

Co-opting of #SaveTheChildren

Analysis on the systematic co-opting of the hashtag #SaveTheChildren for nefarious purposes by the group QAnon

Presented by: Udith Prabhu
Presented for: CS795/895



News on which the presentation is based

THE SHIFT

QAnon Followers Are Hijacking the #SaveTheChildren Movement

Fans of the pro-Trump conspiracy theory are clogging anti-trafficking hotlines, infiltrating Facebook groups and raising false fears about child exploitation.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/12/technology/qanon-save-the-children-trafficking.html>

QAnon's 'Save the Children' morphs into popular slogan

By AMANDA SEITZ October 28, 2020



<https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-donald-trump-child-trafficking-illinois-morris-aab978bb7e9b89cd2cea151ca13421a0>

How An Online Conspiracy Community Is Using #SaveTheChildren To Attract New Believers

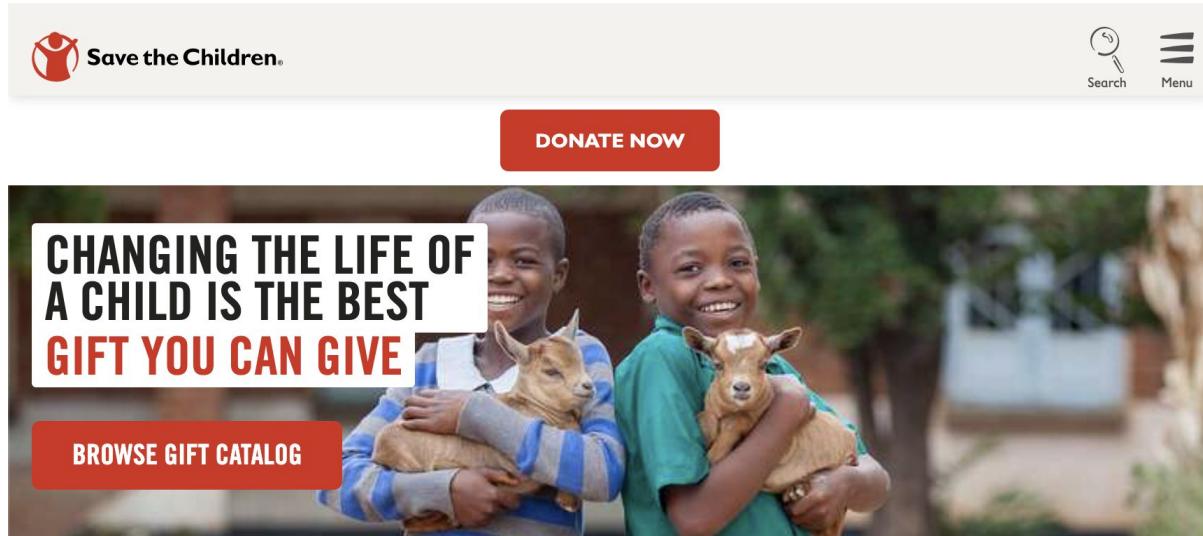


Kaity Kline

<https://the1a.org/segments/qanon-save-children-facebook/>



'Save the Children' is a leading humanitarian organization



<https://www.savethechildren.org/>

- Found by Eglantyne Jebb and her sister Dorothy Buxton.
- Was established in the UK in 1919, after World War 1.
- Works in around 117 countries
- Aim of the NGO is to gain more rights for young people.

<https://www.savethechildren.net/>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Save_the_Children



QAnon is an extreme right conspiracy theorists group



- The group alleges that a cabal of Satan-worshipers is running a global child sex-trafficking ring.
- The “cabal” is also allegedly plotting against President Donald Trump.
- “Q” claims to be a high level government official with Q clearance level.
- The FBI has identified QAnon as a potential domestic terrorist threat.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/wat-qanon-guide-conspiracy-theory-taking-hold-among-trump-supporters-n897271>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/QAnon>



SaveTheChildren group released a statement after the co-opting of the hashtag by QAnon

The image shows the header of the Save the Children website. It features the organization's logo (a red stylized child icon) and the text "Save the Children®". A search bar with the placeholder "Enter search term" and a magnifying glass icon is positioned on the right. Below the header, there is a navigation menu with links: "Who We Are >", "What We Do >", "Ways to Help >", "Shop Gift Catalog >", "Sponsor a Child >", and a red "Donate" button.

[Home](#) ▶ [About Us](#) ▶ [Newsroom](#) ▶ [2020 Press Releases](#) ▶ Save the Children Statement on use of its Name in Unaffiliated Campaigns

Save the Children Statement on use of its Name in Unaffiliated Campaigns

Media Contact: media@savechildren.org

Public Contact: donorcare@savechildren.org

FAIRFIELD, Conn. (August 7, 2020) – Save the Children is an international, humanitarian organization that has been protecting children around the world for more than 100 years. Save the Children has been fighting against the exploitation of, and violence against, children since our inception. Ensuring the safety and well-being of children worldwide has always been our most essential commitment, and will be so always.

Our name in hashtag form has been experiencing unusually high volumes and causing confusion among our supporters and the general public. In the United States, Save the Children is the sole owner of the registered trademark “Save the Children.” While people may choose to use our organization’s name as a hashtag to make their point on different issues, we are not affiliated or associated with any of these campaigns.

