

TOXIC TWITTER

How Twitter Generates Millions in Ad Revenue by Bringing Back Banned Accounts

#StopToxicTwitter



The Center for Countering Digital Hate is a US-headquartered international nonprofit NGO that disrupts the architecture of online hate and misinformation.

Digital technology has forever changed how we communicate, build relationships, share knowledge, set social standards, and negotiate and assert our societies' values.

Digital spaces have been colonized, and their unique dynamics exploited by malignant actors that instrumentalize hate and misinformation. These movements are opportunistic, agile, and confident in influencing and persuading people.

Over time these malignant actors, advocating diverse causes – from hatred of women to racial and religious intolerance to denial of science – have formed a digital CounterEnlightenment. The disinformation they spread to bolster their causes has socialized the offline world for the worse.

The Center's work combines both analysis and disruption of these networks. CCDH's solutions seek to increase the economic, political, and social costs of all parts of the infrastructure – the actors, systems, and culture – that support and profit from hate and misinformation.

If you appreciate this report, you can donate to CCDH at <u>counterhate.com/donate</u>. In the United States, Center for Countering Digital Hate Inc is a 501(c)(3) charity. In the United Kingdom, Center for Countering Digital Hate Ltd is a non-profit company limited by guarantee.

Twitter stands to make up to \$19m a year from ads on just ten toxic reinstated accounts

Since announcing his policy of a "general amnesty" for banned Twitter users in November, Elon Musk has reinstated tens of thousands of accounts, including neo-Nazis, white supremacists, misogynists and spreaders of dangerous conspiracy theories.

Now new research by the Center for Countering Digital Hate estimates the value of these reinstatements to Twitter, providing further evidence that Musk's decision to welcome them back is driven by a desperate drive for revenues.

By analyzing new publicly available figures on tweet impressions, the Center estimates that just ten reinstated accounts renowned for publishing hateful content and dangerous conspiracies will generate up to \$19 million a year in advertising revenue for Twitter.

The analysis shows that the ten accounts have already amassed 2.5 billion tweet impressions since Twitter rolled out publicly visible impression-counts on 15th December 2022, putting them on track to reach 20 billion impressions over the course of a year.

The Center has also found ads appearing next to toxic content from each of these reinstated accounts, showing how companies are putting their brand safety and consumer trust at risk by continuing to advertise on Twitter.

The ten reinstated accounts were selected to highlight the various kinds of problematic content that Twitter's advertisers are now supporting. They are:

- Andrew Tate, the influencer and former kickboxer known for posting extreme misogynistic videos. He has said that rape victims "bear some responsibility" for being raped and that he would threaten women who accuse him of cheating with a machete.
- **Robert Malone**, a doctor who has built up a following by pushing falsehoods about Covid vaccines, while also claiming to have played a key role in their development. He has claimed that the "science is settled" that Covid vaccines "are not working".
- Andrew Anglin, an American neo-Nazi who founded the Daily Stormer website, which takes its name from the Nazi propaganda sheet known as Der Stürmer.
- **Gateway Pundit**, an online media outlet notorious for its promotion of disinformation, including claims around vote tampering, climate denial and Covid misinformation.
- **Emerald Robinson**, the former Newsmax reporter who was sacked and suspended from Twitter in 2021 for claiming that the Covid vaccine contains a satanic marker.

- **Rogan O'Handley**, a Hollywood former entertainment lawyer turned far-right conspiracy theorist, who has been criticized for fanning the flames of vaccine conspiracies in the wake of the NFL athlete Damar Hamlin's heart attack.
- **Peter McCullough**, a doctor known for pushing misinformation about Covid. He has claimed that health officials withheld treatments for Covid in the early days of the pandemic in order to spread fear and push people into taking a vaccine.
- **Stew Peters**, a former bounty hunter who produced the film 'Died Suddenly', which promotes false claims about Covid vaccines.
- **Ronnie Steven Islam**, known as "Rizza" Islam, is an internet personality who regularly posts antisemitic, anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-vaccine rhetoric. He was named in CCDH's "Disinformation Dozen", listing twelve of the most influential online anti-vaxxers.
- Anthime Gionet, known as Baked Alaska, is a white supremacist internet personality who attended the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally and has been sentenced for his role in the Capitol insurrection.

