum A	news5213	4/07/2021	6:40:36	https://w	Donald Tr	http://hottodaynews.com/dor	Donald Trum	Donald Trump is preparing to make a ma

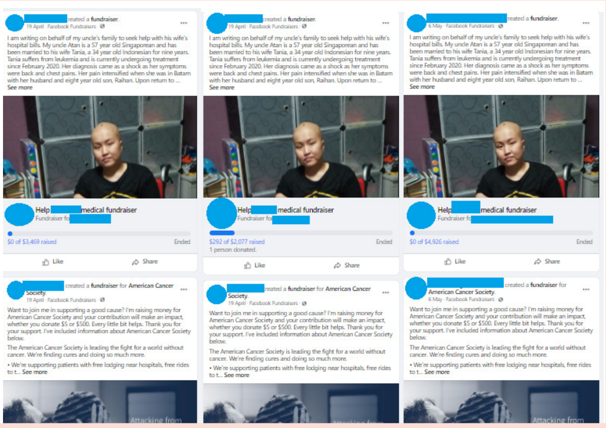
Use of hacked accounts

In Facebook groups operated by the network, a large number of article links to the domains are shared by what appear at first glance to be authentic Facebook users. However, a closer inspection reveals indications that at least some of these personal accounts may have been hacked.

For example, the last public activity on a number of the profiles is to share several identical and highly specific Facebook fundraisers. This is a common way in which hackers attempt to monetize hacked Facebook accounts. Unless all of these individuals happen to have the same uncle, it seems highly likely that they have been hacked by the same group.

In several cases, what appear to be the original account owners and their friends and family have posted on the account saying that it has been hacked.

Fig 13: Screenshot of suspected hacked Facebook accounts



[redacted] created a **fundraiser**.
19 April · Facebook Fundraisers ·

I am writing on behalf of my uncle's family to seek help with his wife's hospital bills. My uncle Atan is a 57 year old Singaporean and has been married to his wife Tania, a 34 year old Indonesian for nine years. Tania suffers from leukemia and is currently undergoing treatment since February 2020. Her diagnosis came as a shock as her symptoms were back and chest pains. Her pain intensified when she was in Batam with her husband and eight year old son, Raihan. Upon return to ... See more

Help [redacted] medical fundraiser
Fundraiser fo[redacted]

$0 of $3,469 raised · Ended

Like · Share

[redacted] created a **fundraiser**.
19 April · Facebook Fundraisers ·

I am writing on behalf of my uncle's family to seek help with his wife's hospital bills. My uncle Atan is a 57 year old Singaporean and has been married to his wife Tania, a 34 year old Indonesian for nine years. Tania suffers from leukemia and is currently undergoing treatment since February 2020. Her diagnosis came as a shock as her symptoms were back and chest pains. Her pain intensified when she was in Batam with her husband and eight year old son, Raihan. Upon return to ... See more

Help [redacted] medical fundraiser
Fundraiser fo[redacted]

$292 of $2,077 raised · Ended
1 person donated.

Like · Share

[redacted] created a **fundraiser**.
6 May · Facebook Fundraisers ·

I am writing on behalf of my uncle's family to seek help with his wife's hospital bills. My uncle Atan is a 57 year old Singaporean and has been married to his wife Tania, a 34 year old Indonesian for nine years. Tania suffers from leukemia and is currently undergoing treatment since February 2020. Her diagnosis came as a shock as her symptoms were back and chest pains. Her pain intensified when she was in Batam with her husband and eight year old son, Raihan. Upon return to ... See more

Help [redacted] medical fundraiser
Fundraiser fo[redacted]

$0 of $4,926 raised · Ended

Like · Share

[redacted] created a **fundraiser** for **American Cancer Society**.
19 April · Facebook Fundraisers ·

Want to join me in supporting a good cause? I'm raising money for American Cancer Society and your contribution will make an impact, whether you donate $5 or $500. Every little bit helps. Thank you for your support. I've included information about American Cancer Society below.

The American Cancer Society is leading the fight for a world without cancer. We're finding cures and doing so much more.

