RUSSIA REPORTEDLY ORGANIZED PRO-TRUMP RALLIES ON FACEBOOK

- 21.09.2017

The Verge, 21 September 2017

More and more details have been coming out about how Russia used Facebook to spread pro-Trump propaganda during the 2016 US election, and today The Daily Beast has published evidence that appears to show a Putin-linked Facebook group organizing rallies that Trump supporters in the US actually attended.

The Daily Beast identified a Facebook group called Being Patriotic that was shut down around the same time that other Russian-linked Facebook accounts were purged. The page also posted memes watermarked and framed in a similar style as those other pages, according to the report, which suggests the page came from the same source. Its not a perfect link, but it strongly implies Being Patriotic was among the Russian propaganda pages; Facebook told The Daily Beast that it could not confirm the details.

Along with posting memes, the Being Patriotic page also tried to organize four rallies, according to the report. One of those was supposed to be a patriotic state-wide flash mob occurring simultaneously in 17 cities across Florida in support of Trump. The Daily Beast says it found evidence that at least two of those rallies materialized Fort Lauderdale and Coral Springs and were documented on Facebook by the local campaign chair for Trump.

THE ACCOUNT APPEARS TO COME FROM PROFESSIONAL TROLLS

The Being Patriotic account reportedly had over 200,000 followers at the time it was shut down, and had tried to organize other pro-Trump or anti-Hillary events in New York, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. A related Twitter account also posted at least one comment promoting violence against Black Lives Matters supporters.

The Daily Beast suggests the Being Patriotic account came from the Internet Research Agency, a Russian group that US intelligence has identified as professional trolls funded by a close Putin ally with ties to Russian intelligence.

While this isnt the first Facebook account thats been publicly tied to Russian propagandists, this appears to be the first time were seeing Russian efforts to organize Trump supporters for physical demonstrations. That it ultimately worked, to at least some extent, shows that the propaganda campaign had real and tangible effects beyond the spread of memes.

Facebook said earlier this month that it had found evidence of Russians buying political ads during the campaign, spending $100,000 under fake accounts. Thats not a huge amount of money for Facebook, but its clear their work led to some results.

The Trump campaign is certainly aware of how effective targeted Facebook posts can be. BuzzFeed reported today that the presidents and vice presidents Facebook pages are paying for ads that are only visible to groups of users likely their own supporters that they choose to target. The ads are asking for donations.

Kaynak/Source: