GDI

Ad-Funded Disinformation on the Ukraine Conflict

Global Disinformation Index

27 April 2022

GDI has observed a number of ad tech companies monetising anti-Ukrainian and anti-democratic disinformation.

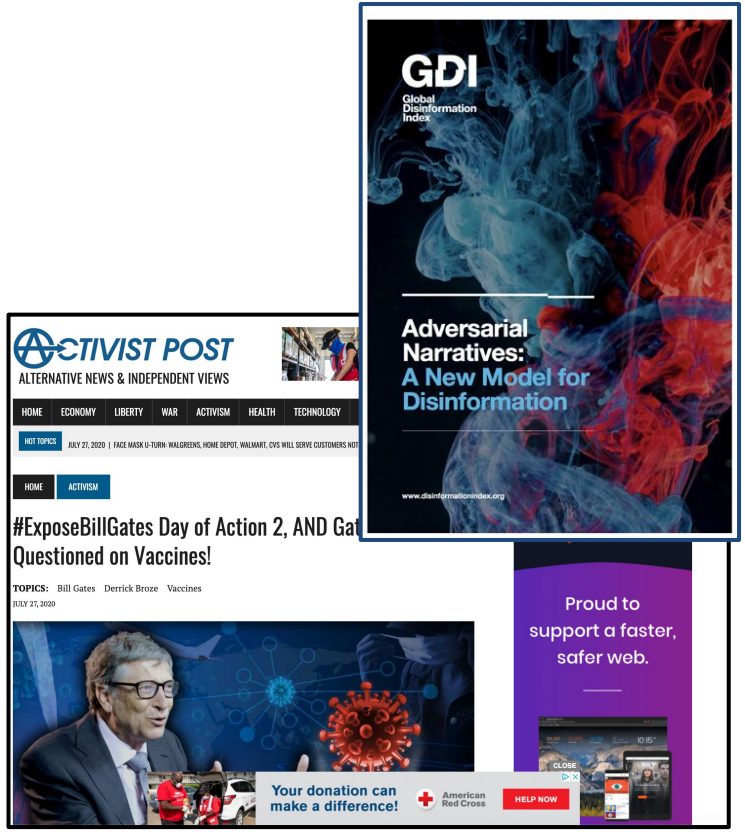
This deck includes examples of ad-funded content promoting a range of harmful adversarial narratives:

- **Denazification**: Ukraine is led by a Nazi regime and the denazification and demilitarisation of Ukraine is therefore in the best interests of Europe and the world.
- **Bioweapons threat**: Hunter Biden participated in the financing of a military biological programme in Ukraine.
- **Bucha massacre**: The massacre was a staged, false flag event.
- **Conspiracy theories:** The conflict is a result of continued provocation of Russia by the Western elite and part of the ‘Great Reset’.

These disinformation narratives have been identified across multiple websites in multiple languages.

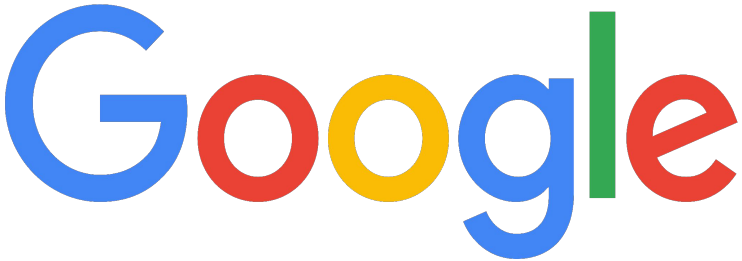
How GDI defines disinformation

- Disinformation is more than **overly simple, false dichotomies** such as true vs. false or left vs. right.
- GDI views disinformation through the lens of **adversarial narrative conflict.** Adversarial narratives:
  - Can be implicit or explicit;
  - Are intentionally misleading;
  - Are adversarial against:
    - at-risk individuals or groups
    - current scientific consensus
    - democracy and key institutions
  - **Most importantly, these adversarial narratives create a risk of harm.**
- This definition transcends false binaries and identifies disinformation explicitly by adversarial narrative topic, such as anti-immigrant, misogyny, anti-vax etc.



