Peace Data, an apparent Russian disinformation outlet, tried to recruit me | Slate

By Jacob Silverman
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According to Facebook, Twitter, and the FBI, peacedata.net, a website to which Krakow had just submitted his 10th freelance contribution, was a Russian cutout, possibly an operation of the infamous Internet Research Agency. While both companies credited the FBI for the initial tip, Facebook and Twitter differed slightly in their attribution, with Twitter writing, "we can reliably attribute [Peace Data] to Russian state actors." Facebook pointed directly to the IRA, a troll farm funded by a Putin crony perhaps best known for manufacturing fake American social media accounts—and even organizing protests attended by actual Americans—during the 2016 election in order to sow political and cultural discord and help elect Donald Trump. The two social media companies took down a handful of accounts and suppressed links and posts referencing Peace Data. After initially denying the allegations, Peace Data soon ceased publishing.

Early reporting has focused on Peace Data as another failed volley in the disinformation wars, part of Russia's demonstrated interest in disrupting American democracy. Contributors for Peace Data have been painted variously as rubes, unwitting Russian agents, or desperate freelancers out for a paycheck. Some have told journalists that their writing was steered in a certain pro-Russian direction.

My perception of Peace Data is different, both in its potential as a foreign adversary and what it says about digital media. This summer, someone presenting himself as an editor of the site emailed me, asking that I freelance. I passed, but after the site's purported Russian origins were exposed, I looked closely at its output, wondering how my writing might have figured into any of its propagandistic aims. Then I spoke with several writers, like Krakow, who did take Peace Data up on its offer.

Rather than a threat to the placid ecosystem of American journalism, the picture of Peace Data that emerged highlights some of digital media's great flaws—including

> the tendency of beat journalists to quickly run with whatever embargoed information government authorities and large tech companies offer. Rather than an advanced propaganda operation, Peace Data was something much less sophisticated and more familiar: a content farm.
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Source: [Peace Data, an apparent Russian disinformation outlet, tried to recruit me.](#)