

In today's Vatnik Soup, I'll introduce an American social media influencer, Benny Johnson (@bennyjohnson). He's best known for his plagiarism while working as a clickbait "journalist", and for being paid by the Kremlin to spread anti-Ukraine and anti-Democratic narratives.

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Benny graduated from the University of Iowa in 2009 with a degree in developmental psychology. His former high school buddy described him as the "smartest, most articulate kid in school," and was disappointed to see him turn into a "cheating, low standard hack."

2/23



deja_geek • 8y ago • Edited 8y ago

I've always felt bad for Ben. Not in the, people are dumping on him feel bad; because he gets what he deserves. But the feel bad because he can do so much better.

I went to high school with Ben, had the same classes. Honestly, he was one of the smartest, most articulate kids in school. He was very genuine as a person, well liked by everyone and he treated everyone with an open respect; even if they had completely opposite views from him.

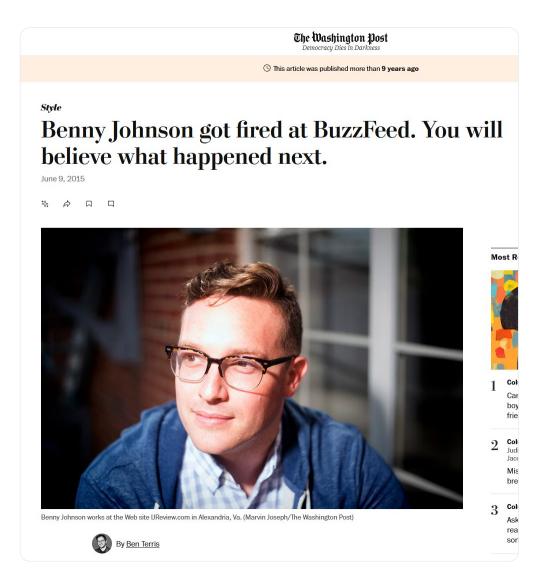
So it's sad to see that kid transform in to a cheating, low standard hack. He comes across as so.. phony. From his journalism to the way he presents himself to the world.

After graduating, Benny dived directly into the world of outrage media. Benny's first job was writing op-eds for far-right website Breitbart, from where he moved on to TheBlaze, a conservative media owned by Glenn Beck, and a spring board for many conservative influencers.

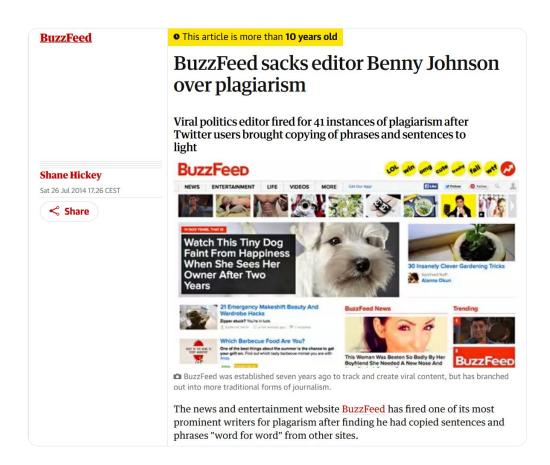
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BENNY JOHNSON Oct 31, 2012	This Is Joe Biden's Mitt Romney Impression & It Includes Being Vladimir Putin's 'Best Buddy			
BENNY JOHNSON Oct 31, 2012	The Most Patriotic Halloween Costumes Of The Year			
BENNY JOHNSON Oct 31, 2012	This Is the Amount of Candy Your Children Can Eat Tonight Based on Michelle Obama's Food Guidelines			

Between 2012 and 2014, Johnson worked as a staff writer for BuzzFeed. Remember the clickbait titles like "9 Reasons Why Ted Cruz is Actually the Zodiac Killer"? Benny boy mastered them, quickly gaining the nickname "BuzzFeed Benny". But Ben was also both lazy and sloppy:...



In Jul 2014, it was reported that Benny had copy-pasted phrases "word for word" from other sites like Yahoo Answers, Wikipedia, and US News & World Report. He was subsequently fired, but was quickly hired as digital director by the National Review.







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IJReview hires Benny Johnson

By HADAS GOLD | 02/03/2015 06:22 PM EST



Independent Journal Review, a viral politics site created by a pair of Republican operatives, has hired Benny Johnson as creative content director.

"IJReview has been recognized as the leading viral politics site by Newswhip next to Business Insider for business and Bleacher Report for sports. That is why we are excited to have Benny Johnson join IJReview and our audience of nearly 40 million monthly unique visitors. His creative energy and passion for telling political stories for a social news world is unmatched," Alex Skatell, one of the site's founders, said in a statement.