Brands unwittingly funding these stories:

Ad tech companies monetising this content:



Ad tech publisher policies must be updated and enforced.

Most ad tech companies' publisher policies do not adequately address the breadth of disinformation narratives associated with the Ukraine conflict.

	Specific publisher policy?	**Most relevant policy wording** *(as at 27 April 2022)*
Google	✓	"Due to the war in Ukraine, we will pause monetization of content that exploits, dismisses, or condones the war."
amazon	✗	"You will not place our Ads adjacent to any content that is: obscene, hateful (e.g. hate speech), violent (including the use of firearms), discriminatory, harmful, threatening, abusive, harassing or offensive…"
CRITEO	✗	Prohibited Content: "Is hateful or discriminatory to any groups or individuals based upon their race, sex, nationality, religious affiliation, age or sexual orientation…Promotes, glorifies or condones violence against others…Promotes disenfranchisement or harassment of groups or individuals."

GDI calls for global policy intervention

This intervention should prioritise:

- **Quality assessment:** Industry wide risk rating assessments of news sites to risk rate disinformation conducted by CSOs/ independent 3rd parties of news sites. This must be used for a) developing quality signals in ranking and recommender algorithms, b) informing monetisation decisions, and c) assessment of media pluralism.

- **Transparency:** Expanded and centralised access to platform data. This could be done through an expansion of a common Information Sharing and Analysis Center (ISAC).

- **Strengthened publisher policies:** Adoption of adversarial narrative framing for enhanced scope and efficient enforcement that defunds disinformation.

An urgent, long-term and industry-wide solution is needed to end the monetisation of harmful disinformation.

GDI calls for ad tech companies to take immediate action.

- **Policy enforcement**: Ad tech companies should develop and enforce supply quality policies that specifically address narrative-led disinformation.
- **Audit**: Sellers should review existing publisher partnerships and take action against those that infringe on policies.
- **Demonetisation**: Sites that consistently infringe on supply quality policies should be completely demonetised. Removing ads only from infringing content allows offending websites to continue to profit from digital advertising.
- **Data**: Sellers should pass disinformation risk scores in the bid stream, allowing advertisers to more easily avoid inadvertently funding disinformation content.