<https://www.savethechildren.org/us/about-us/media-and-news/2020-press-releases/save-the-children-statement-on-use-of-its-name-in-unaffiliated-c>



Hashtag Analysis - Facebook



Facebook displays an info box to stop spread of misinformation

The screenshot shows a Facebook page for the hashtag #SaveTheChildren. At the top, there's a blue circular icon with a white '#'. Below it, the hashtag is displayed in bold black text, followed by a smaller gray text indicating 1.6M people are posting about it. A large, semi-transparent white info box is overlaid on the page. It contains a blue Facebook logo icon and the text "Looking for info about Save the Children?". It suggests visiting their website if looking for information about the humanitarian organization. Two buttons are present: "Go to SavetheChildren.org" and "See Posts Anyway". Below this box, a post from a user named Cung Le is visible. The post, timestamped at 3 August, discusses a tragic event involving his wife and children taken by CPS and public servants in Boyd County, Kentucky. He expresses his desire to expose corruption and thanks @jackfroot for joining his fight. The post includes hashtags #Repost and credit to @jackfroot, and ends with three sad face emojis. Three dots are visible above the post, likely indicating more content.

<https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/savethechildren>



Facebook APIs only provide recent posts data

 **João Antunes**
Sep 11, 2017, 4:57 PM

When trying to retrieve past posts from a page, via the Graph API, after a few paginations (via the next link returned in the JSON response), not all posts are returned.

For example, a popular page as CNN, when debugging in the Graph Explorer, it retrieves past posts correctly then starts skipping them.
On attachment you can see a screenshot with the Graph API response skipping from the end of May to March, as if the page didn't had any April posts.

Appreciate any assistance you can provide, thank you.

 Same here!  Comment  Subscribe

 1 other 174 subscribers

Latest Response from Facebook Team

 **Andrew Lutz** •  Facebook Team
Hi all,

I've heard back from Engineering and unfortunately this will not be fixed immediately. The cause of this bug has been identified and we estimate a fix will be pushed in about a month.

Thanks for your patience while we correct this.

Andrew

Sep 22, 2017, 2:56 PM • Status changed to Closed

 **Arseniy Kushnir**
Hi Andrew!

The new endpoint doesn't support working without page token. So, it makes impossible to get actual data of page posts you are not an admin.

I need to get the data about each published post with summary data - how many reactions, shares and comments were. The previous endpoint gave such data [posts]. Can you fix it?

Use case: we use such data to show users how engagement are posts with different types of content. Competitive analysis

Feb 8, 2018, 3:52 AM

 **Andrew Lutz** •  Facebook Team
Hey Arseniy, this sounds like it is By Design. We've made some recent changes which restricts what data you can pull for Pages you are not an Admin of. If you believe this is a bug please submit a new bug report.

Feb 9, 2018, 2:30 PM

<https://developers.facebook.com/support/bugs/1838195226492053/>



8 mementos found for the hashtag search on Facebook

```
> curl -s  
http://memgator.cs.odu.edu/timemap/link/https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/savethechildren  
| grep datetime | awk '{print $1}' | awk -v FS=/ '{print $3}' | sort | uniq -c | sort -nr
```

5 web.archive.org

2 archive.md

1 wayback.archive-it.org



Most of the pages were not archived properly



Loading...

<https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/savethechildren>
|
16:47:05 August 24, 2020

Got an HTTP 302 response at crawl time

Redirecting to...

<https://www.facebook.com/login.php?next=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fhashtag%2Fsavethechildren>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200825004734/https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/savethechildren>

The screenshot shows the Facebook login interface. At the top, there is a blue header bar with the Facebook logo and a "Sign Up" button. Below the header, a message reads: "Sorry, something went wrong while we were doing this search. Please try later." To the right of the message, there is a "TRENDING" section with several news items:

- #NationalBurgerDay: Hamburgers Celebrated on May 28 Observance
- Scripps National Spelling Bee: Vanya Shivashankar and Gokul Venkatachalam Win Competition
- Kuchinoerabu: Evacuation Order Issued After Volcano Erupts on Southern Japanese Island
- #KungFury: Crowdfunded Swedish Film Inspired by 1980s Action Movies Released on YouTube
- FIFA: Soccer Association Officials Arrested on US Corruption Charges; Swiss to Probe World Cups

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150529081102/https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/savethechildren>



Only 2 pages from the archives had the correct content

This screenshot shows a web page from archive.today. At the top, it displays the URL "archive.today Saved from https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/savethechildren" and the date "14 Aug 2020 10:17:45 UTC". Below this is a navigation bar with links for "Webpage" and "Screenshot". The main content is a Facebook page titled "#SaveTheChildren" with a blue circular icon containing a white hash symbol. The page has 1.3M people talking about it. A post by user "Cung Le" is visible, dated August 4 at 12:29 AM. The post content is as follows:

This is happening everywhere. The sad thing is it happening on both sides. My wife @sunshine_s_le kids was illegal taken by CPS & public servants in Boyd county Kentucky. I'm shining the light into the darkness there. I want to thank you @jackroot for joining my fight to expose the corruption there with media.

#Repost
credit: @jackroot
This is horrible. 😢😢😢

#Regram This happened in Lexington, Kentucky - I didn't hear anything from our local news. Human Trafficking can happen everywhere.

Lexington, Ky. 10 Days ago a young girl rolled out the back of a Volkswagon, bound at the hands. She had been raped, beaten and trafficked. This story has gotten no news coverage or online attention. Pls make people aware of the things going on in our communities.
Currently looking into this story.