Digiday has called IJReview "an ideological cross between Drudge Report and Upworthy," and the site is in the top 50 most trafficked websites, according to Quantcast.

Johnson joined National Review Online in September as digital director. He gained notoriety after being fired from BuzzFeed for plagiarism when a pair of anonymous bloggers pointed to more than 40 times he lifted work from other publications for BuzzFeed posts. The two, who go by the names "blippoblappo" and "crushingbort," have since made similar charges against the likes of Fareed Zakaria and Malcolm Gladwell.

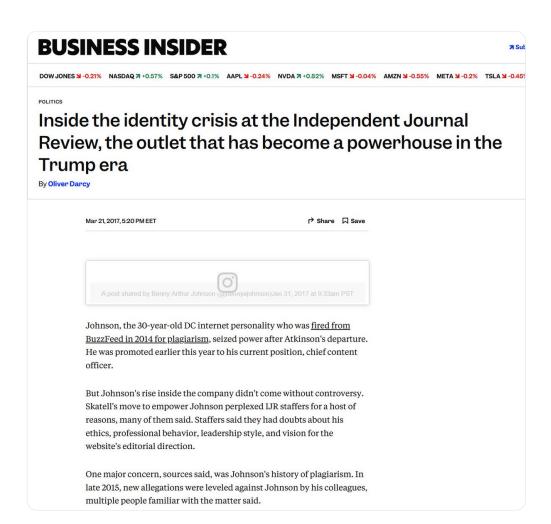
"We wish Benny all the best," National Review editor Rich Lowry said in an email.

EXCLUSIVE: Benny Johnson, the BuzzFeed "viral politics editor" who was fired for plagiarism in July, will start Monday as National Review's social media director, a new position. Rich Lowry, editor of National Review, tells us: "Benny made a terrible mistake. But he has owned up to it and learned from it. He's a talented journalist, with obviously a lot to contribute. He knows he's joining a storied institution at NR, and we look forward to his helping us carry on our mission across all platforms."

Even a few years ago, "BuzzFeed Benny" might have been locked out of the journalistic academy forever. But two factors combined to give @BennyJohnson a surprisingly quick shot at redemption, using a pillar of conservative media as his onramp: 1) a youthful digital fluency -- "I love you internet:)," he tweeted during the online firestorm over his clumsy copying; and 2) the Iowa native's red-state instincts, which had contributed to longtime mockery of him online.

His new charge: giving NR maximum reach across social media and digital. Benny will remain in D.C., and will start by giving advice and running NR's Twitter and Facebook accounts. Over time, he'll do more creative work of his own. Benny is quite savvy about the digital ecosystem, and has a real shot at notably moving the needle for NR.

In 2015, he left NR to join another conservative media outlet, Independent Journal Review (IJR). He was reported as being verbally abusive, driving several colleagues away from the company. And yet again, he was caught plagiarizing and spreading conspiracy theories.



Johnson's treatment of staff left his colleagues seething, many of them told Business Insider.

Johnson — who once compared himself to Walt Disney, two people said — frequently berated the video team over what was characterized as minuscule details. Multiple sources said Johnson loudly hurled profanity at team members for small mistakes, fostering a distressing work environment. The behavior eventually led to Johnson receiving a formal verbal reprimand from the company's human-resources department in February, a person familiar with the matter said.

"He would have these meltdowns when we would push back or when he didn't get the 'Benny edits.' There was actually a term for it. We would all prepare ourselves for just an awful day," one former staffer said. "It was all a f---ing ego trip is what it was for him."

"He yelled, cried, had meltdowns," another person said. "The whole emotional gamut sort of happened."





SELECT ALL

How to Spot a Fake Antifa Account

By Brian Feldman



Photo: Romy Arroyo Fernandez/NurPhoto via Getty Images

On the internet, it can often be difficult to tell what is fake and what is real. Often, but not always. For instance, it's pretty easy to tell when a Twitter account supposedly associated with the leftist Antifa movement is actually a troll merely pretending.

