

Trolls and shills: How disinformation sites InfoWars, Natural News and US Right to Know manufacture fake news

Milieu control is an attempt by group leaders to limit exposure to outside information. It was made famous by [Robert Jay Lifton](#), a psychiatrist who studied brainwashing in China during the Mao regime. Reasons are given to followers as to why outsiders of the group should not be listened to. A modern example of this is the accusation that protesters are being paid by George Soros.

In online discussions, this is well known as the “shill gambit”. When confronted with evidence that is contrary to someone’s belief they will often begin asking questions like “how much are you being paid?”. These accusations are even promoted by leaders of anti-science movements to convince their followers not to listen to anyone with different information.

Sometimes all it takes is one statement from a company employee to be misinterpreted to feed the conspiracies.

Speaking at a public event, Monsanto’s Dr. William Moar explained to a student when asked how Monsanto handles the vast amount of misinformation about them on the internet:

An entire department dedicated to debunking science which disagreed with theirs.

This should not be a surprise to anyone. When a company’s main product is under threat they will, of course, invest money in protecting it. The practice is even done by the organic food industry. In a New York Times story, Stonyfield executive [Gary Hirshberg explains](#):

That is why Dr. Benbrook, who had served as chief scientist at the Organic Center, a group funded by the organic foods industry, resigned his job and sought a university appointment....

The organic industry knew that a research department with their names directly on it would not be accepted as well by the public. So they sent their own [Dr. Charles Benbrook](#) to a university program to hide behind a false halo of independence.

At Washington State Dr. Benbrook was supported by many of the same backers, including Organic Valley, Whole Fields, Stonyfield, and United Natural Food Inc. The companies stayed closely involved in his research and advocacy, helping him push reporters to write about his studies.

What neither the organic industry or Monsanto, is doing is having employees hide behind anonymous social media accounts to promote their products. If they were they would be violating FTC guidelines and should be held accountable there. According to [Federal Trade Commission guidelines](#):

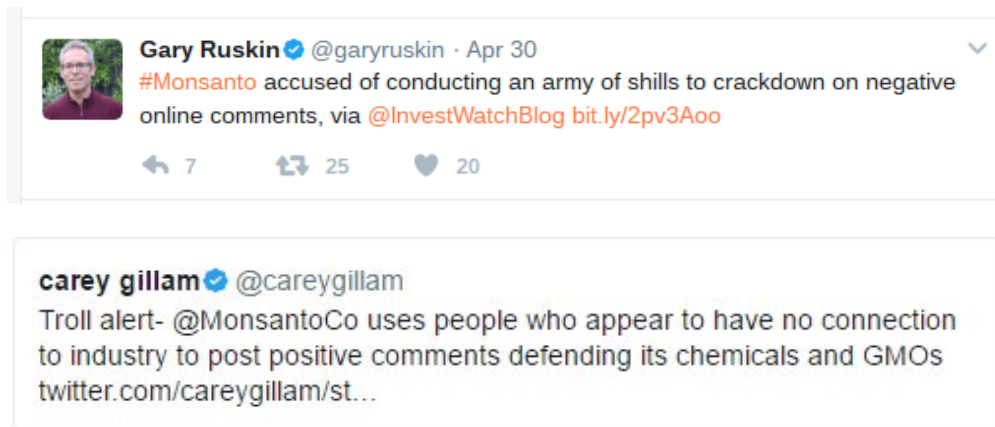
...if there's a connection between an endorser and the marketer that consumers would not expect and it would affect how consumers evaluate the endorsement, that connection should be disclosed.

That didn't seem to stop Robin Greenwald, Michael Miller, and Aimee Wagstaff. The lawyers are currently suing Monsanto, claiming that their product caused non-Hodgkin's lymphoma suffered by their clients. They are claiming that, based on the existence of this department to examine research, that Monsanto also [pays its employees](#) to argue with people on social media.

it employs individuals who appear to have no connection to the industry, who in turn post positive comments on news articles and Facebook posts, defending Monsanto, its chemicals, and GMOs.

There is, of course, zero evidence of this, and calls into question where exactly these lawyers are getting their information. The [original Daily Kos](#) story did not make this claim, and it only seems to appear on such conspiracy theory web pages such as Natural News, Mercola.com and InfoWars.

Unfortunately, all it takes is an accusation to be made, and it will be accepted as fact by individuals who already make such an assumption. The Twitter accounts of [US Right to Know \(USRTK\)](#), an organic industry front group astroturfing in the name of "transparency", were quick to spread the lawyer's claim.



The use of the word troll by [Carey Gillam](#) is especially troubling. Dehumanization of people with a difference of opinion brings back memories of the term "cockroaches" in the Rwanda genocide or calling slaves in the South two-thirds of a human. Why should people inside their group listen to anyone that isn't even being considered a human being?

It is not far-fetched to consider whether such language has led to a rise in crime against both biotech and plant scientists. Recently [Molotov cocktails](#) were launched at a research facility in Italy, one scientist had his office broken into, and Mexican researchers found themselves the [target of a mail bomb](#).

I asked Ms. Gillam to provide a screenshot of just one such social media account that this was in reference to, and she replied with a screenshot of my own tweet.

Fp uFQtY GJY mPaDQFg

Image not found or type unknown

OX ncPIU BazGY oum rQ

Image not found or type unknown

Whether Monsanto's product caused non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in these individuals will be up for the court to decide. One can hope that the court will look at the evidence without thinking that "this person was just paid by Monsanto to be here". But if the lawyers behind this lawsuit are using notorious "fake news" web pages as their evidence, I don't think Monsanto has much to worry about.

We should be much more worried about a new rise in eco-terrorism that the leaders of these anti-GMO groups appear to be instigating.

A version of this article appeared at Medium as "Are lawyers behind Monsanto lawsuit citing InfoWars and Natural News?" and has been republished here with permission from the author.

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