- We're supporting patients with free lodging near hospitals, free rides to t... See more

[redacted] created a **fundraiser** for **American Cancer Society**.
19 April · Facebook Fundraisers ·

Want to join me in supporting a good cause? I'm raising money for American Cancer Society and your contribution will make an impact, whether you donate $5 or $500. Every little bit helps. Thank you for your support. I've included information about American Cancer Society below.

The American Cancer Society is leading the fight for a world without cancer. We're finding cures and doing so much more.

- We're supporting patients with free lodging near hospitals, free rides to t... See more

[redacted] created a **fundraiser** for **American Cancer Society**.
6 May · Facebook Fundraisers ·

Want to join me in supporting a good cause? I'm raising money for American Cancer Society and your contribution will make an impact, whether you donate $5 or $500. Every little bit helps. Thank you for your support. I've included information about American Cancer Society below.

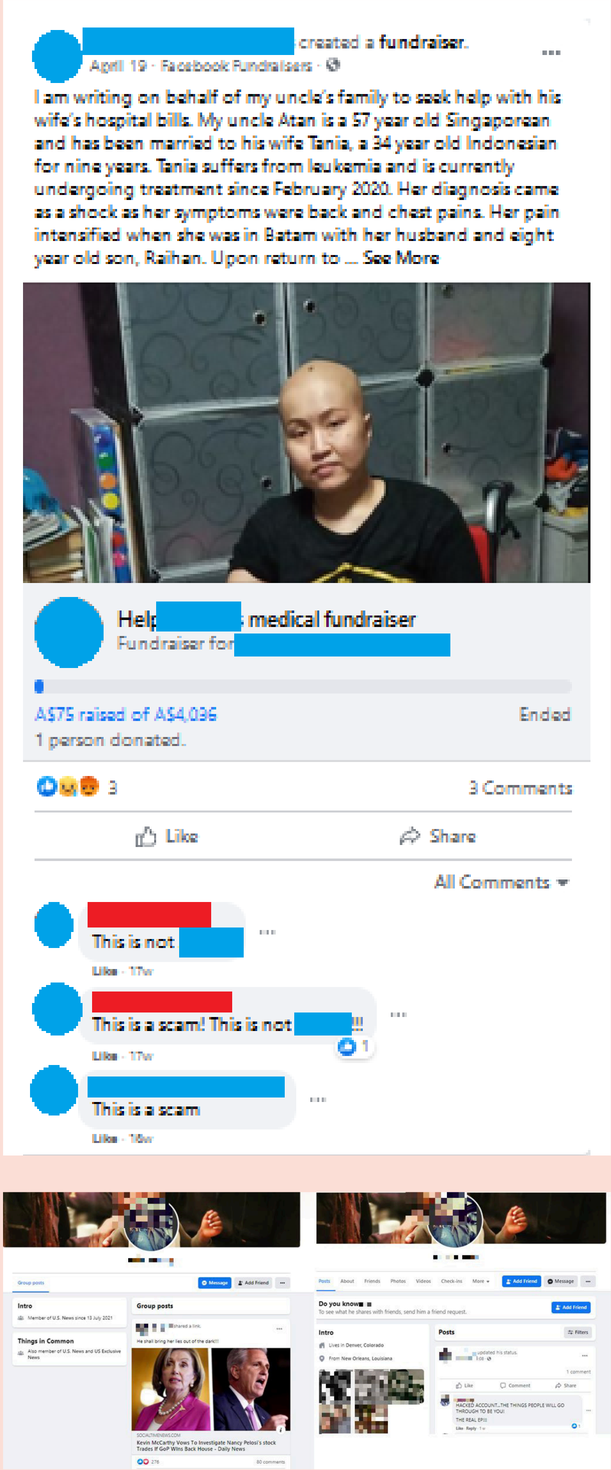
The American Cancer Society is leading the fight for a world without cancer. We're finding cures and doing so much more.

- We're supporting patients with free lodging near hospitals, free rides to t... See more

It is not clear whether the network involved in this operation were directly involved in either the account hacking or attempted scam fundraisers. It is possible that this is the case, but it is also possible that they purchased the hacked accounts through a dealer.

