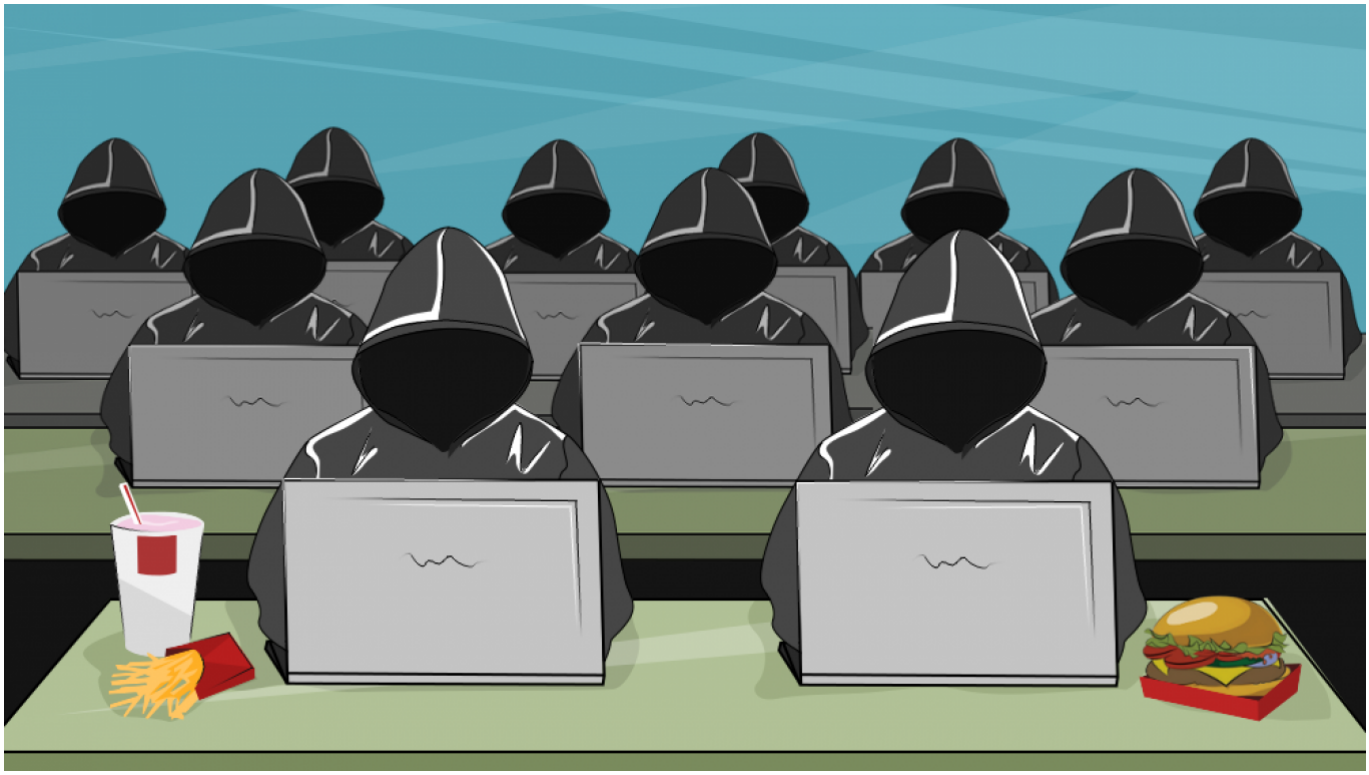
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Kremlin Troll Factory's Methods and Figures Revealed

TROLLS

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Anna Pavich

Stoking racial tensions, funding activist campaigns and organizing fake street flash mobs were just a sampling of the "Kremlin's troll factory" activities online in the months leading up to the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the RBC news outlet revealed in an investigation published Tuesday.

The St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency is believed to have launched a mass social media campaign using fake accounts to exacerbate racial and ideological divides in the U.S. before Donald Trump's election last November.

"There was no task to support Trump" a troll-factory employee told RBC, adding that their orders were to "uncover and highlight existing problems and social issues in the United States."

Some 50 employees currently operate out of the St. Petersburg-based "American department" of the Internet Research Agency, but at the height of their operations in 2016 the department had between 80 to 90 employees.

The campaign began in March 2015, when a night-shift vacancy for "internet operators" earning 40,000-50,000 rubles ($700-$870) monthly appeared on the job-search engine SuperJob, a former employee told RBC.

The description listed writing on "any given topic of a news, informational, or analytical nature" as the primary task. Applicants had to be fluent in English and possess creative writing abilities.

Currently, the "American department" receives 60-70 million rubles ($1 million) funding annually, RBC reported.

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The lowest-ranked employees earn 60,000 rubles ($1,046) a month, administrators up to 90,000 rubles (1,569 USD) a month, and managers 120,000 rubles ($2,100) a month, a former employee told RBC.

Despite its marked success, the campaign faced numerous obstacles including having its accounts blocked by social media sites, a former troll factory employee told RBC.

Immediately after Facebook would block a user, the factory's IT department would purchase new proxy servers and issue new IP addresses so the work could begin anew.

RBC counted over 6 million subscribers to 120 groups created by the troll factory that blocked by social media companies.

The right-wing group "Heart of Texas," with its 254 members, the religious minority group "United Muslims of America" with 330 members, and the racial activist group "Blacktivist" were among many of the fake "troll factory" accounts RBC identified.

The "factory" spent almost $80,000 over two years managing to stage about 40 political rallies by posing as American sponsors and hiring activists.

The trolls were also responsible for organizing fake Facebook events such as a free-hotdog giveaway in Manhattan, that they would watch for amusement with street cameras, RBC reports.

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