audible

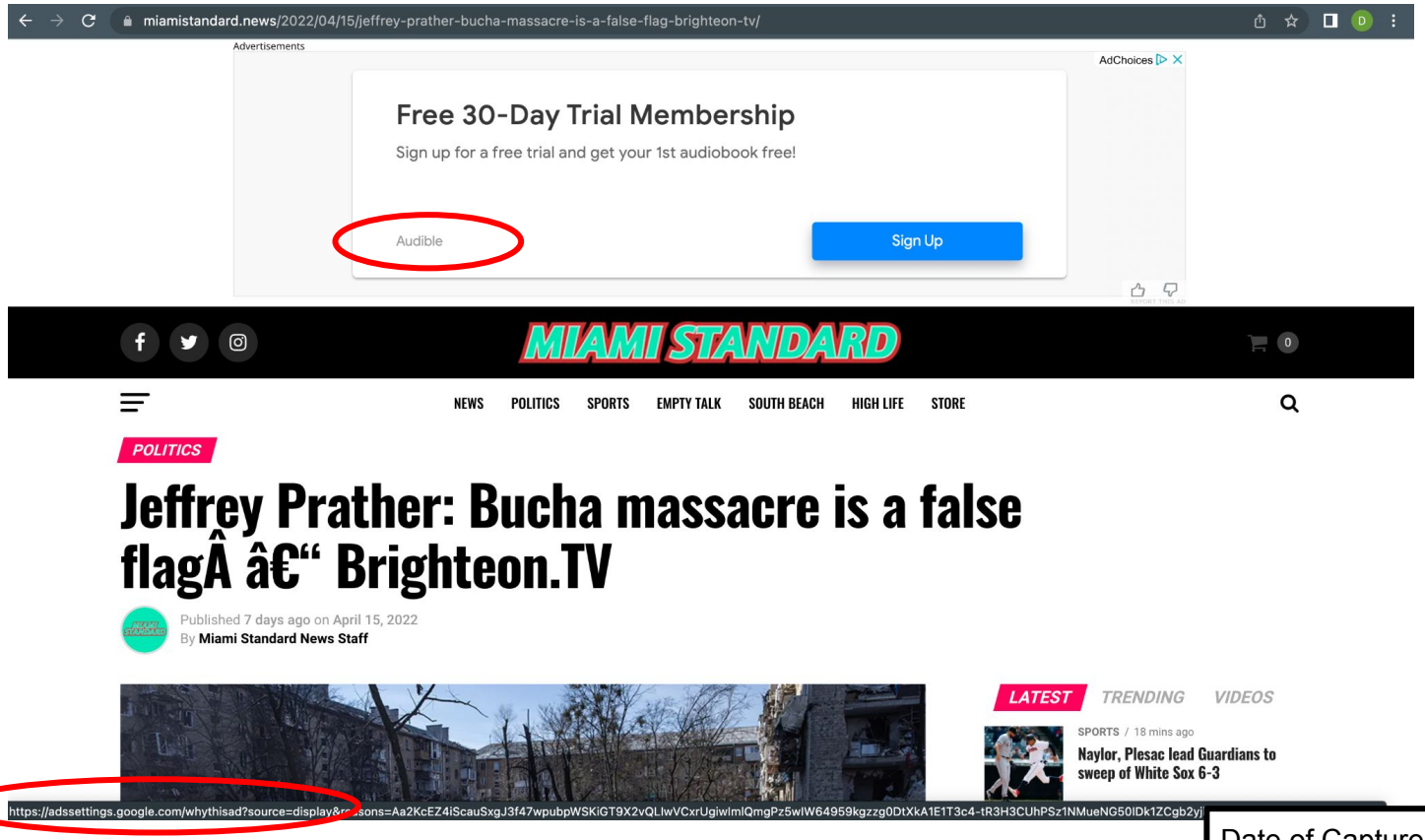
Brand:
Audible

Ad served by:
Google

Site:
Miami Standard

Disinformation:
Anti-Ukrainian

Language:
English



Date of Capture:
21 April 2022

ExpressVPN

Brand:
Express VPN

Ad served by:
Google

Site:
France.pravda.ru

Disinformation:
Anti-Ukrainian

Language:
French

Translation: "The special military operation will end once orders are completed. Among these are the protection of the peaceful population of Donbas, the demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine, as well as the elimination of threats to Russia from Ukrainian territory due to its colonisation by NATO members."

Date of Capture:
25 April 2022

Brand:
Ibis

Ad served by:
Google

Site:
grupormultimedio.com

Disinformation:
Anti-Ukrainian
Anti-democratic

Language:
Spanish

Translation: “Russia assures that the son of the US president is related to military biological laboratories in Ukraine. Hunter Biden runs an investment fund that would have made investments in the country involved in a war.”

