



ITALIAN NETWORKS BREAKING FACEBOOK RULES ON INAUTHENTIC BEHAVIOR

Executive Summary of Avaaz Report sent to Facebook

Intro note (May 11): Avaaz identified 14 Italian networks on Facebook comprising 104 pages and six groups, with a total reach of 18.2 million followers. This report was presented to Facebook on May 3. This week, Facebook took action against 23 pages in these networks, with a total of 2.46 million followers and 2.44 million interactions over the last three months. Below is an executive summary, including examples of pages taken down and identified in the report. The press statement from Avaaz on the takedown can be found here: <https://secure.avaaz.org/italystatement> ([Italian version here](#))

1. Pages Already Taken Down by Facebook

These are the Italian pages included in Avaaz's report that have already been taken down by Facebook as of May 11, 3pm CET:

Page name + Archived link	Total interactions (3 months)	Followers
Vogliamo il movimento 5 stelle al governo ¹	699,038	129,685
Beppe Grillo For President ²	17,939	15,491
Lega Salvini Sulmona ³	307,741	23,402
Lega Salvini Premier Santa Teresa di riva ⁴	283,363	16,581
NOI SIAMO 5 stelle. ⁵	35,093	53,916
Lombardia a 5 stelle ⁶	187,764	25,676
Adriano Valente ⁷	295,032	8,252

¹ <http://archive.is/TbQjb>

² <http://archive.is/k3FDg>

³ <http://archive.fo/cQLPK>

⁴ <http://archive.fo/Ttpuy>

⁵ <http://archive.is/6BZ96>

⁶ <http://archive.fo/zmz0i>

⁷ <http://archive.fo/XrsXd>

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Mag24 Informazione Indipendente ⁸	87,426	97,101
Catena Umana ⁹	4,308	34,380
Catena Umana 3 ¹⁰	2,698	11,782
»Ragazzi. ♡ ¹¹	1,084	143,286
Dannati e Ribelli ¹²	942	14,501
Questa è l'Italia ¹³ (created on April 2019)	332	827
La voce del popolo 2 ¹⁴ (created on 6 April 2019)	246	235
Nicolò Raniolo ¹⁵	130	21,793
Notizie Web ¹⁶ (created on 10 April 2019)	58	210
Contro Rothschild: la Bestia che domina il mondo ¹⁷	10,283	19,172
I valori della vita ¹⁸	139,389	1,540,792
Un Caffè al giorno ¹⁹	253,259	236,024
Oltre.TV ²⁰	14,186	45,009
La nostra salute è sotto attacco ²¹	739	18,678
La verità ci rende liberi- Advanced Mind ²²	103,041	5,893

⁸ <http://archive.fo/HQGLI>

⁹ <http://archive.is/7xeYQ>

¹⁰ <http://archive.fo/7tH2E>

¹¹ <http://archive.fo/2sEjz>

¹² <http://archive.fo/17Vby>

¹³ <http://archive.fo/EnT3L>

¹⁴ <http://archive.fo/S5Sx0>

¹⁵ <http://archive.is/tfoRO>

¹⁶ <http://archive.fo/SnH4L>

¹⁷ <http://archive.fo/c9Btx>

¹⁸ <http://archive.is/IUpNA>

¹⁹ <http://archive.fo/rD2Jh> & <http://archive.is/3a3s6>

²⁰ <http://archive.fo/ycJRN> & <http://archive.fo/Vla7w>

²¹ <http://archive.is/zlGfT>

²² <http://archive.fo/yPIvb>

Roba da Pazzi ²³	5	1,288
TOTAL	2,444,096	2,463,974

2. Examples of Disinformation and Hate Speech Shared by Pages Facebook has Taken Down

The Avaaz investigation focused on uncovering inauthentic networks that use fake profiles, misleading page-name changes, spamming techniques, or other coordination practices that go against Facebook's Terms of Service, in order to spread disinformation and hate speech.

The most active of the pages taken down by Facebook is [Vogliamo il movimento 5 stelle al governo](#), an unofficial page in support of the 5 Star Movement. An example of such an item is a [made-up quote](#) falsely attributed to the anti-mafia Italian writer and journalist, Roberto Saviano, saying he would "prefer to save migrants than Italian earthquake victims." He never said it, but was forced to deny it.



Above, the post in which Saviano defends himself and denies saying what was attributed to him; below, a second example of the same page sharing fake news, this time about former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi.

²³ <http://archive.fo/oOMLy> & <http://web.archive.org/web/20151020054518/https://www.facebook.com/GioielliGioielliXTutti>



A second example is from 2017 when the page reported that the Italian media had suppressed a story about a meeting between Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and Mark Zuckerberg where they discussed how to censor the internet. In reality the photo was from a meeting that took place a [year earlier](#).

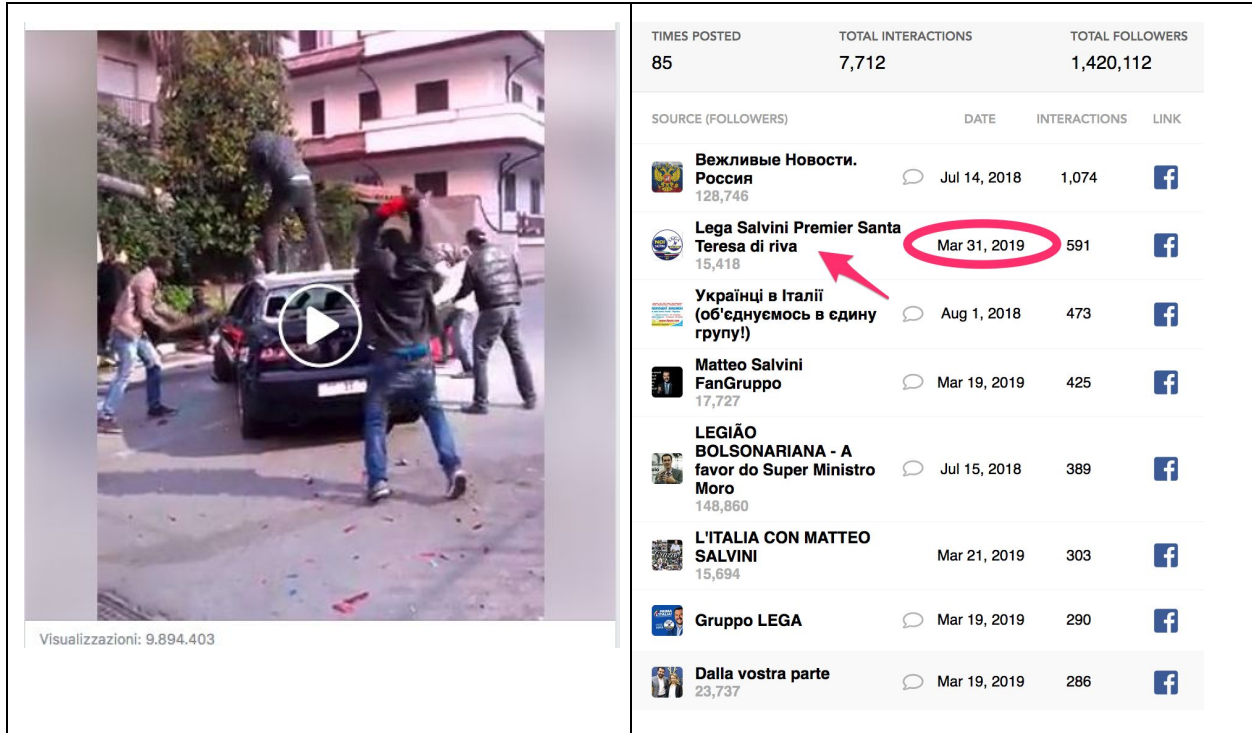
This page has [been reported](#) to be part of a much wider disinformation network in support of the 5 Star Movement, which was also included in the Avaaz report sent to Facebook.

The most active League supporting page, "[Lega Salvini Premier Santa Teresa di riva](#),"²⁴ which has now also been removed by Facebook, has been the biggest

















recent sharer of a [video](#) purporting to show migrants smashing a police car. The video, which has almost 10 million views, is actually a scene from a movie and has been [debunked several times](#) over the years, but is still widely shared.

Below you can see the list of the main sharing pages extracted using the Facebook monitoring app Crowdtangle.