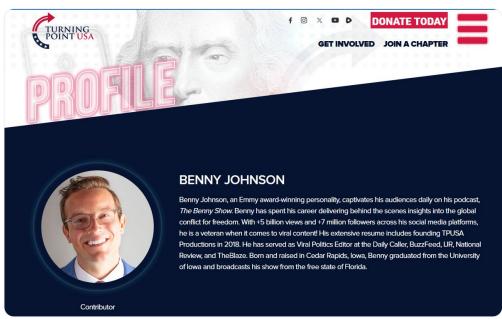
Anyway, over the weekend, IJR editor Benny Johnson — who has been suspended at two different jobs for plagiarizing from sites including Yahoo Answers — $\underline{\text{fell}}$ for one of these accounts, @AntifaBoston. Johnson did not make any sort of attempt to verify the account's legitimacy before publishing his piece, preferring to take the account at its word as "the official page for the Antifa organization in the Boston area." (It's clearly not.) Simple context clues reveal it as an exaggerated parody of left-wing sentiment.

Save read



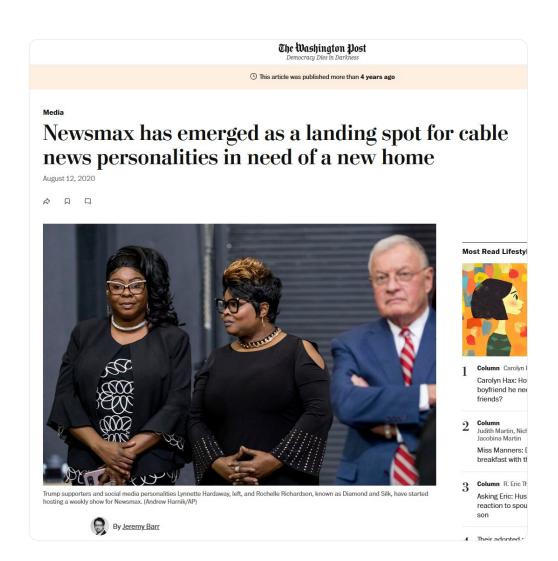
By 2019, after working for other various conservative "news" outlets, Benny found his ideological soulmate: Turning Point USA, where he became chief creative Officer and started producing viral videos targeting liberals, immigrants, education, and critical thinking.

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In 2020, he was hosted by one of the biggest MAGA propaganda mills in the US, Newsmax TV. Newsmax is a channel that makes even Fox News seem liberal, and Washington Post described it as "a landing spot for cable news personalities in need of a new home".





Benny is a co-founder of Arsenal Media, a media company that "makes Republicans go viral". Basically, they produce outrage media for MAGA personalities like Don Jr. and Kari Lake, trying to keep them in focus on social and traditional media. Interestingly, Arsenal Media...



...seemed to be behind the promotion of Trump's Supreme Court nominee, Justice Amy Coney Barrett. Since then, the Trump administration and MAGA have abandoned her, referring to her as a DEI hire. In Apr 2025, Benny called her a "repulsive lizard" and a "sick witch".

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Why MAGA is suddenly calling Justice Amy Coney Barrett a 'DEI' hire

MAGA Republicans have accused Barrett, who has at times sided with her liberal colleagues, of being insufficiently loyal to Trump.

Benny Johnson calls Amy Coney Barrett a "repulsive lizard" and a "sick witch"

Johnson: "She didn't deserve to be on the Supreme Court. I disown her."

WRITTEN BY MEDIA MATTERS STAFF
PUBLISHED 04/08/25 1:38 PM EDT



Benny's Arsenal Media is probably one of the biggest reasons why many MAGA personalities go viral. As I've written before, because of companies like this, much of the content that goes viral on X is the result of paid manipulation — and not organic at all.

In the breathless world of conservative online politics, Arsenal Media is here to help you go viral. Co-founded by gadfly meme enthusiast Benny Johnson, the firm lists clients like Rep. Madison Cawthorn and Dana Loesch and takes credit for more than doubling Donald Trump Jr.'s Facebook following.

Most enticing, it seems to offer a tried-and-true playbook for making content hit it big. One slide from a pitch deck viewed by *The Verge* describes a "viral influencer network" as the secret to making client content take off, showing a single video being passed around by a network of friendly faces. "This organic distribution network serves as the vehicle your client needs to ensure that it reaches its intended audience," one document promises.

Authenticity

<u>Platform Manipulation and Spam:</u> You may not use X's services in a manner intended to artificially amplify or suppress information or engage in behavior that manipulates or disrupts people's experience on X. <u>Learn more</u>.

<u>Civic Integrity</u>: You may not use X's services for the purpose of manipulating or interfering in elections or other civic processes. This includes posting or sharing content that may suppress participation or mislead people about when, where, or how to participate in a civic process. <u>Learn more</u>.

<u>Misleading and Deceptive Identities:</u> You may not impersonate individuals, groups, or organizations to mislead, confuse, or deceive others, nor use a fake identity in a manner that disrupts the experience of others on X. <u>Learn more</u>.