Estimates of ad revenue from the accounts are based on three elements: predictions for annual tweet impressions based on daily averages, the results of a simulation to find the frequency of ads on Twitter, and industry information on the cost of Twitter ads.

Name	Total Views	Daily Views (Since Reinstatement)	Estimated Annual Views	Estimated Annual Ad Revenue
Andrew Tate	1,642,680,664	34,950,652	12,756,988,135	\$12,300,021
Robert W. Malone	291,328,720	6,198,483	2,262,446,443	\$2,181,404
Rogan O'Handley	195,153,327	4,242,464	1,548,499,225	\$1,493,031
Peter A. McCullough	114,360,075	2,433,193	888,115,476	\$856,302
Emerald Robinson	94,385,057	2,051,849	748,924,909	\$722,098
Gateway Pundit	93,075,236	2,023,375	738,531,764	\$712,077
Stew Peters	68,828,475	1,496,271	546,138,986	\$526,576
Andrew Anglin	16,493,433	350,924	128,087,299	\$123,499
Anthime Gionet	7,661,913	163,019	59,502,090	\$57,371
Rizza Islam	840,762	140,127	51,146,355	\$49,314
TOTAL	2,524,807,662	54,050,358	19,728,380,682	\$19,021,692

To predict yearly impressions for the accounts, the Center gathered a dataset of tweets starting on the 15th December 2022 when impressions first became visible on the platform. The dataset counts 9,615 tweets posted by the accounts over the course of 47 days, ending on 30th January 2023.

The data shows that, on an average day, tweets from the ten accounts received a combined total of 54 million impressions. Projecting this average across 365 days, the accounts can be expected to reach nearly 20 billion impressions over the course of a year.

To find an estimate for how often Twitter shows ads, the Center set up three accounts to follow only reinstated accounts and found that after scrolling through 1,039 tweets, an ad appeared at an average rate of once every 6.7 tweets.

Assuming this rate is broadly representative of how often Twitter serves ads, the ten accounts can be estimated to generate 2.9 billion ad impressions throughout the course of a year.

Finally, industry information from the social media analytics firm Brandwatch shows that Twitter ads cost an average of \$6.46 per 1,000 impressions. Pulling these elements together results in a total figure of up to \$19 million in estimated annual ad revenues across the accounts.

The estimates demonstrate that Twitter will make millions of dollars from a deliberate decision to reinstate accounts that are known to spread hate and dangerous misinformation, and have already had enforcement action taken against them.

Examples of ads appearing next to tweets from the ten reinstated accounts

Research by the Center demonstrates that Twitter is displaying ads from brands including Amazon, Apple TV, NFL, Merrill Lynch and Prime Video next to tweets from individuals in the list. The following section evidences these ads, including those next to tweets containing hateful language and harmful conspiracies.

Ads were captured via accounts created by the Center, which were set up to simulate the experience of a user following the accounts. They appeared either on the "For You" feed, the "Following" feed or in the replies under individual tweets posted by the accounts.

This work confirms that Twitter has been displaying ads next to every one of the toxic accounts we have investigated, despite the fact that the individuals behind them are known to promote hateful views and falsehoods.

• Andrew Tate: An ad for the freelancing platform Fiverr appears amongst replies beneath a tweet posted by Andrew Tate in which he denigrates women in business by claiming that female CEOs have their lives funded by rich husbands and that their businesses are "hobby bullshit".