²⁴ <http://archive.fo/Ttpuy>



TIMES POSTED	TOTAL INTERACTIONS	TOTAL FOLLOWERS
85	7,712	1,420,112

SOURCE (FOLLOWERS)	DATE	INTERACTIONS	LINK
 Вежливые Новости. Россия 128,746	Jul 14, 2018	1,074	
 Lega Salvini Premier Santa Teresa di riva 15,418	Mar 31, 2019	591	
 Українці в Італії (об'єднуємось в єдину групу!)	Aug 1, 2018	473	
 Matteo Salvini FanGruppo 17,727	Mar 19, 2019	425	
 LEGIÃO BOLSONARIANA - A favor do Super Ministro Moro 148,860	Jul 15, 2018	389	
 L'ITALIA CON MATTEO SALVINI 15,694	Mar 21, 2019	303	
 Gruppo LEGA	Mar 19, 2019	290	
 Dalla vostra parte 23,737	Mar 19, 2019	286	

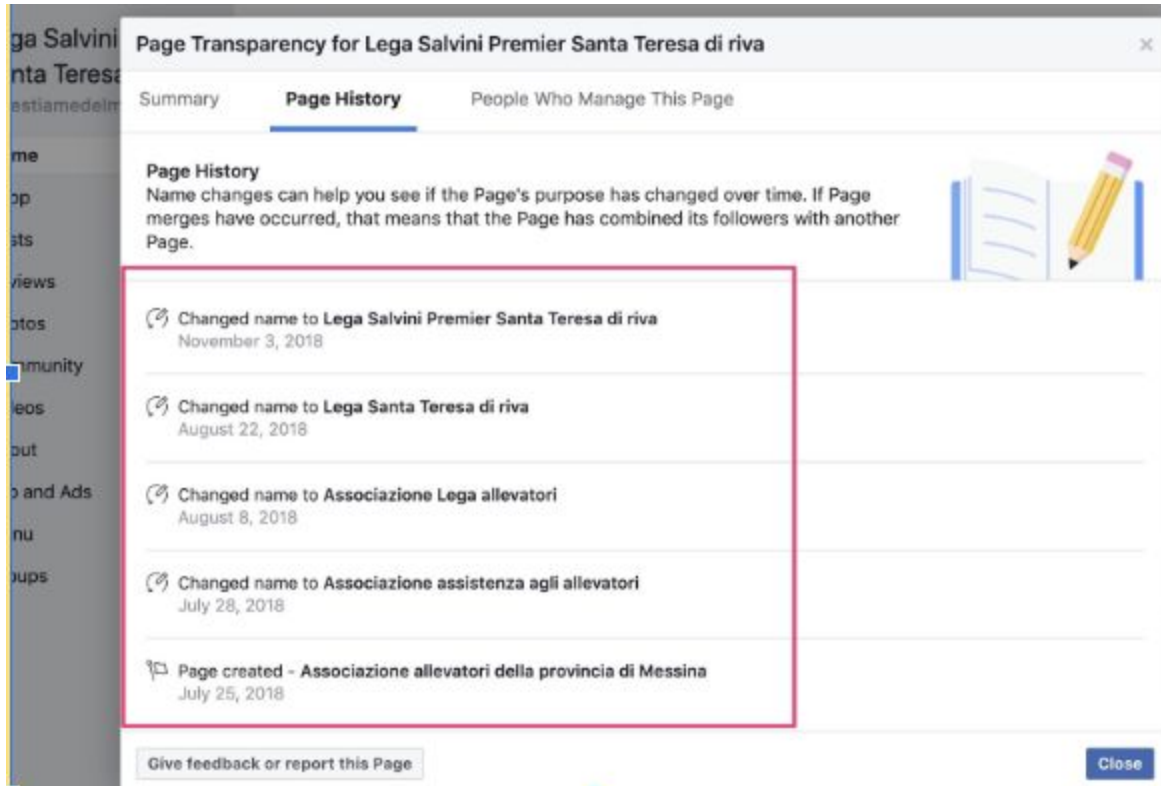
3. Examples of Violations of Facebook’s Terms

Facebook does not publicly disclose its reasons for the removal of pages, but this chapter presents some of the potential violations uncovered and flagged by the Avaaz investigation.

Misleading page-name changes

One of the most common violations is what we call “recycling of followers.” This happens when a page with non-political content suddenly changes its name or identity to become political or partisan, retaining all its likes and followers, who often remain unaware of the change but start to receive political content.

