

Profiting from the Pandemic: Moderating COVID-19 Lockdown Protest, Scam, and Health Disinformation Websites | Oxford Internet Institute

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This data memo examines the infrastructural support for controversial COVID-19 websites that (1) protest public health measures such as lockdowns, (2) promote COVID-19 scams, frauds and profiteering, and (3) disseminate disinformation about public health. What hosting, functionality, and networking services do these controversial websites rely upon? We systematically use an open source toolkit to investigate a wide array of third-party and infrastructure services that generate revenue for technology firms from websites with content that are targets of takedowns or other forms of content moderation. First, we find that Google, GoDaddy and Cloudflare are among the single largest firm providing infrastructural support. Second, Google and Facebook are among the single largest firms providing a vast array of third party technology services. Finally, we find that websites utilize behavioral analytics, tracker systems, and cross-platform integration tools that connect them back to large technology firms in multiple ways. We demonstrate how firms up and down the technology stack profits from contentious COVID-19 websites, even after steps such as ad removals or content moderation.

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