#savethechildren #sextrafficking #endtrafficking #protectchildren #humantrafficking #Corruption

<http://archive.md/7I8hP>

You are viewing an archived web page, collected at the request of [Internet Archive Global Events](#) using [Archive-It](#). This page was captured on 9:35:11 Aug 18, 2014, and is part of the [Ukraine Conflict](#) collection. The information on this web page may be out of date. See [All versions](#) of this archived page. Found 0 archived media items out of 0 total on this page.

facebook Sign Up Email or Phone
 Keep me logged in

#savethechildren

Save the Children Australia ► 50th Annual University Branch Book Sale 2 hrs ·

Customers at our The University of Western Australia – UWA 50th annual book sale lined up hours early to be the first few in the door, took bargain books home by the carload and have simply had an awesome time! Great work WA!
#Perth #booksale #charity #fundraising #SaveTheChildren #members #volunteers #UWA

Save the Children Australia's photo.

<http://wayback.archive-it.org/all/20140818093511/https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/savethechildren>



Hashtag Analysis - Instagram



Instagram prompts confirmation first

#savethechildren

Looking for info about Save the Children?

If you're looking for info about the humanitarian organization, Save the Children, visit their website.

Go to SavetheChildren.org

[See Posts Anyway](#) [Cancel](#)

#savethechildren

Top posts

After the elections are over, your neighbors will still be your neighbors. Trump won't be there to ring up your groceries; your neighbors will. Biden won't be there to fix your car or help you out with yard work; your neighbors will. Both Trump and Biden will still be in their wealthy political world, and we'll be in ours. They'll both be doing their thing, while you and I live together, work together, learn together, shop together, eat together, worship together, and pump our gas next to one another. We are what makes America great. We are the ones who choose to be decent, loving, caring, and compassionate human beings. Vote for whomever you choose to vote for in November, but remember... We, the people, choose to shape our communities. Not them.

<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/savethechildren/>



Instagram scrapers do not give all the posts

```
> instaloader "#SaveTheChildren" --no-pictures --no-videos  
--no-video-thumbnails --no-compress-json
```

```
#savethechildren/2020-11-04_00-21-37_UTC_profile_pic.jpg  
Retrieving pictures with hashtag #savethechildren...
```

```
[ 1] [HUMANITY 4 SALE Painting. Put...] json  
[ 2] [Very impressive turnout for t...] json  
[ 3] [Irei fazer uma bandeira igual...] json  
[ 4] [#savethechildren #betheirvoic...] json  
[ 5] [Don't forget: While we are pl...] json  
[ 6] [When your base consists of ha...] json  
[ 7] ["I'm competitive, and I love ...] json  
[ 8] [#savethechildren #voteblue #b...] json
```

```
>
```



Instagram page is only archived in the Internet Archive

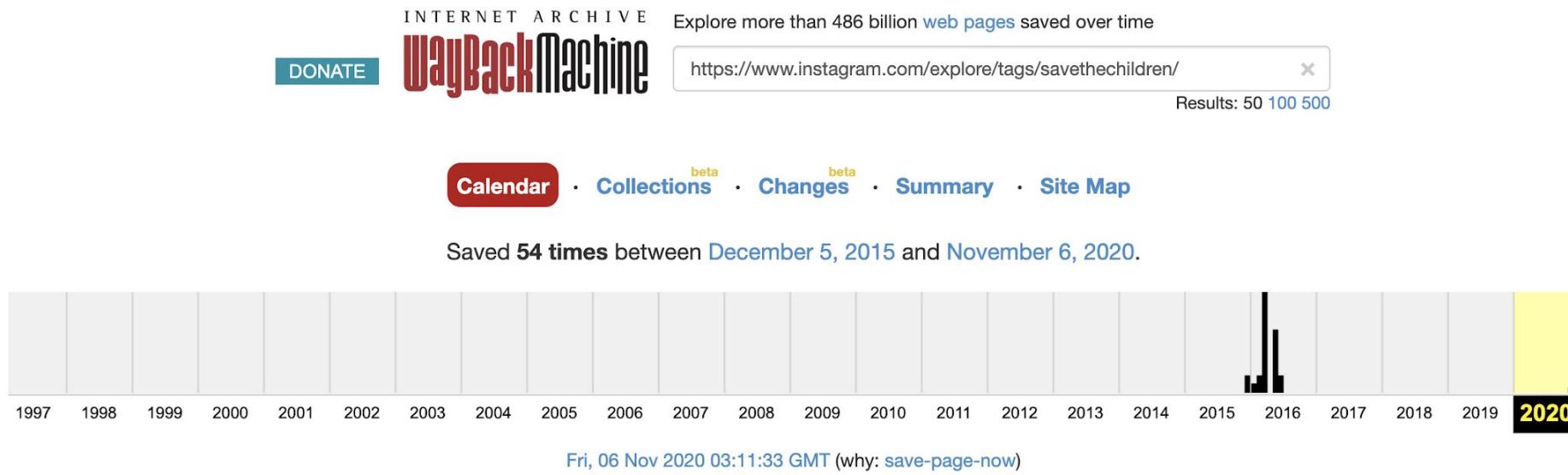
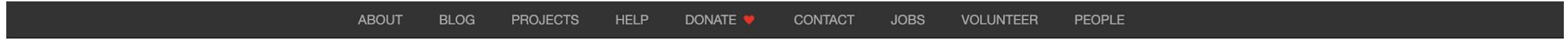
```
> curl -s  
http://memgator.cs.odu.edu/timemap/link/https://www.instagram.com/explore/tag  
s/savethechildren/ | grep datetime | awk '{print $1}' | awk -v FS=/ '{print  
$3}' | sort | uniq -c | sort -nr
```

