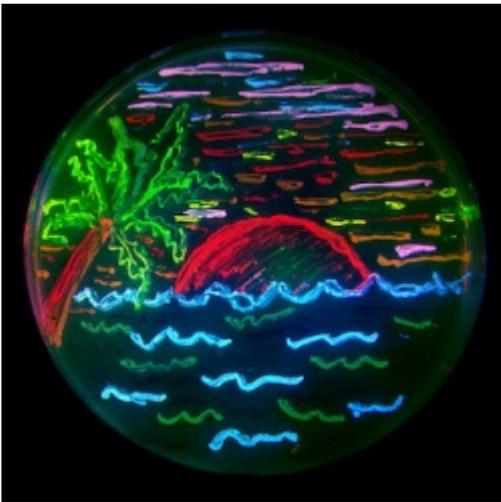


How to Make Money by Spreading Anti-GMO Propaganda



By Alex Berezow, PhD — December 3, 2019

Anti-GMO activists routinely label scientists and biotech supporters "shills for Monsanto." However, a new study suggests that those who spread GMO disinformation are the ones who are actually motivated by money.



Credit: Nathan Shaner/Wikipedia ^[1]

The anti-GMO movement is bizarre in so many ways. The topic is essentially non-controversial in the scientific community, with [92% of Ph.D.-holding biomedical scientists](#) ^[2] agreeing that GMOs are safe to eat.

Yet, GMOs have become a perverse obsession among food and environmental activists, some of whom have gone so far as to accuse biotech scientists of committing "[crimes against nature and humanity](#)" ^[3]. Why? What's in it for them?

A new [paper](#) ^[4] published by Dr. Cami Ryan and her colleagues in the *European Management Journal* examined this issue. They came to the conclusion that many of us had already suspected: It's all about the Benjamins, baby.

The Monetization of Disinformation: The Case of GMOs

The authors, who work for Bayer (which acquired Monsanto), begin by explaining the attention economy. Like most everything else, from money to coffee beans, human attention can be thought

of in strictly economic terms. Attention is a scarce commodity; there is only so much of it to go around. Entire businesses, like social media, have developed a revenue model that relies on capturing as much of your attention as possible. In various ways, that attention can be monetized.

To quantify the attention that the topic of GMOs receives, the authors utilized BuzzSumo, a website that aggregates article engagement from all the major social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. The authors identified 94,993 unique articles from 2009 to 2019, and then whittled down the list to include only those domains that published at least 48 articles on GMOs (which is an average of one per month for four years). Thus, the researchers identified 263 unique websites.

Table 1: Median Total Shares Per Domain

Domain	Median Total Shares	Total Matching Articles
collective-evolution.com	8539	81
mercola.com	4820	148
alhealthworks.com	4312	147
realpharmacy.com	4024	126
worldtruth.tv	3640	114
trueactivist.com	3103	96
takepart.com	2665	83
non-gmoreport.com	2300	206
greenmedinfo.com	2248	109
healthy-holistic-living.com	2152	107
naturalnews.com	2041	1070
enlightened-consciousness.com	1749	64
rt.com	1424	181
sustainablepulse.com	1421	186
theguardian.com	1328	53
healthnutnews.com	1291	76
motherjones.com	1273	69
ecowatch.com	1246	282
npr.org	1219	83
march-against-monsanto.com	1059	184
grist.org	1055	144
altnet.org	1049	113
the-open-mind.com	1023	60
seattleorganicrestaurants.com	971	77
yournewswire.com	952	140

And now, the depressing results. By far, the most shared articles on GMOs came from conspiracy, pseudoscience, and/or activist websites. The image on the right depicts the top 25 websites based on median article shares. Of these, only two -- *The Guardian* and NPR (highlighted green) -- are widely considered to be mainstream news outlets. (It should be pointed out, however, that *The Guardian* is often [not a reliable source of information](#) [5] on science, technology, and public health.)

It isn't a coincidence that many of these same websites also peddle snake oil. Mercola.com, for

instance, is a website that sells everything from [hydrogen-infused water](#) [6] to kill oil supplements for your pet. The website publishes anti-GMO and anti-vaccine articles, as well as a whole host of other fake health news, in order to drive traffic to itself. Then it sells the reader phony medicine.

If you're wondering how Mercola.com gets away with this, here's how: (1) It's not illegal to lie, and (2) It's not illegal to sell phony medicine, provided that there is a tiny disclaimer somewhere on the website admitting that the FDA hasn't evaluated any of the health claims. Here's Mercola's:



***These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. These products are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.**

Subscribe to Dr. Mercola's Natural Health Newsletter

Perhaps Dr. Ryan's next research project should be how to put Mercola.com and its ilk out of business.

[Source](#) [4]: Camille D. Ryan, Andrew Schaul, Ryan Butner, John Swarthout. "Monetizing Disinformation in the Attention Economy: the case of genetically modified organisms (GMOs)." European Management Journal. In press. 2019. doi: 10.1016/j.emj.2019.11.002

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Links

- [1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genetically_modified_organism#/media/File:FPbeachTsien.jpg
- [2] <https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2016/12/01/public-opinion-about-genetically-modified-foods-and-trust-in-scientists-connected-with-these-foods/>
- [3] <https://www.sciencealert.com/monsanto-will-face-a-tribunal-for-crimes-against-nature-and-humanity>
- [4] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0263237319301446>
- [5] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/07/01/toxic-america-guardian-spreads-chemophobia-and-anti-americanism-14128>
- [6] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/05/02/step-aside-tap-water-theres-new-h2o-player-town-11224>