	Andrew Tate Ø	
Why	r are all these "business women" and "CEO" ks married to very rich men?	
Its a	Imost as if the man pays for their entire lives and r businesses are hobby bullshit.	d
	M - Dec 26, 2022 - 3.3M Views	
2,517 1	Retweets 269 Quote Tweets 53:2K Likes	
	0 tì 🛡 İ	
H	Tweet your reply	
1 AL	NFT kid "Keith Berry" (\$kokid951 - Dec 26, 2022 Replying to @Cobrate That's a small amount of women Tate . There's plenty of successful powerful single women	
	Q 44 tl 3 ♡ 420 dd 97.5K ±	
-	Akeem Hunt CryptoKeem @ @Mr, AtHunt - Dec 26, 2022 Replying to @kokkd951 and @Cabratate I guess he is referring to the very OUTSPOKEN ones . Idk but yes you an right	 e
	Q 3 t2 O 194 d⊿ 89.2K ± Show replies	
	Alana Mastrangelo 🖉 @ARmastrangelo - Dec 26, 2022	
-	Replying to @Cobratate	
	HYPERGAMY Men marry across or down across or up	
	across or down across or up	
	socio-economic hierarchy	
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	Q 14 t] 30 ♥ 385 tH 46K t	
0	Glen Kovacs 🤣 @glenkovacs - Dec 26, 2022 Replying to @ARmastrangelo and @Cobratate	
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Andrew Tate, <u>https://twitter.com/Cobratate/status/1607373157144436738</u> Fiverr, <u>https://twitter.com/fiverr/status/1609869390584889344</u>

• **Robert W Malone:** An ad for Fortune Magazine appeared next to a tweet by Robert Malone in which he falsely claims that mRNA vaccines are "not safe". He also uses inverted commas to imply they are not really vaccines.

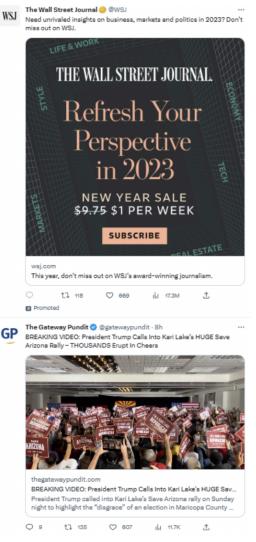
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Robert Malone, <u>https://twitter.com/RWMaloneMD/status/1620040558684286976</u> Fortune, <u>https://twitter.com/FortuneMagazine/status/1614014389702492160</u> • Andrew Anglin: A Prime Video ad appeared next to a tweet by Andrew Anglin in which he claims that the "only career that a woman is actually capable of on merit is prostitution".

Andrew Anglin @WorldWarWang · Jan 11 ... The only career that a woman is actually capable of on merit is prostitution. Single women are an invention of the modern state. When the state no longer forces men to hire women and the programs end, women will go back to being mothers. This will have all been like a bad dream twitter.com/Cooperstreamin... This Tweet is unavailable. Q 71 tl 61 O 213 11 29.3K £ Prime Video 🤣 @PrimeVideo ... Till disaster do us part. 💍 🔆 Shotgun Wedding, starring @jlo and @joshduhamel, is coming January 27 to @primevideo. #LiterallySaveTheDay prime 0:23 amazon.com Watch Shotgun Wedding 1/27 On Prime Video £ Q 26 t] 42 ♥ 479 11 5.9M Promoted

Andrew Anglin, <u>https://twitter.com/WorldWarWang/status/1613304714422255617</u> Prime Video, <u>https://twitter.com/PrimeVideo/status/1613284261687328768</u>

• **Gateway Pundit:** An ad for the Wall Street Journal appeared next to a tweet from the Gateway Pundit promoting an article containing election misinformation. The article pushes the debunked claim that Kari Lake's election for Governor of Arizona "was blatantly stolen right in our faces".



The Wall Street Journal, <u>https://twitter.com/gatewaypundit/status/1619896943433457665</u> The Gateway Pundit, <u>https://twitter.com/WSJ/status/1611442018248531968</u>

"Fact check: Kari Lake's continuing false Arizona election claims", CNN, 31 January 2023, <u>https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/31/politics/fact-check-kari-lake-140k-fraudulent-ballots/</u> <u>index.html</u>

"BREAKING VIDEO: President Trump Calls Into Kari Lake's HUGE Save Arizona Rally – THOUSANDS Erupt In Cheers", The Gateway Pundit, 29 January 2023, <u>https://www.thegatewaypundit.com/2023/01/breaking-video-president-trump-calls-kari-l</u> <u>akes-huge-save-arizona-rally-thousands-erupt-cheers/</u> • Emerald Robinson: An NFL ad appeared next to a tweet by Emerald Robinson in which she states: "Welcome to the pandemic of the vaccinated" and shares a tweet claiming that Covid vaccines "made things worse", and constitutes the "greatest public health disaster in the history of the world".