The benefit of using hacked accounts to share the article links is likely to be two-fold. Firstly, it makes the sharing behavior look more natural for the authentic users in their groups. Secondly, it makes the sharing behavior look more natural for Facebook's automated content moderation systems. Whereas a newly created account sharing multiple links to the same

Fig 14: Screenshot showing posts on suspected hacked Facebook account



[redacted] created a **fundraiser**.
April 19 · Facebook Fundraisers ·

I am writing on behalf of my uncle's family to seek help with his wife's hospital bills. My uncle Atan is a 57 year old Singaporean and has been married to his wife Tania, a 34 year old Indonesian for nine years. Tania suffers from leukemia and is currently undergoing treatment since February 2020. Her diagnosis came as a shock as her symptoms were back and chest pains. Her pain intensified when she was in Batam with her husband and eight year old son, Raihan. Upon return to ... See More

Help [redacted] medical fundraiser
Fundraiser for [redacted]

A$75 raised of A$4,036 · Ended
1 person donated.

3 · 3 Comments

Like · Share

All Comments ▾

[redacted]
This is not [redacted]
Like · 17w

[redacted]
This is a scam! This is not [redacted]!!! · 1
Like · 17w

[redacted]
This is a scam
Like · 16w

[redacted]

Group posts · Message · Add Friend · ···

Intro
Member of U.S. News since 13 July 2021

Things in Common
Also member of U.S. News and US Exclusive News

Group posts

[redacted] shared a link.
He shall bring her lies out of the dark!!!

SOCIALTIMENEWS.COM
Kevin McCarthy Vows To Investigate Nancy Pelosi's stock Trades If GoP Wins Back House - Daily News

276 · 80 comments

[redacted]

Posts · About · Friends · Photos · Videos · Check-ins · More ▾ · Add Friend · Message · ···

Do you know [redacted]
To see what he shares with friends, send him a friend request. · Add Friend

Intro
Lives in Denver, Colorado
From New Orleans, Louisiana

Posts · Filters

[redacted] updated his status.
1:08 ·

1 comment

Like · Comment · Share

[redacted]
HACKED ACCOUNT...THE THINGS PEOPLE WILL GO THROUGH TO BE YOU!
THE REAL EP!!!
Like · Reply · 1 w · 1

domain might be flagged up as suspicious by content moderation algorithms, the same behavior from an account with an otherwise normal pattern of behavior in the past is more likely to pass unnoticed.

Use of homoglyphs

A striking and interesting feature of the operation is its consistent use of homoglyphs.

Homoglyphs are two characters which appear very similar or identical to the human eye. To computers, however, they are two different characters. Take the example below:

To a casual reader, the highlighted character appears to be a lower-case letter 'r', albeit perhaps in a strange font. However, in reality it is [▯], a linguistic symbol for a voiced alveolar flap, and that is how a computer or an algorithm reads it.

Larger font in headlines on the domain makes it easier to see which characters have been substituted for homoglyphs.

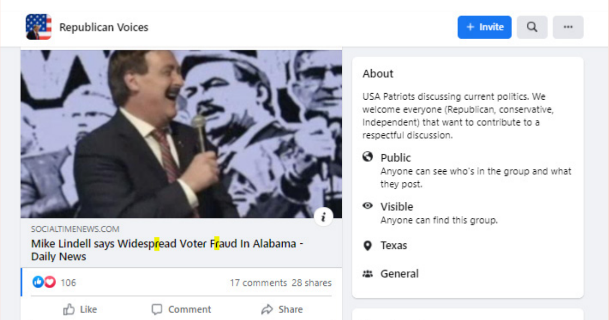
This technique of switching characters for a doppelganger is commonly used in what are referred to as homoglyph attacks, in which fraudsters, phishers and hackers attempt to fool users into clicking on dangerous links or domains disguised as legitimate ones.3

In this context, however, the purpose appears to be different. It seems likely that the goal here is to blind Facebook's content moderation algorithms. This allows the network to smuggle banned content onto the platform, and to post repeatedly about divisive topics without throwing up red flags which might contribute to their assets being taken down.