<u>Synthetic and Manipulated Media:</u> You may not deceptively share synthetic or manipulated media that are likely to cause harm. In addition, we may label posts containing synthetic and manipulated media to help people understand their authenticity and to provide additional context. <u>Learn more</u>.

<u>Copyright and Trademark:</u> You may not violate others' intellectual property rights, including copyright and trademark. Learn more about our <u>trademark policy</u> and <u>copyright policy</u>.

A 2022 Verge article exposed Benny's company's toxic environment and dubious practices, such as delayed payments, unethical behavior, and overworking and underpaid jobs. Johnson was described as "very abusive, very toxic, screaming at people," and "making women cry".

Most urgently, some contractors say they aren't being paid. Karl Slater started doing freelance editing work for Arsenal in May 2021 — but he quickly noticed irregularities in the way the company handled money.

"Invoices should be sent to [CEO] Jason Cole, but I would suggest you cc me," an Arsenal worker wrote to Slater in an email obtained by *The Verge*. "Also – I have noticed that it seems easier for him to pay via PayPal."

Soon, the invoices had run up to \$8,795, and they were still going unanswered. Slater issued a formal demand the next month and then took the issue to court, winning a judgment the following November. The Verge spoke with Cole, who declined to make an on-the-record statement but agreed to have specific factual claims attributed; he insists he paid the invoice as soon as he became aware of the judgment, and he produced evidence indicating payments had been obtained by a collection agency earlier this month. But, as of publication, Slater says he has yet to receive any of the money, and the Second Judicial District Court in Minnesota still lists the case as unresolved, a clerk said on Wednesday.

Curiously, Johnson has begun distancing himself from the company. As recently as April 1, Johnson's website listed him as both co-founder and chief creative officer of Arsenal. But the language disappeared from Johnson's site after the release of a *Puck* article detailing his association with Arsenal, and he has denied any formal employment with the company following its publication.

Responding to a request for comment from *The Verge* on Tuesday, a Johnson spokesperson credited him with, "casting the vision for what the company could become" and said, "It's probably true that Arsenal wouldn't have come into being without Benny's input early on in the company's formation."

"I hadn't been screamed at like that since I was probably seven years old" Still, the spokesperson insisted there was no formal relationship between Johnson and Arsenal, saying, "He is not currently, nor has ever been an owner, executive, or even employee of Arsenal Media." Cole put it even more starkly, saying Johnson began as a contractor and had not been

involved with the company's operations in over a year.

But there's reason to think these statements may be understating Johnson's role with Arsenal, at least as of this year. Workers told *The Verge* that, as recently as January, Johnson had both referred clients to the company and led creative work under the company's name.

The confusion is particularly strange given the outsized role Johnson appears to have played in office life. Former employees describe Johnson bullying or humiliating staffers if video shoots or client work didn't go as planned, often on the company's internal Telegram chats.

Johnson can be "very abusive, very toxic, screaming at people, like using profanity, vulgarity, making women cry, like pushing them to the edge," one former worker said. "I hadn't been screamed at like that since I was probably seven years old on the playground."

In one incident, a source told *The Verge* that Johnson screamed at a female employee over the phone as she was boarding a flight to Las Vegas in September 2020 to attend a video shoot. Johnson's issue with the employee is unclear, but he allegedly demanded that the staffer apologize to himself, his wife, and his newborn daughter. The staffer in question did not comment on the matter.

And BuzzFeed Benny's antics can only be described as unethical. As he has once said, "A hate click is just as valuable as a love click," and this is evident from his shitty content. Almost

But Benny isn't content just sitting behind a computer. At the Supreme Court, he noticed the funny way interns <u>sprint</u> <u>down</u> the steps to carry a big ruling to their media bosses and turned that into a story. He found the <u>secret Dunkin Donuts</u> inside the Library of Congress. He assigned his team to parade a cardboard cutout of Hillary Clinton through a conservative conference to film the reaction of the rambunctious crowd. He doesn't care if you think it's dumb as long as you check it out.