54 web.archive.org

>



Instagram page not archived recently



http://web.archive.org/web/*/https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/savethechildren/



Instagram page not archived completely

#savethechildren
102,373 posts

TOP POSTS

 Laugh. Give. Save a kid. Happy #RedNoseDay! Pop and I are proud to lend a hoof to children in poverty in the US and around the world. 
#savethechildren #may26
#gottagettaGUND
#gottagettaprissyandpop
#PrissyandPop #SillyPop
@rednosedayusa

 Xwes 😊😍 Hayat'a min 😊😊😊😊😊
#cr7 #cristiano #ronaldo
#savethechildren #syria #football
#realmadrid #jr #kurdistan
#husband#like4like #followme

 If you can donate or help you should!
#savethechildren #childfund #helpkids
#helpourworld

http://web.archive.org/web/20160527085024if_/https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/savetheChildren/



Hashtag Analysis - Twitter



#SaveTheChildren has been de-indexed on Twitter

https://twitter.com/search?q=%23SaveTheChildren&src=typed_query&f=live



No tweets displayed for the hashtag

← 🔎 #SaveTheChildren ⚙

Top Latest People Photos Videos

No results for "#SaveTheChildren"

The term you entered did not bring up any results. You may have mistyped your term or your [Search settings](#) could be protecting you from some potentially sensitive content.

https://twitter.com/search?q=%23SaveTheChildren&src=typed_query&f=live



User search is correctly displaying the results

The screenshot shows a Twitter search interface with the query "#SaveTheChildren". The results are filtered by the "People" tab. Three profiles are listed:

- Save the Children US** (@SavetheChildren) - Verified account. Bio: "Save the Children is an international humanitarian organization that has been protecting children around the world for more than 100 years." Follow button.
- Save the Children BD** (@SCinBD) - Bio: "Save the Children being the world's leading independent organization for children, has been working in Bangladesh to assist the children since 1970." Follow button.
- SaveTheChildren E&SA** (@ESASavechildren) - Bio: "We advocate for a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation." Follow button.

https://twitter.com/search?q=%23SaveTheChildren&src=typed_query&f=live



Pre vs. Post ban

#SaveTheChildren

Top | Live | Accounts | Photos | Videos | More options ▾

Accounts

 Save the Children US 
@SavetheChildren
We invest in childhood—every day, in times of crisis & for our future. We give children a healthy start, the opportunity to learn & protection from harm.

 Save the Children UK 
@savechildrenuk
We work in more than 120 countries. We save children's lives. We fight for their rights. We help them fulfil their potential.

Photos

hair spaghetti @theo_variations · 2h
is your #child safe????? #SAVETHECHILDREN

munnavenkatesh @munnavenkatesh · 10h
oka 5mts spare cheyakalgithe take a look at this [savethechildren.in](#)
#savethechildren

#savethechildren

Top | Latest | People | Photos | Videos | News | Broadcasts

Search filters · Show

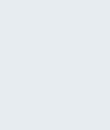
New to Twitter?
Sign up now to get your own personalized timeline!

Sign up

People

 Save the Children 
@SavetheChildren
JOIN US FOR 100 DAYS OF READING

 Save the Children US 
@SavetheChildren
We ensure children are cared for, learning and safe around the world. Your support can help create a better world for children. ow.ly/2OFE50xqJl

 Save the Children Internat... 
@save_children
Save the Children's official global voice. We're calling on world leaders to #ProtectAGeneration to ensure children survive, learn and are protected.



Both official and unofficial scraping methods do not give results

Official Method

```
import tweepy

consumer_key = ''
consumer_secret = ''
access_token = ''
access_token_secret = ''
auth = tweepy.OAuthHandler(consumer_key, consumer_secret)
auth.set_access_token(access_token, access_token_secret)
api = tweepy.API(auth,wait_on_rate_limit=True)
c = len(tweepy.Cursor(api.search,q="#SaveTheChildren").items())

print(c)
> 0
```

Unofficial Method

```
import twint

config = twint.Config()
config.Search = "#SaveTheChildren"
config.Hide_output = True
config.Pandas = True
twint.run.Search(config)

df = twint.storage.panda.Tweet_df

print(df.shape[0])
> 0
```



Internet Archive and Archive-IT have most number of mementos for Twitter hashtag #SaveTheChildren

```
> curl -s  
http://memgator.cs.odu.edu/timemap/link/https://www.twitter.com/hashtag/savethechildren |  
grep datetime | awk '{print $1}' | awk -v FS=/ '{print $3}' | sort | uniq -c | sort -nr  
  
39 web.archive.org  
23 wayback.archive-it.org  
5 www.webarchive.org.uk  
1 webarchive.loc.gov
```



1194 mementos of the Twitter search found using memento and CDX API search on the Internet Archive and Archive-IT

```
> curl -s http://memgator.cs.odu.edu/timemap/link/https://www.twitter.com/hashtag/savethechildren* | grep  
datetime | awk '{print $1}' | awk '{print substr($0, 2, length($0)-3)}' > urls.txt  
  
> curl -s  
"http://web.archive.org/cdx/search/cdx?url=https://www.twitter.com/hashtag/savethechildren&matchType=prefix"  
| awk '{print "http://web.archive.org/web/" $2 "/" $3}' >> urls.txt  
  
> cat urls.txt | wc -l  
1194  
  
> cat urls.txt | head -n 5  
  
https://wayback.archive-it.org/all/20140603145110/https://twitter.com/hashtag/SavetheChildrenEast?src=hash  
https://wayback.archive-it.org/all/20140603145111/https://twitter.com/hashtag/SavetheChildrenEast  
https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20140616021825mp_/https://twitter.com/hashtag/savethechildren  
https://wayback.archive-it.org/all/20140703172422/https://twitter.com/hashtag/SaveTheChildren?src=hash  
https://wayback.archive-it.org/all/20140703172424/https://twitter.com/hashtag/savethechildren
```



