

Detecting Human Trafficking Using Babel Street Technology

Human trafficking is big business. The International Labour Organization reports that nearly 28 million people worldwide are enslaved in forced labor¹ – either in the private sector, or as part of commercial sexual exploitation rings. This enslavement generates profits of more than US\$236 billion annually.² But you can't prevent, suppress, or punish a crime you can't see.

Uncovering a heinous crime

Human trafficking is notoriously hard to spot. Why? First, traffickers prey on vulnerable people who may never be officially listed as “missing.”³ These include the young; people living in extreme poverty; people without strong family or social networks; people living in politically disorganized or unstable regions; and people living through natural disasters. Second, traffickers often work in complex rings operating across jurisdictions or nations. Third, trafficked persons often hesitate to report the crime.⁴

Babel Street technology can make it easier to find human traffickers. Babel Street Insights scours top-level social media sites for keywords indicating the type of fake employment ads, dating-site interactions, and other activities associated with human trafficking. It also searches hard-to-reach dark web forums and sites where human trafficking is openly discussed. Babel Street Synthesis helps authorities uncover and explore relationships among traffickers, pinpointing those who wield the most influence. Additional Babel Street capabilities help investigators connect traffickers' online personas to real-world entities.

Using Babel Street to stop human trafficking

Investigators can take the following steps to detect human trafficking rings and solicitations – the first steps on the road to prosecution.

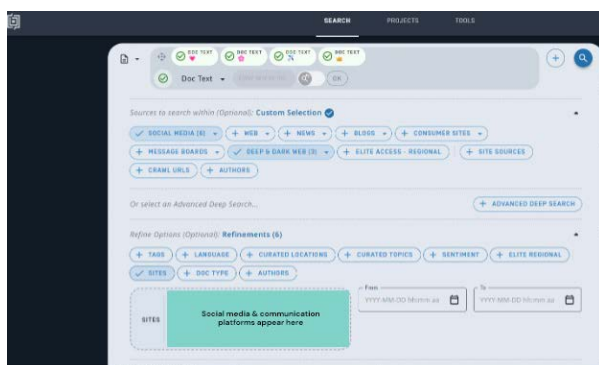


Figure 1: An Insights search focusing on human trafficking-related emojis

Develop search queries

Use emojis and keywords to find human trafficking advertisements across forums, social media platforms, dark web sources, and other sites where criminals recruit human trafficking victims and communicate with the networks that exploit them.

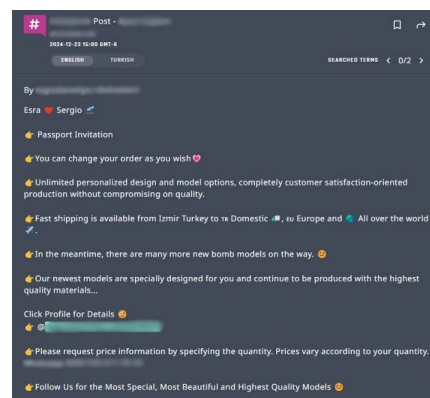


Figure 2: A social media post that yields a social media handle and online messaging app ID

Refine and review search results

Use further refinement options to narrow results and identify specific posts or chat rooms that pose a potential risk for human trafficking based on known predatory tactics. Note posts that provide social media handles and online messaging app IDs.

Extract identifiers

Within Insights, conduct a People Search using the names and identifiers of the authors and chat group members, including usernames, emails, phone numbers, and messaging platform IDs. These targeted searches can yield even more information that helps build a personal profile of each person of interest.

With investigative tools from Babel Street, law enforcement professionals can maximize the use of open-source information to spot human traffickers — the first step in prosecuting them.

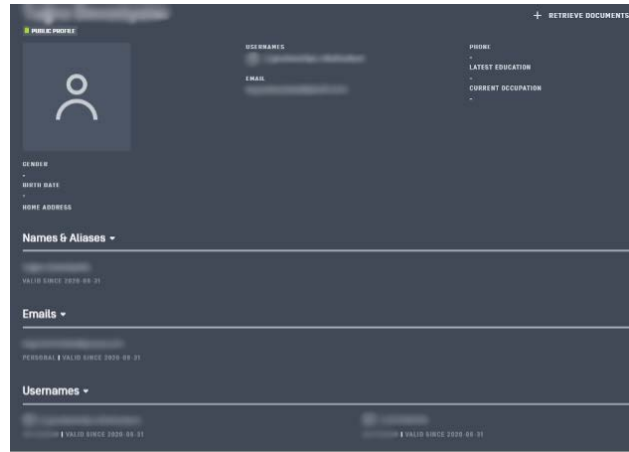


Figure 3: A personal profile in progress

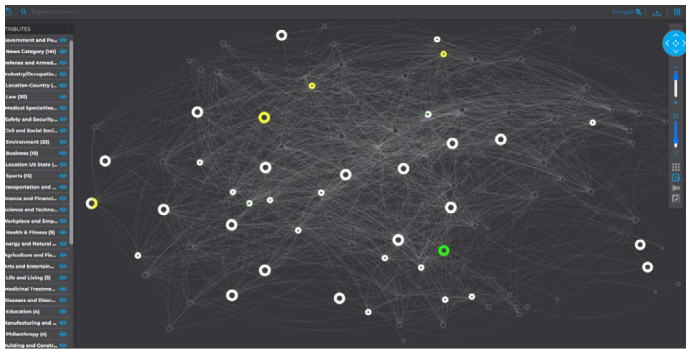


Figure 4: Output from Babel Street Synthesis showing connections within a social network

Expose connections

Use Babel Street Insights Synthesis to show connections among potential bad actors. Synthesis rapidly maps key relationships within social networks, precisely identifying those who wield the most influence. Synthesis helps illuminate influencers' publicly available online profiles and activities and connects them to real-world entities. These connections, hidden within massive datasets, would have otherwise remained undetected.

Endnotes

¹ International Labour Organization, "Data and research on forced labour," accessed February 2025, <https://www.ilo.org/topics/forced-labour-modern-slavery-and-trafficking-persons/data-and-research-forced-labour>

² Ibid

³ National Institute of Justice, "Federally Backed Human Trafficking Task Force Models Yields Progress and Opportunities for Continued Growth," January 2022, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/federally-backed-human-trafficking-task-force-model-yields-progress#note1>

⁴ United States Department of State, "Trafficking in Persons Report 2023," accessed February 2025, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

Babel Street is the trusted technology partner for the world's most advanced identity intelligence and risk operations. The Babel Street Insights platform delivers advanced AI and data analytics solutions to close the Risk-Confidence Gap.

Babel Street provides unmatched, analysis-ready data regardless of language, proactive risk identification, 360-degree insights, high-speed automation, and seamless integration into existing systems. We empower government and commercial organizations to transform high-stakes identity and risk operations into a strategic advantage.

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