Emerald Robinson 🚹 🤡 @EmeraldRobinson - Jan 27 🛛 🚥 Welcome to the pandemic of the vaccinated.					
-	∕igilant Fox ∖ ₩CovidVacc	🤣 @VigilantF ines	ox∙Jan 16		
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Promoted	by DraftKings				

Emerald Robinson, <u>https://twitter.com/EmeraldRobinson/status/1619021036737146880</u> NFL, <u>https://twitter.com/NFL/status/1595903619014221825</u>

• **Rogan O'Handley:** An Apple TV ad appeared next to a tweet by Rogan O'Handley in which he promotes the debunked claim that Ukraine was developing biological weapons with the assistance of the US government.

€tv+	Apple TV+ 😓 @AppleTVPlus With so much amazing talent on Apple TV+, we can't be expected to remember everyone					
	apple.com bple.com start streaming – Apple TV+					
	Q 1 €] 1 ♡ 15 1/1 84.7K ∱ Promoted					
۲	DC_Draino ♥ @DC_Draino - Jan 29 ···· Remember when the Pentagon confirmed the US partnered w/46 Ukrainian Bioweapon labs? And Hunter Biden secured millions for 1 of the labs - Metabiota? Well now we have a 2/24/22 letter from Zelensky ordering the destruction of all gov't files for Metabiota I'm sure it's nothing					
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Rogan O'Handley, <u>https://twitter.com/DC_Draino/status/1619784534953984000</u> Apple TV, <u>https://twitter.com/AppleTVPlus/status/1619823951764660224</u>

"How the false Russian biolab story came to circulate among the U.S. far right", NPR, 25 March 25 2022,

https://www.npr.org/2022/03/25/1087910880/biological-weapons-far-right-russia-uk raine

• **Peter McCullough:** An ad for Amazon appears next to a tweet by Peter McCullough in which he pushes claims that Pfizer is guilty of conspiring to commit domestic terrorism based on unverified claims made in a video with a supposed Pfizer employee.

Ĵ	Amazon 🤣 @amazon Shop bestselling electronics and accessories on Amazon.			
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	Peter A. McCullough, MD, MPH [™] ♥ @P_McCulloughMD - Jan 27 We concluded Dr Walker revealed in sting operation that @pfizer is conspiring to commit domestic terrorism. Walker should turn states witness. Full DOJ/IC probe into Pfizer including the library of codes they hold now. Horrific development. Must listen!			
	Q 77 tl 1.099 ♡ 2.759 ılıl 91.3K ±			

Amazon, <u>https://twitter.com/amazon/status/1612058913502904320</u> Peter McCullough, <u>https://twitter.com/P_McCulloughMD/status/1619090849672957958</u>

"Fact Check: Does Project Veritas Video Show Pfizer Is Mutating COVID?", Newsweek, 26 January 2023,

https://www.newsweek.com/project-veritas-covid-mutations-pfizer-fact-check-1776845

• Stew Peters: An ad for Wendy's appeared next to a tweet by Stew Peters in which he refers to the vaccine as a "BioWeapon" and claims that people have been "murdered" by it.



Stew Peters, https://twitter.com/realstewpeters/status/1620262162181812224

• **Rizza Islam:** An ad for the Merrill Lynch next to a tweet by Rizza Islam in which he claims that "they lied about the shots" and "they lied about the deaths".

Rizza Islam @IslamRizza · Jan 27 So after being banned from my original Twitter account for 2 years what have we learned? *They lied about the shots *They lied about the deaths *They lied about the data *They lied about the "science" *They lied about it ALL! But WE told the TRUTH! Who all should go to jail? 🖣 🤔 **Q** 36 tl 327 ♡ 1,094 1. 36.9K Merrill Lynch 🤣 @MerrillLynch AS. With the new Merrill Advisor Match, you can choose an advisor that's right for you based on your personal preferences, priorities and financial goals. It's a digital tool so impressive, you can't help but find your match. BELL SS: 0:14 Find an advisor Q 7 **t**↓ 5 ♥ 27 ¢ Promoted

Rizza Islam, <u>https://twitter.com/IslamRizza/status/1619010905836240897</u> Merrill Lynch, <u>https://twitter.com/MerrillLynch/status/1610390393572540416</u>

• Anthime Gionet: An ad for the streaming service Peacock appeared next to a tweet from white supremacist Anthime Gionet in which he asks his followers if he should "say the n-word".