7009 tweets found in the archived pages

```
> python3 getTweets urls.txt > prettyPrintedTweets.txt  
  
> cat prettyPrintedTweets.txt | head -n 5  
  
marina_saniram : Slavyansk kids escape to Russia from Kiev's shelling http://rt.com/ne..  
marina_saniram : #Slavyansk Night in the basement pic.twitter.com/KVHf1QUykh #SaveDonb..  
marina_saniram : Slavyansk kids escape to Russia from Kiev's shelling http://rt.com/ne..  
marina_saniram : #Slavyansk Night in the basement pic.twitter.com/KVHf1QUykh #SaveDonb..  
PaganSoul366 : This isn't about immigration...This is about refugees! #SaveTheChildr..  
JolieSchwarz : Wishing this http://goo.gl/0Ig50D for all mothers escaping violence a..  
erazo_ruth : "Just because it isn't happening here doesn't mean it isn't happening...  
stc_de : Heute ist @SozialerTag! Gefördert wird unter anderem ein #Savethechild..  
KarisBoyne : That guilty feeling in the pit of your stomach you get when an ad for ..  
IliasBey : Twitter / IliasBey: #Savethechildren #Empowertheyouth ... http://fb.me..  
  
> cat prettyPrintedTweets.txt | wc -l  
7009
```



1232 unique users

```
> cat prettyPrintedTweets.txt | awk '{ print $1 }' | sort | uniq | wc -l  
1232  
  
> cat prettyPrintedTweets.txt | awk '{ print $1 }' | sort | uniq | head -n 5  
01nv1s1ble1  
10Hercules10  
10thAmendment  
15minutosnews  
1957_Tintin_
```



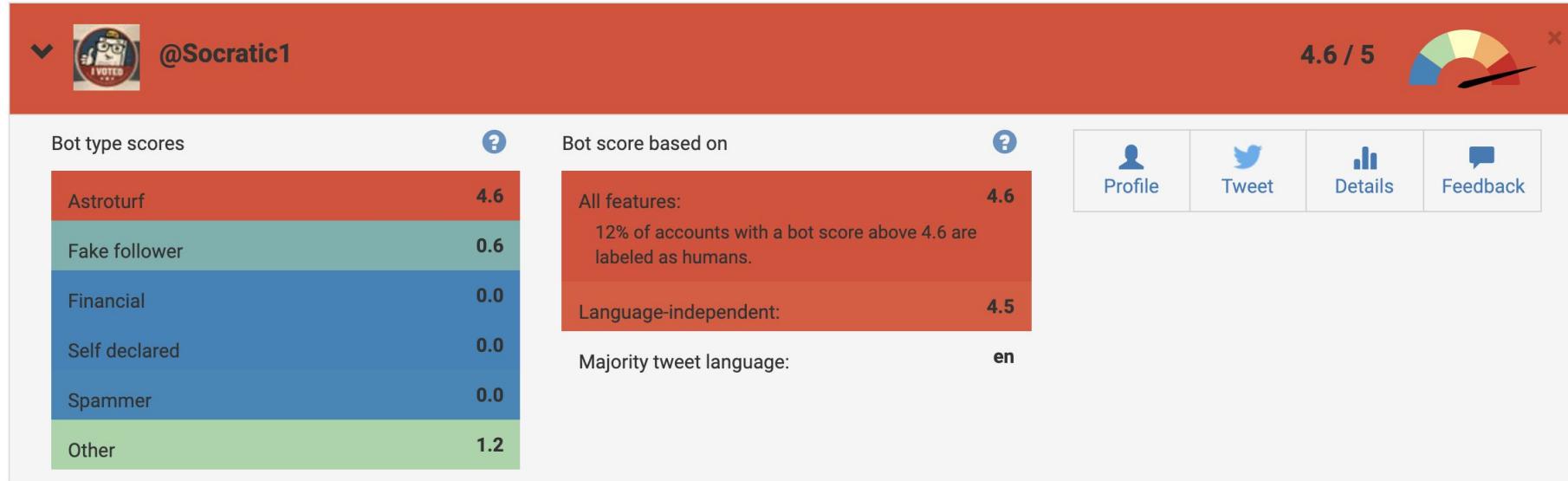
10 accounts that most tweeted the hashtag

```
> cat prettyPrintedTweets.txt | awk '{ print $1 }' | sort | uniq -c | sort -nr | head -n 10
```

141	StopTrump2020
98	SMonitors
92	Khaleesi1021
90	Cornishview
88	RevJJackson
60	Socratic1
60	LakotaMan1
59	SaveChildrenPE
58	Helenhs
57	prayingmedic