"A hate click is just as valuable as a love click," he says.

	ull Name	Is Musk Subscribed?	Subjects	Retweets Musk	Followers		Paym ent received
DirtyTesLa D	irty Tesla	Yes	Tesla	Yes	77K	63K	\$1,004
Anc_Aesthetics A	esthetica	Yes	Art	No	274K	5K	\$1,358
nickfloats N	lick St. Pierre	Yes	Art	No	113K	7K	\$1,393
mysteriouskat K		No	"Curious writer"	No	63K	45K	\$1,469
		No	Updates about Elon Musk's account	Yes	67K	33K	\$2,226
raptalksk SI	K	No	Music	No	232K	88K	\$2,236
WarClandestine Cl	landestine	Yes	Anti Ukraine, anti vax	Yes	290K	5K	\$2,426
nicksortor N	lick Sortor	Yes	Anti vax, anti trans, anti Hunter Biden, retweets Tucker Carlson	Yes	141K	2K	\$3,699
levelsio le	evelsio	Yes	AI	No	305K	112K	\$3,899
simonateba Si	imon Ateba	No	Anti Biden, anti Ukraine, retweets Tucker Carlson	Criticized Musk	451K	2K	\$3,975
Timeast Ti	im Pool	No	Anti Trans, anti Ukraine	Yes	1.7M	19k	\$5,823
WholeMarsBlog W	Vhole Mars Catalog	Yes	Tesla	Yes	332K	270K	\$6,206
	awyer Merritt	Yes	Tesla	Yes	458K	75K	\$6,465
DC_Draino D		No	Anti Ukraine, anti vax, conspiracies	No	971K	5K	\$7,036
stclairashley A	shley St. Clair	Yes	Anti Trans, anti Ukraine, anti Zuckerberg	Yes	711K	14K	\$7,153
bennyjohnson B	enny Johnson	Yes	Anti Ukraine, anti vax, conspiracies, retweets Tucker Carlson	Yes	1.7M	80K	\$9,546
ZubyMusic Z1	UBY:	Yes	Motivaion, Anti Ukraine, anti vax, anti west. Podcast with Musk	Yes	1.1M	149K	\$12,237
stillgray Ia	n Miles Cheong	Yes	Anti Trans, anti Ukraine	Yes	678K	437K	\$16,259
Cobratate A	indrew Tate	No	Anti Ukraine, anti vax, Musk retweeted his Tucker Carlson interview	Yes	7.1M	4K	\$20,379
Krassenstein B	rian Krassenstein	Yes	Pro Biden. Had Twitter space with Musk, ALX, Ian Miles Cheong	Yes	753K	70K	\$24,305
EdKrassen Ed	d Krassenstein	Yes	Brian Krassenstein twin brother and partner	Yes	979K	58K	\$24,877
MrBeast M	IrBeast	Yes	YouTuber who does stunts	Yes	21M	6K	\$25,801
BillyM2k Sl	hibetoshi Nakamoto	Yes	Crypto, random	No	2.1M	16K	\$37,050
InternetH0F in	nternet hall of fame	Yes	Memes	No	1.9M	3K	\$107,247
EndWokeness EndWokeness EndWokeness	nd Wokeness	No	Anti LGBT	Yes	1.4M	6K	\$10419
jeremyjudkins_ Je	eremy Judkins	No	Tesla	Yes	11K	42K	\$3948
imPenny2x Pe	enny2x	Yes	"Tesla and SpaceX inspired original art" - portraits of Musk	Yes	39K	40K	\$5071
ALX A	LX	Yes	Anti Ukraine, anti Zuckerberg, anti vax, retweets Tucker Carlson	Yes	543K	33K	\$8172
SallyMayweather Sa	al the Agorist	No	Anti Ukraine, anti vax, anti LGBT, conspiracies	No	201K	111K	\$3106



Today, his most common sources are MAGA conspiracy theorists like pro-Kremlin propagandist Tucker Carlson, former QAnon follower Michael Flynn, anti-Ukraine MAGA influencer Mike Benz, and of course the Republican conspiracy theorist Marjorie Taylor Greene.