One example is the page Lega Salvini Premier Santa Teresa di Riva, already mentioned in the previous chapter for sharing fake news. The page was started as an agricultural breeders’ association of the Messina province and eventually became a League-supporting local chapter. The change was made one word at a time, gradually, using the ambiguity of the word “League” to avoid the automatic checks carried out by Facebook.



Other examples of political pages taken down by Facebook, likely for misleading page name changes, include:

- [“Vogliamo il movimento 5 stelle al governo”](#)²⁵ (“We want the 5 Star Movement in Government”) - Original name: “BOMBE SEXY” (“Sexy Bombs”)
- [“NOI SIAMO 5 stelle.”](#)²⁶ (“We are 5 Star”) - Original name: “Calcio Passione” (“Passion for Soccer”)
- [“Lega Salvini Sulmona”](#)²⁷ - Original name: “Il peggio del Grande Fratello 2018,” (“The worst of Big Brother 2018”)
- [“Beppe Grillo For President”](#)²⁸ - Original name: “Fai crescere la tua pagina in modo esponenziale” (Make your page grow exponentially)
- [“Catena Umana”](#)²⁹ (Human Chain) - Original name: “Da quando ti ho conosciuto, non faccio altro che pensare a te” (Since I met you, I only think of you) - Later: “Oroscopo” (Horoscope)

²⁵ <http://archive.is/TbQjb>

²⁶ <http://archive.is/6BZ96>

²⁷ <http://archive.fo/cQLPK>

²⁸ <http://archive.is/k3FDg>

²⁹ <http://archive.fo/JgzAx>

Use of likely fake accounts to manage pages

Another example is the use of fake or duplicate profiles. In this case, a page managed by a person with the name “Bernardo Paguro” (Pagurus bernhardus is a type of hermit crab). Although, as you can see from the screenshots below, the admin account appears to have been removed or suspended by Facebook after Avaaz reported it, the page is currently still active.



The page after the suspension or takedown of the likely fake account:



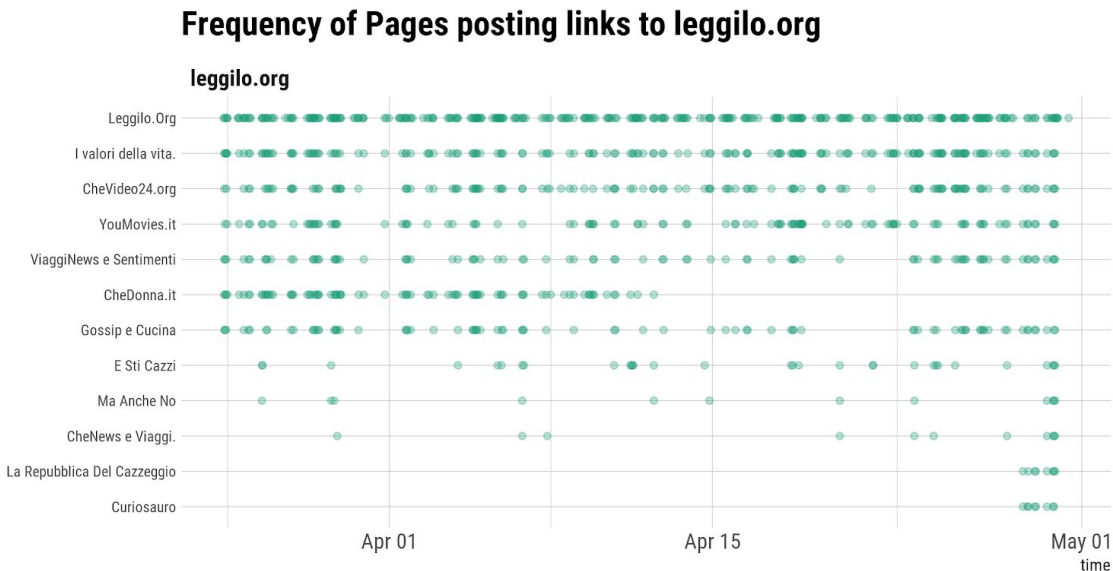
A screenshot of the likely fake account before deletion.



Inauthentic pages, spam and coordination

Another example of a page taken down for violations of Facebook's rules is "I Valori Della Vita" ("The value of life"), with more than 1.5 million followers. Our research showed that the page, which looks like a generic lifestyle page, is actually part of a bigger network, whose pages share, in a coordinated manner, content from the well-known far-right news site Leggilo.org.