Botometer report for one of the accounts



<https://botometer.osome.iu.edu/>

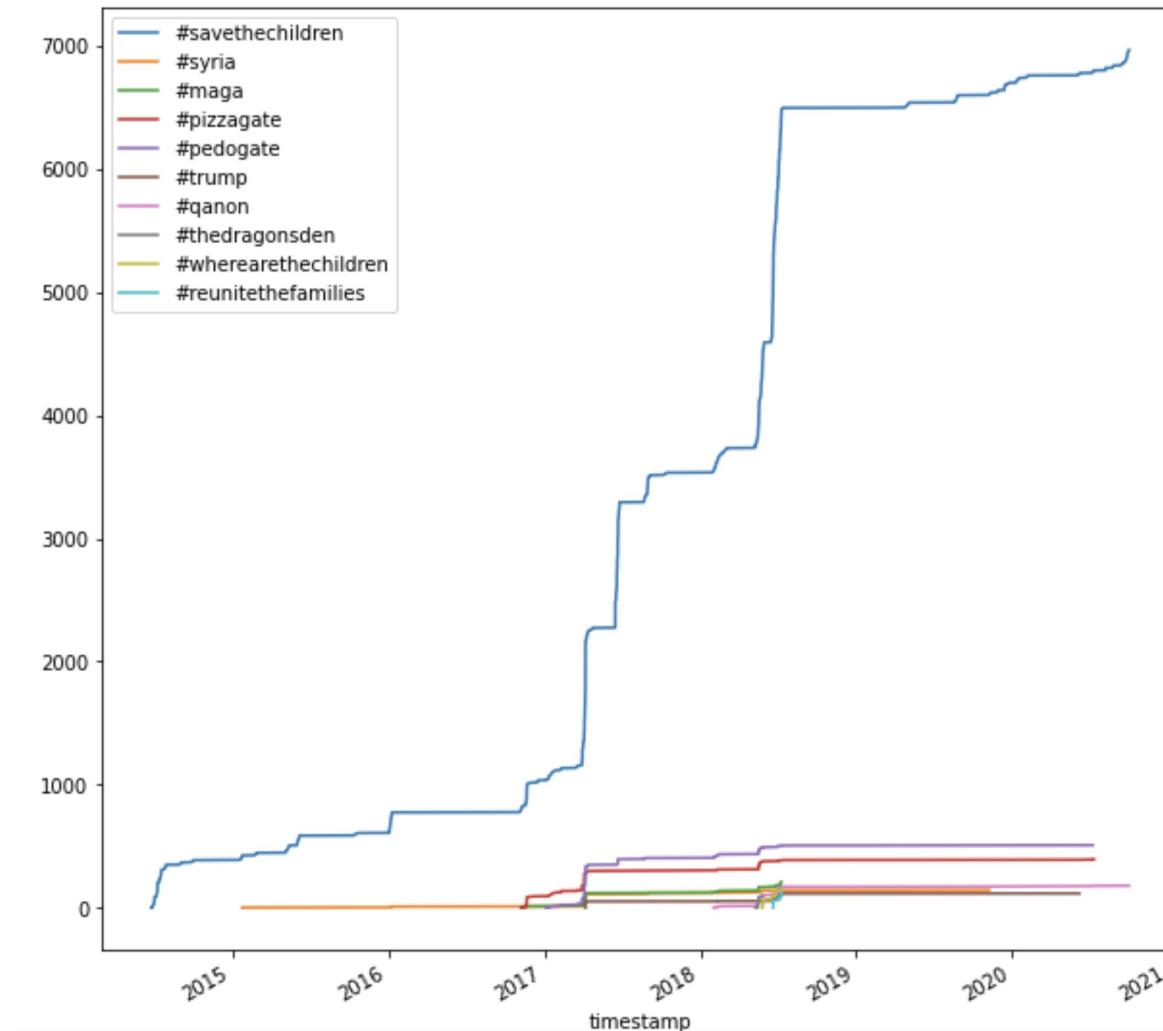


2 of the accounts are most likely bots and 1 account is suspended

User	Bot Rating (Out of 5)	Note
StopTrump2020	1	
SMonitors	0.7	
Khaleesi1021	-	Account Suspended
Cornishview	0.6	
RevJJackson	1.8	Verified Account
Socratic1	4.6	Most likely a bot
LakotaMan1	0.2	
SaveChildrenPE	2.3	Verified Account
Helenhs	4.4	Most likely a bot
prayingmedic	2	