Baked Alaska, <u>https://twitter.com/bakedalaska/status/1603132210973917185</u> Peacock, <u>https://twitter.com/peacock/status/1617966195747221509</u>

<u>Methodology</u>

- To gather tweets from each of the ten reinstated accounts, researchers used the social media web-scraping tool SNScrape, which utilizes Twitter's search function to enable data collection. The resulting dataset spans from the 15th December 2022, which is when tweet impressions first became widely visible, to the 30th January 2023.
- Daily impressions were calculated as individual averages for each of the accounts, starting from either the date they were reinstated, or, for those reinstated before impression-counts were rolled out, from the beginning of the dataset.
- Twitter ads cost an average of \$6.46 per 1,000 impressions, according to the social media analytics firm Brandwatch. Twitter's average cost per 1,000 impressions was the lowest of four social media platforms analyzed by Brandwatch.

Brandwatch, 22 February 2022, <u>https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/how-much-do-social-media-ads-cost-on-facebo</u> <u>ok-instagram-twitter-and-linkedin/</u>

• The following link contains all of the revenue calculations as well as the underlying dataset of 9,615 tweets posted by the accounts and their impression-counts.

CCDH, 31 January 2023, https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1L7Y3boPGLwuvtn-EMOPsvokX2BipHFL45sL OJT8Tdx0/edit#gid=1586723664

- Built into these estimates is the assumption that one ad is served up by Twitter for every 6.7 tweet impressions. The Center arrived at this figure by conducting an experiment to analyze the average number of tweets served up between ads on Twitter's home timeline. For the purposes of this experiment, three Twitter accounts were created and set up to follow solely reinstated accounts. Using these accounts, researchers conducted ten separate simulations where they loaded the home screen and scrolled until they reached 100 tweets. In total, 156 ads were shown out of a total of 1,039 tweets, meaning ads were shown at an average rate of once every 6.7 tweets.
- The following link shows the results of the simulation, including screen recordings for each of the ten simulations.

CCDH, 25 January 2023, https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1UxBilQhBWQfOg6wEnMuk4UVCgEeDhVxGg ltwRF91WSU/edit#gid=0

 Note that this is a simplified characterisation of the way that people view tweets on Twitter, as they may also view tweets via the search function, on individuals profiles or directly. While ads are served in these other contexts too, it is more complex to simulate user behavior. Therefore, in the absence of any clear information from Twitter on either ad frequency, the home feed analysis was used as a broad approximation of the number of ads displayed per tweet impression.

Background notes on the ten accounts

• Andrew Tate has said that rape victims "bear some responsibility" for being raped and that he would use a machete to threaten a woman if she accused him of cheating.

> "Inside the violent, misogynistic world of TikTok's new star, Andrew Tate", The Observer, 6 August 2022, <u>https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/aug/06/andrew-tate-violent-misogyn</u> <u>istic-world-of-tiktok-new-star</u>

• Robert Malone is a doctor who has built up a following by pushing falsehoods Covid vaccines, while also claiming to have played a key role in their development. He has claimed that the "science is settled" that Covid vaccines "are not working".

"A vaccine scientist's discredited claims have bolstered a movement of misinformation", 24 January 2022, The Washington Post, <u>https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/01/24/robert-malone-vaccine-misinfo</u> <u>rmation-rogan-mandates/</u>

• Emerald Robinson is a former newsmax reporter who was sacked and suspended from Twitter in 2021 for claiming that the Covid vaccine contains a satanic marker.

"Newsmax reporter permanently banned from Twitter for posting Covid misinformation", CNN Business, 10 November 2021, <u>https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/10/media/newsmax-twitter-emerald-robinson-banned/index.html</u>

"Mike Lindell hires reporter fired by Newsmax for saying Covid vaccine has satanic marker", The Independent, 18 January 2022, <u>https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/mike-lindell-newsm</u> <u>ax-reporter-vaccine-b1995455.html</u>

• Andrew Anglin is an American neo-Nazi who founded the Daily Stormer website, which takes its name from the Nazi propaganda sheet known as Der Stürmer.