Date of Capture:
21 April 2022

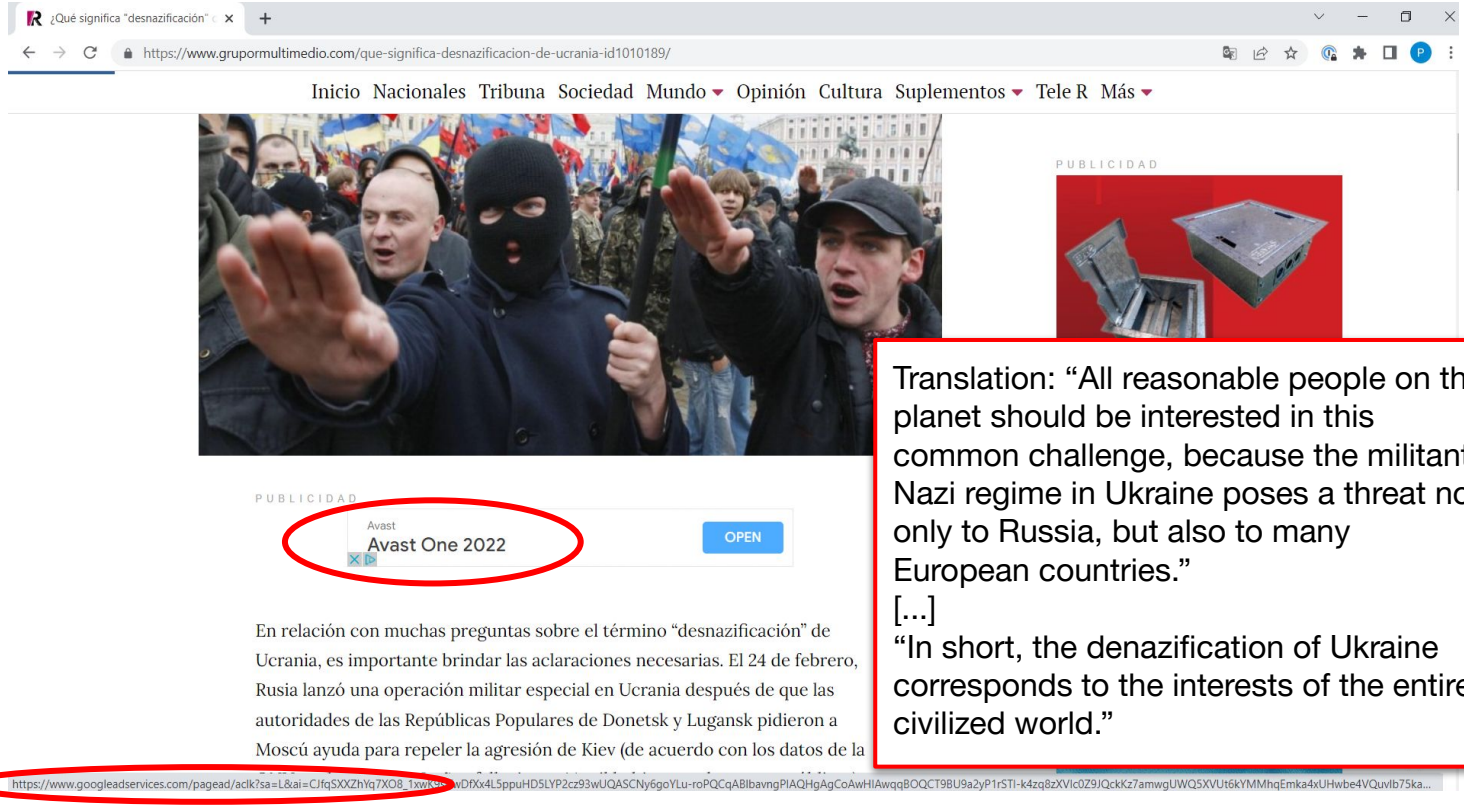
Brand:
Avast

Ad served by:
Google

Site:
grupormultimedio.com

Disinformation:
Anti-Ukrainian
Anti-democratic

Language:
Spanish



Translation: "All reasonable people on the planet should be interested in this common challenge, because the militant Nazi regime in Ukraine poses a threat not only to Russia, but also to many European countries."
[...]
"In short, the denazification of Ukraine corresponds to the interests of the entire civilized world."