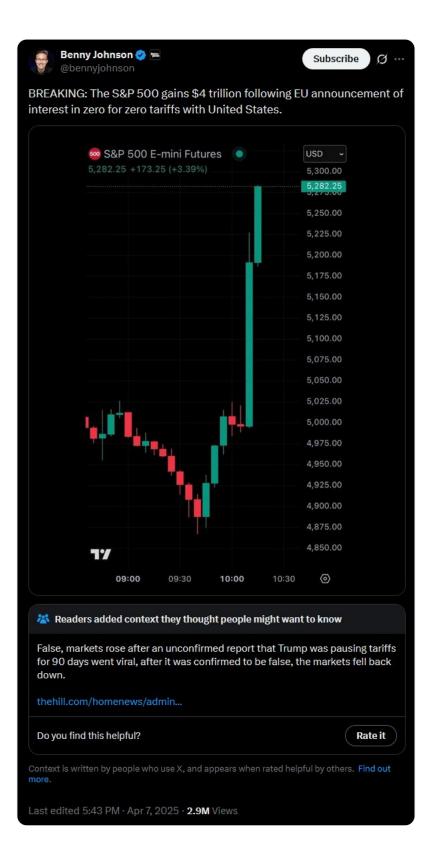


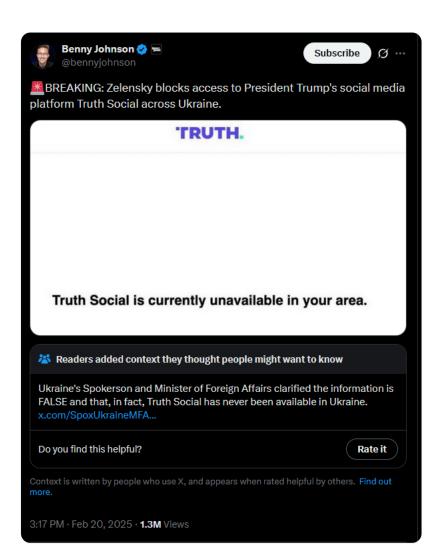


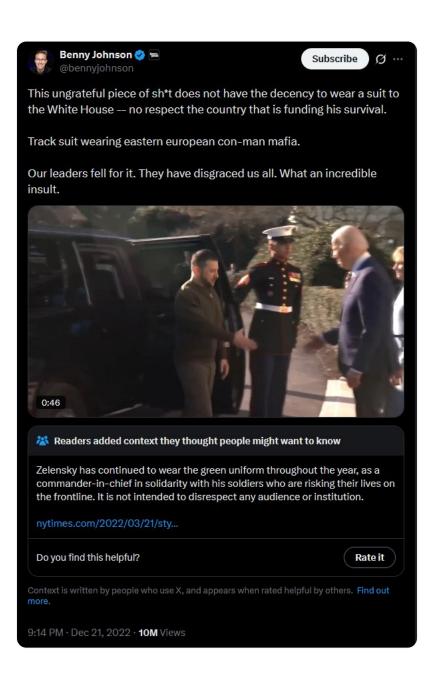


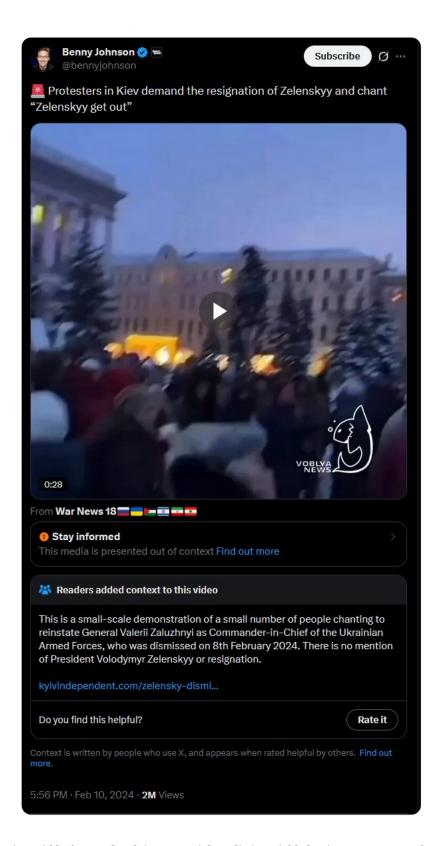


And Benny's flexible attitude towards the truth can also be seen on the Community Notes leaderboard - today, he's at spot #78 with 92 Community Notes on his posts. Naturally, almost all of his posts are filled with disinformation & exaggerations, it's just hard to keep up.