Although perhaps not a goal of the network operators, it also means their articles do not automatically have Facebook fact-check or warning labels appended to them.

The minimal effort put into making the domains appear legitimate and lack of advertising supports the hypothesis that the Facebook assets are the true vehicle for monetization.

Fig 15: Screenshot of socialtimenews.com article shared into Facebook group operated by the network. Highlighting added.



Republican Voices

SOCIALTIMENEWS.COM

Mike Lindell says Widespread Voter Fraud In Alabama - Daily News

106

17 comments 28 shares

About

USA Patriots discussing current politics. We welcome everyone (Republican, conservative, Independent) that want to contribute to a respectful discussion.

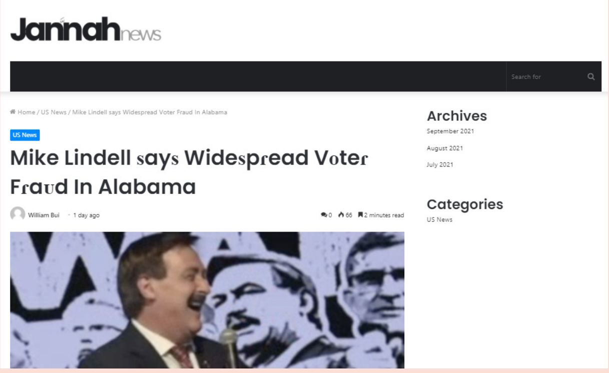
Public
Anyone can see who's in the group and what they post.

Visible
Anyone can find this group.

Texas

General

Fig 16: Screenshot of article on socialtimenews.com.



Home / US News / Mike Lindell says Widespread Voter Fraud In Alabama

US News

Mike Lindell says Widespread Voter Fraud In Alabama

William Bui · 1 day ago

0 66 2 minutes read

Archives

September 2021

August 2021

July 2021

Categories

US News

Engagement and impact

This network has been successful in generating significant engagement from Facebook users. Many of its posts have hundreds of reactions, comments and shares. While hacked accounts have been used to share links, there is no indication that the accounts engaging with the network's content have also been hacked. Instead, this appears to be authentic engagement from real Facebook users.

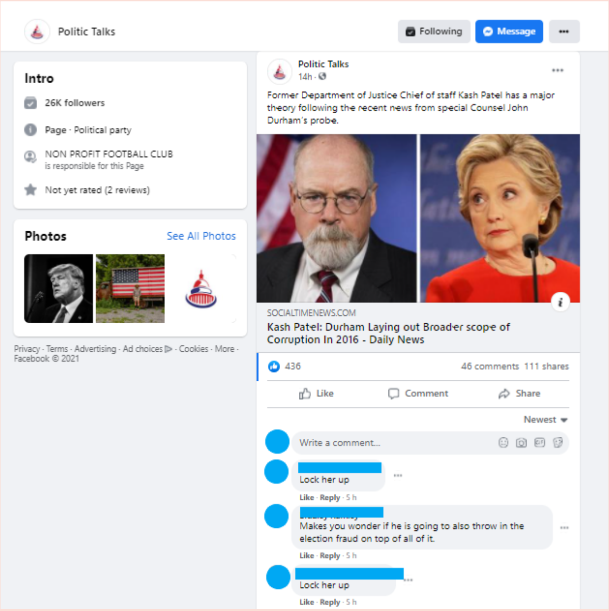
The frequent deletions and replacement of Facebook groups and pages means that engagement data from those pages is no longer available for external researchers. This makes it impossible for ISD to put a precise number on how much engagement the network has been able to generate over time.

CrowdTangle data collected on 21 October found 33,114 comments on articles from the network, and 180,278 other interactions since 3 July. However, this does not account for the large number of groups and pages which have been deleted, meaning the true number of comments and interactions is likely to be very significantly higher.