"Andrew Anglin", Southern Poverty Law Center, <u>https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/andrew-anglin</u> "The making of an American Nazi", The Atlantic, December 2014, <u>https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/12/the-making-of-an-american-nazi/544119/</u>

• Rogan O'Handley is a Hollywood entertainment lawyer turned far-right conspiracy theorist, who has been accused of fanning the flames of vaccine conspiracies in the wake of the NFL athlete Demar Hamlin's heart attack.

"Anti-Vaxxers Turn Damar Hamlin's On-Field Collapse Into a 'Vile' Conspiracy Theory", Rolling Stone, 3 January 2023, <u>https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/damar-hamlin-injury-anti-vaxxers</u> <u>-spew-lies-1234655339/</u>

"Rogan O'Handley", Prager U, <u>https://www.prageru.com/presenters/rogan-ohandley</u>

• Peter McCullough is a doctor known for pushing misinformation about Covid. He has claimed that health officials withheld treatments for Covid in the early days of the pandemic in order to spread fear among the population and push the public to take a vaccine.

"Joe Rogan podcast hosts doctor known for pushing debunked claims about Covid-19", The Independent, 16 December 2021, <u>https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/joe-rogan-covid-podcast-doct</u> <u>or-b1977603.html</u>

• Stew Peters is a former bounty hunter who produced the film Died Suddenly, which promotes false claims about Covid vaccines.

"New 'Died Suddenly' Film Pushes Unfounded Depopulation Claims About Covid-19 Vaccine", Forbes, 22 November 2022, <u>https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucelee/2022/11/22/new-died-suddenly-film-pushes-</u> <u>unfounded-depopulation-claims-about-covid-19-vaccine/?sh=652d6fb049d0</u>

"Twitter Is a Megaphone for 'Sudden Death' Vaccine Conspiracies", Wired, 16 January 2023, <u>https://www.wired.co.uk/article/twitter-sudden-death-vaccine-conspiracies</u>

• Ronnie Steven "Rizza" Islam is an internet personality who regularly posts antisemitic, anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-vaccine rhetoric. He was named in CCDH's "Disinformation Dozen", a list of twelve of the most influential anti-vaxxers on social media. "Profile: Nation of Islam", ADL, <u>https://www.adl.org/resources/profile/nation-islam</u>

"The Disinformation Dozen", CCDH, 21 March 2021, https://counterhate.com/research/the-disinformation-dozen/

• Anthime Gionet, known as Baked Alaska, is a white supremacist internet personality who attended the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally and has been sentenced for his role in the Capitol insurrection.

"Far-right influencer known as 'Baked Alaska' sentenced over Capitol attack", The Guardian, 10 January 2023, <u>https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/10/baked-alaska-anthime-gionet-se</u> <u>ntenced-capitol-attack</u>

"Tim Gionet", ADL, <u>https://extremismterms.adl.org/glossary/tim-gionet-0</u>

"Baked Alaska's clout-chasing spiral into white supremacy is an internet morality tale", Vox, 17 January 2021, <u>https://www.vox.com/22235691/baked-alaska-tim-gionet-arrest-capitol-riot-alt-right</u> <u>-buzzfeed</u>

 Gateway Pundit is an online media outlet notorious for its promotion of disinformation, including claims around vote tampering, climate denial and vaccine misinformation.

> "How 'Gateway Pundit' Used Vaccine And Election Misinformation To Earn \$1.1 Million In Google Ad Revenue", Forbes, 29 July 2021, <u>https://www.forbes.com/sites/abrambrown/2021/07/29/gateway-pundit-election-vac</u> <u>cine-covid-misinformation-google/?sh=29efc0406f14</u>

> "Briefing Note: Programmatic Digital Advertisements and Climate Disinformation", Climate Action Against Misinformation, 7 October 2022, <u>https://foe.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Briefing-Note-Programmatic-Digital-Ad</u> <u>s-and-Disinfo.pdf</u>

> "Facebook's struggle with Gateway Pundit highlights challenge of containing disinformation", 3 December 2021, https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/facebooks-struggle-with-gateway -pundit-highlights-challenge-containing-2021-12-03/



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