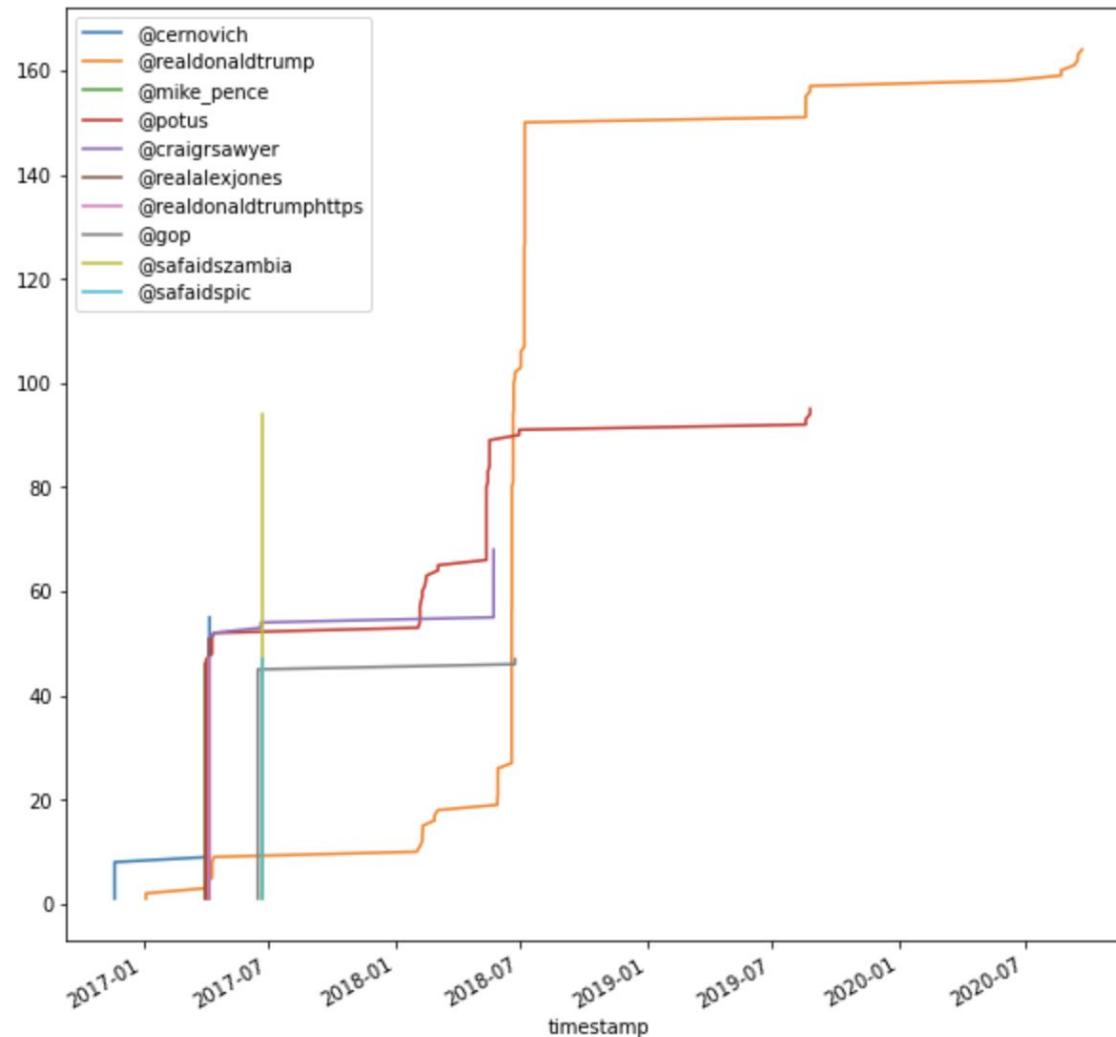


Malicious hashtags started accompanying #savethechildren from as early as 2017



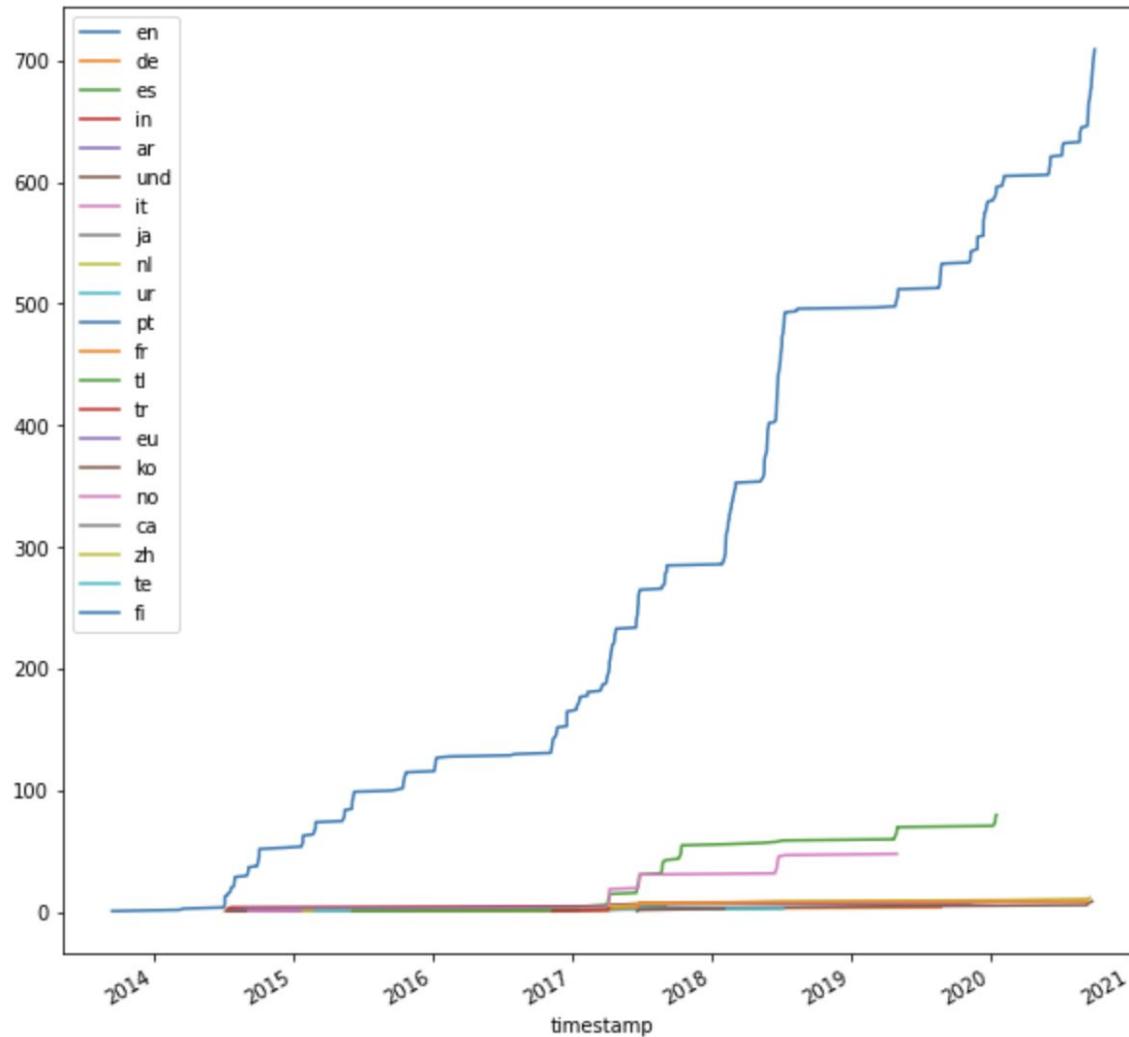


Unrelated users were tagged to the tweets



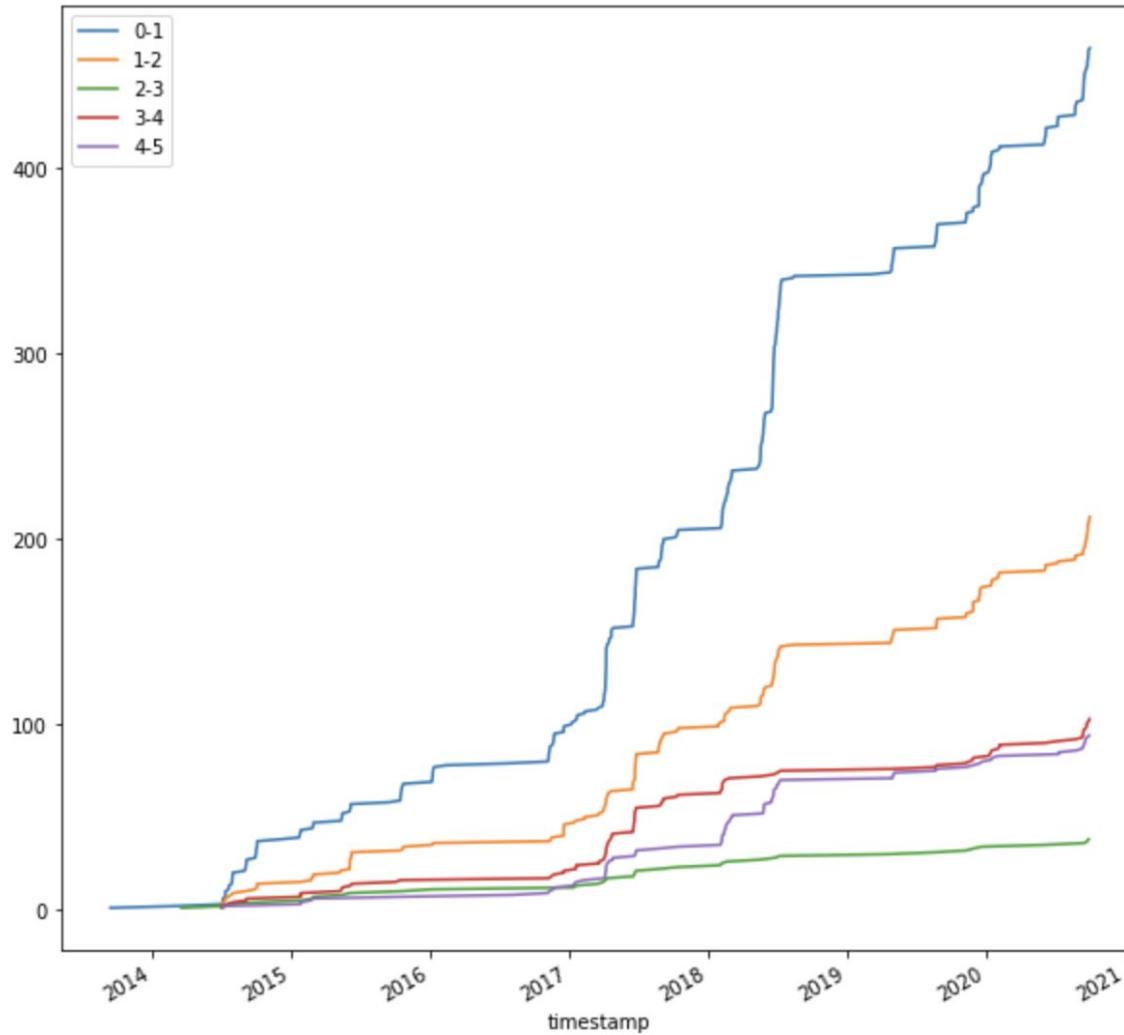


Suspicious increase of tweets in Spanish and Italian around 2017





Minimal increase in Bot activity around 2017





Key Takeaways

- The hashtag #SaveTheChildren was co-opted by a domestic terrorist group known as QAnon
- Multiple social networking sites have worked to prevent the spread of misinformation from this group.
- This ban was brought about only recently, between August 15 and October 29.
- Archives show us that the co-opting might have had pre-planning as we see an increase in spurious activities surround the hashtag around the beginning of 2017
- The attack in 2017 involved non-English accounts. This might have been done to avoid scrutiny.
- Bots might not have played an important role in the 2017 attack as there was no sudden increase in bot activity.