Another sign that the network is gaining organic traction are shares of articles from their domains on Twitter. Over the week preceding October 6th links to the network's articles were shared 42 times on Twitter. ISD investigated this activity but found no indications that it was coordinated or inauthentic. The network itself does not appear to be operating on Twitter. The shares on Twitter appear to be coming from real users who have visited the domains and clicked the Twitter share buttons. While shares are obviously at a low level, the fact that they are happening at all reflects organic engagement.

The impact of networks such as this are notoriously hard to measure. Researcher Ben Nimmo has proposed one framework for doing so called the 'Breakout Scale'. 4 On this scale, the network discussed here would likely sit under Category Two. It has achieved organic engagement and shares (or breakouts) across Facebook and to a much smaller extent on Twitter, but does not appear to have gone significantly viral outside its immediate Facebook following. This is complicated by the fact that the content itself is plagiarized, however.

Fig 17: Screenshots of comments repeating conspiracy theories including about election fraud in the US 2020 Presidential Election and QAnon related conspiracy theories.



Politic Talks
14h ·

Former Department of Justice Chief of staff Kash Patel has a major theory following the recent news from special Counsel John Durham's probe.

SOCIALTIMENEWS.COM
Kash Patel: Durham Laying out Broader scope of Corruption In 2016 - Daily News

[redacted]
Lock her up
Like · Reply · 5 h

[redacted]
Makes you wonder if he is going to also throw in the election fraud on top of all of it.
Like · Reply · 5 h

[redacted]
Lock her up
Like · Reply · 5 h

Another way of gauging the impact of the network on the users who follow it is analyzing the kinds of comments which their posts attract. Many of the network's posts generate hundreds of reactions and comments, most of which are highly politicized, partisan and often antagonistic.

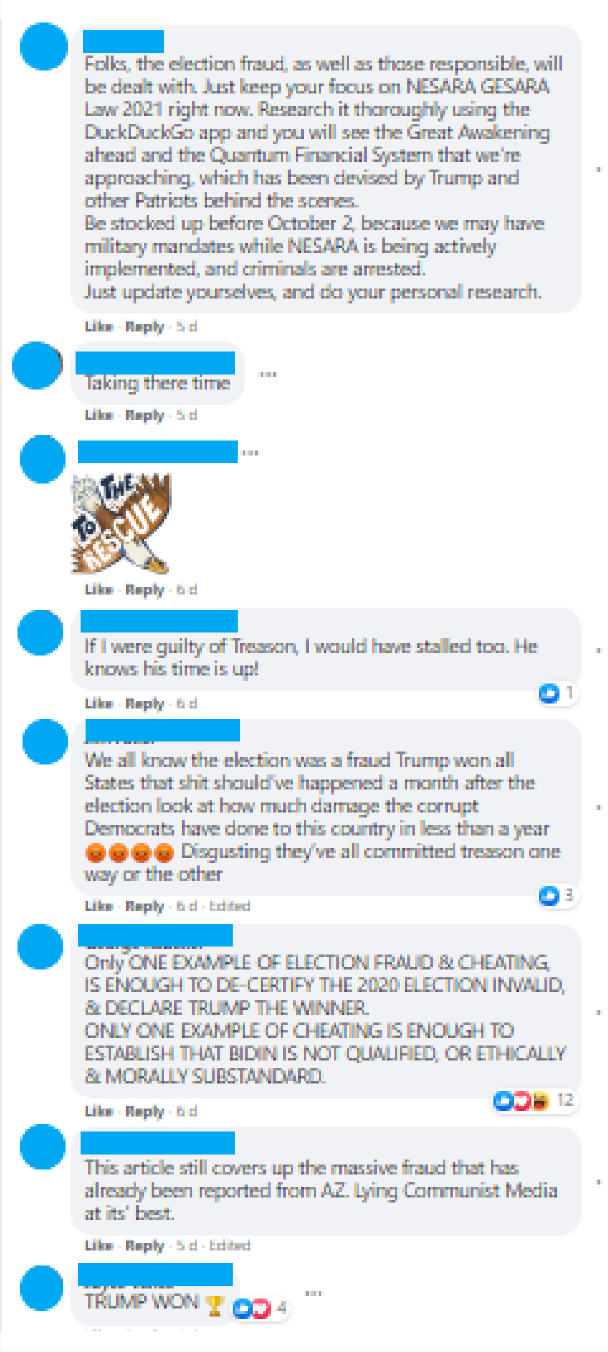
In the comments, users promote and share conspiracy theories about election fraud, QAnon, or about individuals such as Hillary Clinton, Bill Gates and Nancy Pelosi. While in most cases these are likely to be beliefs which these individuals already hold, the network is effectively providing content which affirms those beliefs and the opportunity to engage and connect with others who hold the same beliefs.