The following table shows the frequency and coordinated posting among these pages:



4. The Wider Disinformation Network that Avaaz Uncovered

The 23 pages already taken down and analyzed above might just be the tip of the iceberg: The full report sent to Facebook by Avaaz identifies **14 main clusters of behavior in breach of Facebook's rules** on misrepresentation, page and group name change, spam and related



policies. They include **104 pages and six groups**, with a total of **18.26 million followers** and **23.09 million interactions** in the last three months.

We've named the networks in breach of the rules after their topics or the pages or groups with the highest number of followers:

1. **Inauthentic League pages** (4 pages with a total of 46,610 likes and 970,820 interactions in the past 3 months + 4 groups with a total of 21,000 members)
2. **Inauthentic 5 Star Movement pages** (34 pages, 747,049 likes, 5,300,014 interactions in the past 3 months + 1 group of 13,257 members)
3. **Catena Umana Network** (15 pages, 336,416 likes, 150,414 interactions in the past 3 months)
4. **Kontrokultura Network** (4 pages, 384,654 likes, 122,032 interactions in the past 3 months)
5. **Adesso Basta Network** (1 page, 492,500 likes, 1,363,300 interactions in the past 3 months + 1 group with 23,081 members)
6. **Leggilo.org Network** (13 pages, 14,170,942 followers, 7,708,402 interactions in the past 3 months)
7. **Adesso Italia Network** (9 pages, 850,000 followers, 897,033 interactions in the past 3 months + 2 groups with 3,069 members)
8. **Mondo Sporco Network** (2 pages, 39,000 likes, 2,142 interactions in the past 3 months)
9. **Mag24 Network** (4 pages, 599,629 likes, 1.49 million interactions in the past 3 months)
10. **Anti-Semitic Network** (2 pages + 1 group, 29,614 followers, 99,972 interactions in the past 3 months)
11. **La Verità ci rende liberi Network** (2 pages, 105,015 likes, 716,659 interactions in the past 3 months)
12. **Jeda Network** (7 pages, 797,464 likes, 1.91 million interactions in the past 3 months)
13. **Rassegne Italia Network** (4 pages, 84,504 likes, 635,455 interactions in the past 3 months)
14. **Other inauthentic disinformation pages** (3 pages, 270,326 likes, 621,876 interactions in the past 3 months)

A full list of the pages is available to journalists upon request.

Many of the pages in the Avaaz report are already known for regularly spreading fake news, disinformation and hate speech in Italy. Those pages appear on two blacklists maintained by the fact-checking websites Butac.it and Bufale.net, which are widely used in studies and analyses by leading journalism institutions (e.g. Reuters Institute), governmental agencies (e.g. the Italian Communication Authority Agcom) and researchers and Universities (e.g. University of Venice, Rome and IMT).

Many of the pages in this report have also been at the center of several investigations by media and fact-checkers in the past, from the New York Times and Buzzfeed (and [here](#)) and Italian



media like [Huffington Post](#) and [AGI](#), to well-known [debunkers](#) (also [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)), and even Italian political parties ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#)).

Avaaz calls on Facebook to continue investigating the remaining pages (over 80) included in its report for breaches of its rules, and take into account the large amount of evidence gathered of disinformation spread by several of these pages and to enforce its [recently introduced policy](#) to reduce the reach of such groups and pages, many of which are still very active.

Avaaz also asks Facebook to urgently implement Avaaz's proposal to "[Correct the Record](#)" and send notifications to people impacted and misled by fake news spread by these networks.

Public Interest Research Goals:

The aim of Avaaz's disinformation project is to investigate and analyze disinformation on social media and the networks behind it. We want to report openly on what we find, so we can alert and educate social media platforms, regulators and the public, and so we can more effectively advocate for smart solutions to defend our democracies from disinformation - from issuing factual corrections to everyone exposed to disinformation to taking action against malicious disinformation networks.

To do this, we need to:

- Uncover, analyze, and expose disinfo content and the biggest bad actors/networks behind it;
- Collect identifiable, specific stories of disinfo and networks with supporting data showing the scale and impact of disinformation;
- Break journalistic media stories and original reports to alert the public and pressure platforms and governments to act; and
- Create data driven arguments for advocacy and argumentation to move towards sensible legislation that protects both freedom of speech and democracy.