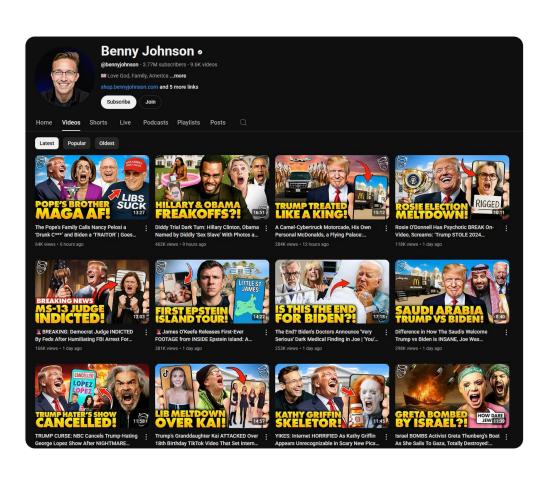






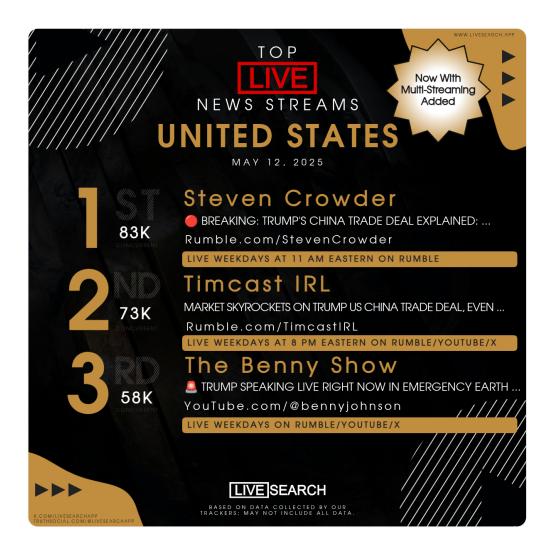


And as I've said before: today, lying on social media is a viable business strategy and can even make you a millionaire. And this is where Benny "the king of clickbait" Johnson excels - with all social media platforms combined, he has over 10 million followers.



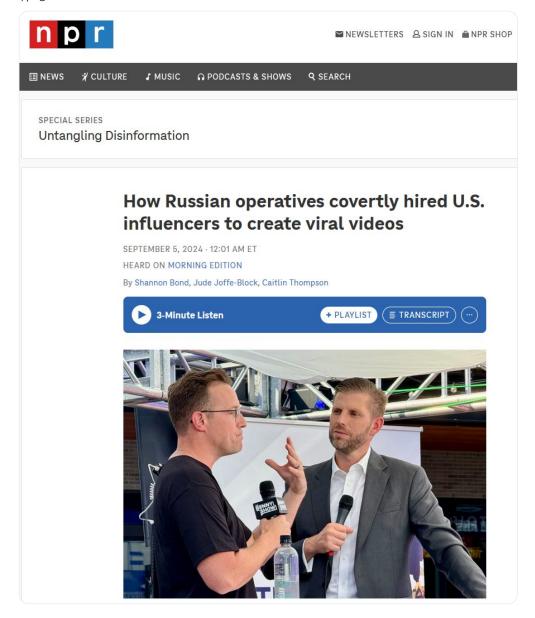




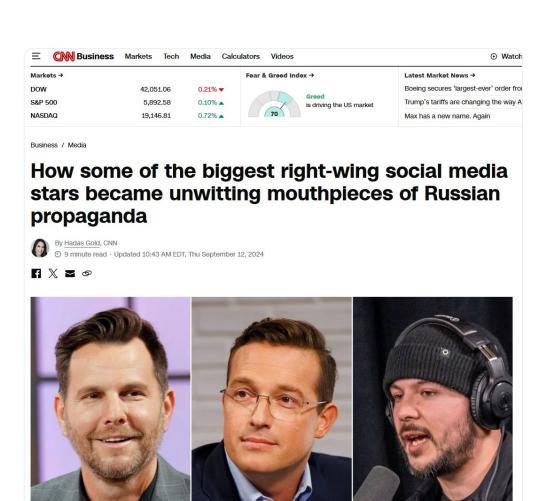


But being the greedy PoS he is, he wanted even MORE money. In Aug 2024, the US DoJ charged two Russian state media employees with secretly funneling \$10 million to Tennessee company Tenet Media to produce political videos aimed at influencing the US in Russia's favor.

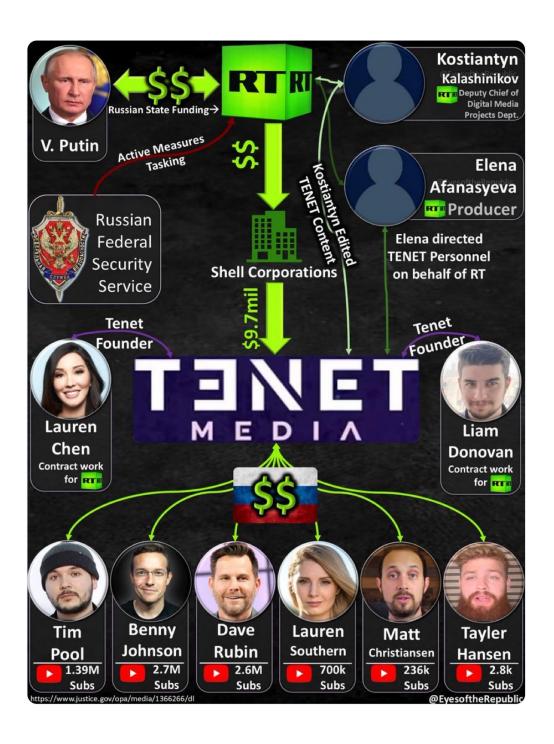
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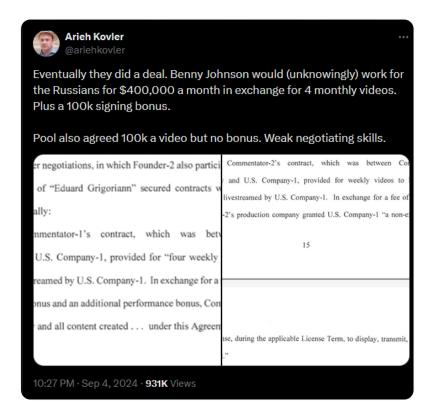