The fact that this network is creating sources and hubs for discussion of QAnon and related conspiracy theories is significant. Facebook has been reasonably successful in marginalizing the QAnon community on its platform (although not in eradicating it).

However, the individuals behind this network are professionals. They are persistent, efficient, opportunistic, and they know the tricks which work best to smuggle banned content onto platforms. Where their efforts fail, and an asset is lost to them, they simply start again. Evidently their efforts are succeeded at least often enough to make it financially viable.

If this were the only network of its kind, the overall impact would be minimal. However, the case study presented here is just one example of an increasingly global industry in creating or amplifying disinformation, conspiracy theories and divisive political content for commercial gain. While each operator may have only a low level of impact individually, the cumulative effect of hundreds or thousands of networks may be profound.

Fig 17: Screenshots of comments repeating conspiracy theories including about election fraud in the US 2020 Presidential Election and QAnon related conspiracy theories.



[redacted]
Folks, the election fraud, as well as those responsible, will be dealt with. Just keep your focus on NESARA GESARA Law 2021 right now. Research it thoroughly using the DuckDuckGo app and you will see the Great Awakening ahead and the Quantum Financial System that we're approaching, which has been devised by Trump and other Patriots behind the scenes.
Be stocked up before October 2, because we may have military mandates while NESARA is being actively implemented, and criminals are arrested.
Just update yourselves, and do your personal research.
Like · Reply · 5 d

[redacted]
Taking there time
Like · Reply · 5 d

[redacted]

Like · Reply · 6 d

[redacted]
If I were guilty of Treason, I would have stalled too. He knows his time is up!
1
Like · Reply · 6 d

[redacted]
We all know the election was a fraud Trump won all States that shit should've happened a month after the election look at how much damage the corrupt Democrats have done to this country in less than a year 😡😡😡😡 Disgusting they've all committed treason one way or the other
3
Like · Reply · 6 d · Edited

[redacted]
Only ONE EXAMPLE OF ELECTION FRAUD & CHEATING, IS ENOUGH TO DE-CERTIFY THE 2020 ELECTION INVALID, & DECLARE TRUMP THE WINNER.
ONLY ONE EXAMPLE OF CHEATING IS ENOUGH TO ESTABLISH THAT BIDIN IS NOT QUALIFIED, OR ETHICALLY & MORALLY SUBSTANDARD.
12
Like · Reply · 6 d

[redacted]
This article still covers up the massive fraud that has already been reported from AZ. Lying Communist Media at its' best.
Like · Reply · 5 d · Edited

[redacted]
TRUMP WON 🏆 4

Endnotes

[1] Lim, Gabrielle. 'The Risks of Exaggerating Foreign Influence Operations and Disinformation', Centre for International Governance Innovation, 7 August 2020, https://www.cigionline.org/articles/risks-exaggerating-foreign-influence-operations-and-disinformation/

[2] Frankel, Sheera. 'QAnon is still spreading on Facebook, despite a ban.' New York Times, 18 December 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/18/technology/qanon-is-still-spreading-on-facebook-despite-a-ban.html

[3] CISO Mag, 'Real or Imposter? Everything You Need to Know About "Homoglyph" Phishing', 7 August 2020, https://cisomag.eccouncil.org/homoglyph-attacks/

[4] Nimmo, Ben. 'The Breakout Scale: Measuring the impact of influence operations', Brookings, 23 September 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-breakout-scale-measuring-the-impact-of-influence-operations/

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