Guess who was also involved? BuzzFeed Benny, of course. Tenet Media employed a group of right-wing grifters — including Tim Pool and Benny Johnson — who were paid exorbitant sums to produce anti-Ukraine and other polarizing content for social media.



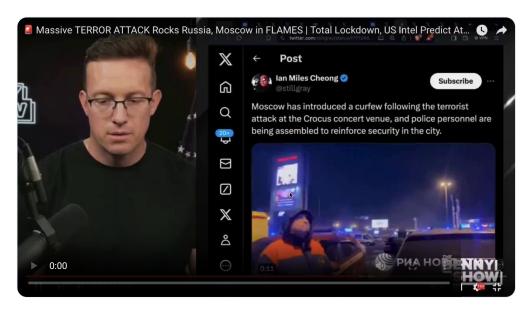
Dave Rubin, Benny Johnson and Tim Pool. Getty Images, Reuters





According to the indictment, Benny was "happy to" cover a lie that the Moscow terror attack was possibly linked to Ukraine & the US, instead of ISIS. Even most Russians laughed at this ridiculous propaganda attempt to blame the Ukrainians for the attack.

19/23



Benny claimed they were "victims in this alleged scheme" and - true to American tradition - threatened to sue anyone who said otherwise.

Not so funny anymore when the wild claims are about you, huh, Russian puppet? Also, what happened to free speech you so much loved?





Johnson is willing to use all dirty tricks for engagement. He's often posting AI slop as real photos, making false claims about MAGA's adversaries, or just making shit up. He has no problem promoting barbaric autocrats and illegal invasions if it makes him more money.



This is the kind of body you DO NOT WANT.

- flabby, protruding belly
- noodle arms
- twig legs
- bent neck
- slomping, broken posture
- Translucent vampire skin

This is the body of a weak loser. A slob with no work ethic and no strength. A conquered soul.

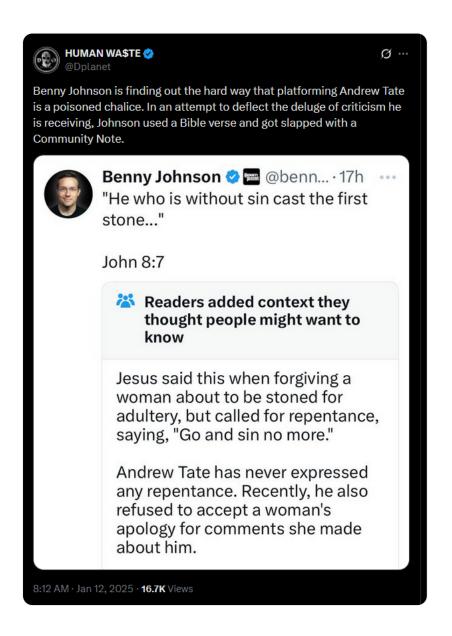
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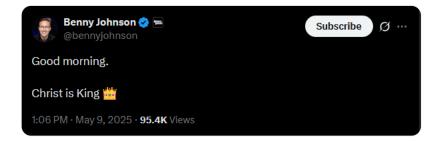




Recently, Johnson has started using fake Christianity as a safe exit from tricky situations. After getting pushback on his Andrew Tate interview, he quickly started pushing the ridiculous "Christ is King" rhetoric, even though he's the antithesis of a real Christian.







To conclude, BuzzFeed Benny is what happens when plagiarism meets propaganda and gets a social media monetization deal. His journey from clickbait journalism to MAGA meme machine shows there's always room in the grift economy for a guy who's willing to lie about anything.



The 2nd edition of "Vatnik Soup — The Ultimate Guide to Russian Disinformation" is officially out!

You can order your copy here:



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