Date of Capture:
21 April 2022

GDI

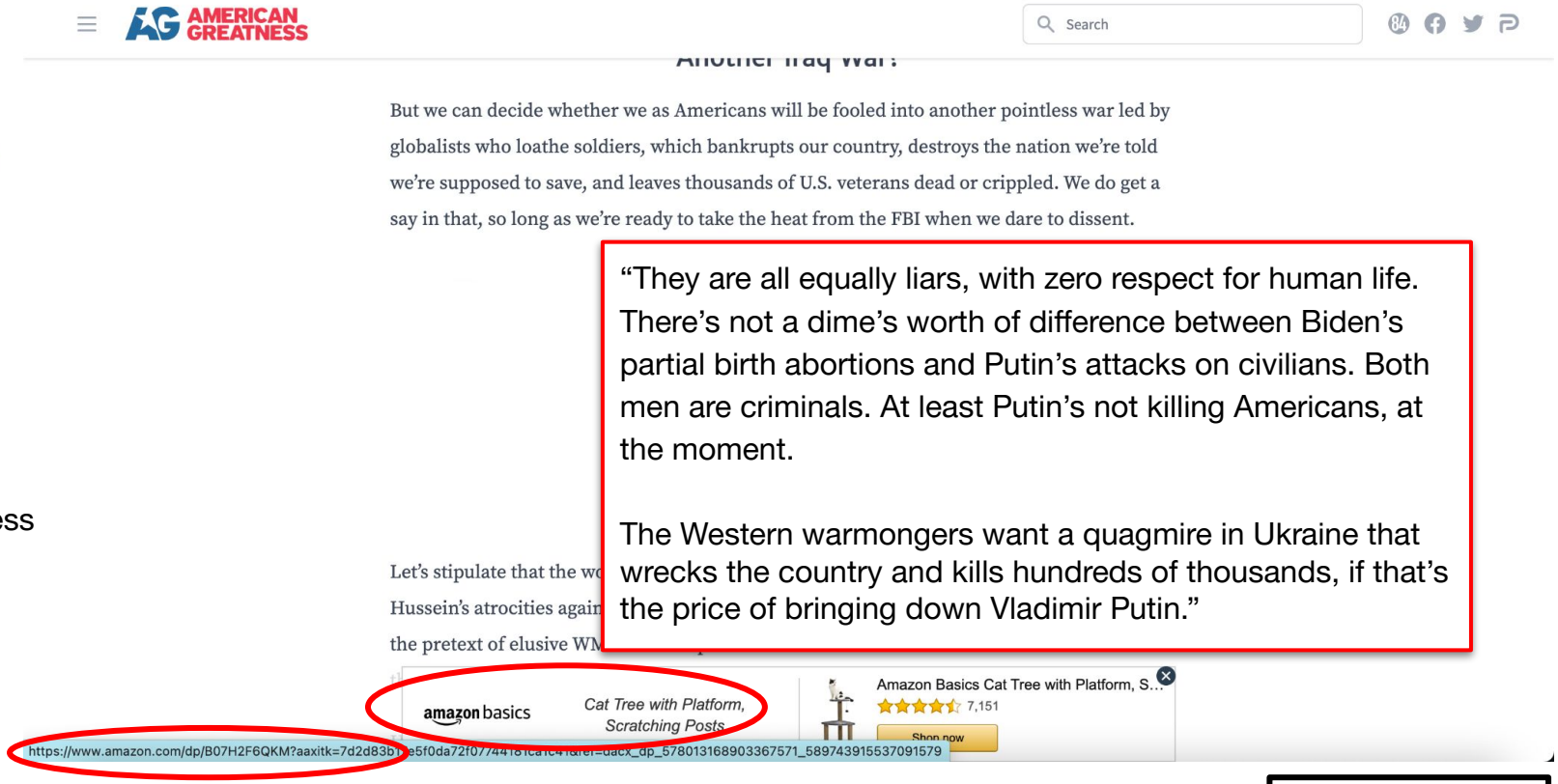
Brand:
Amazon

Ad served by:
Amazon

Site:
American Greatness

Disinformation:
Anti-Ukrainian
Anti-democratic

Language:
English



Date of Capture:
21 April 2022

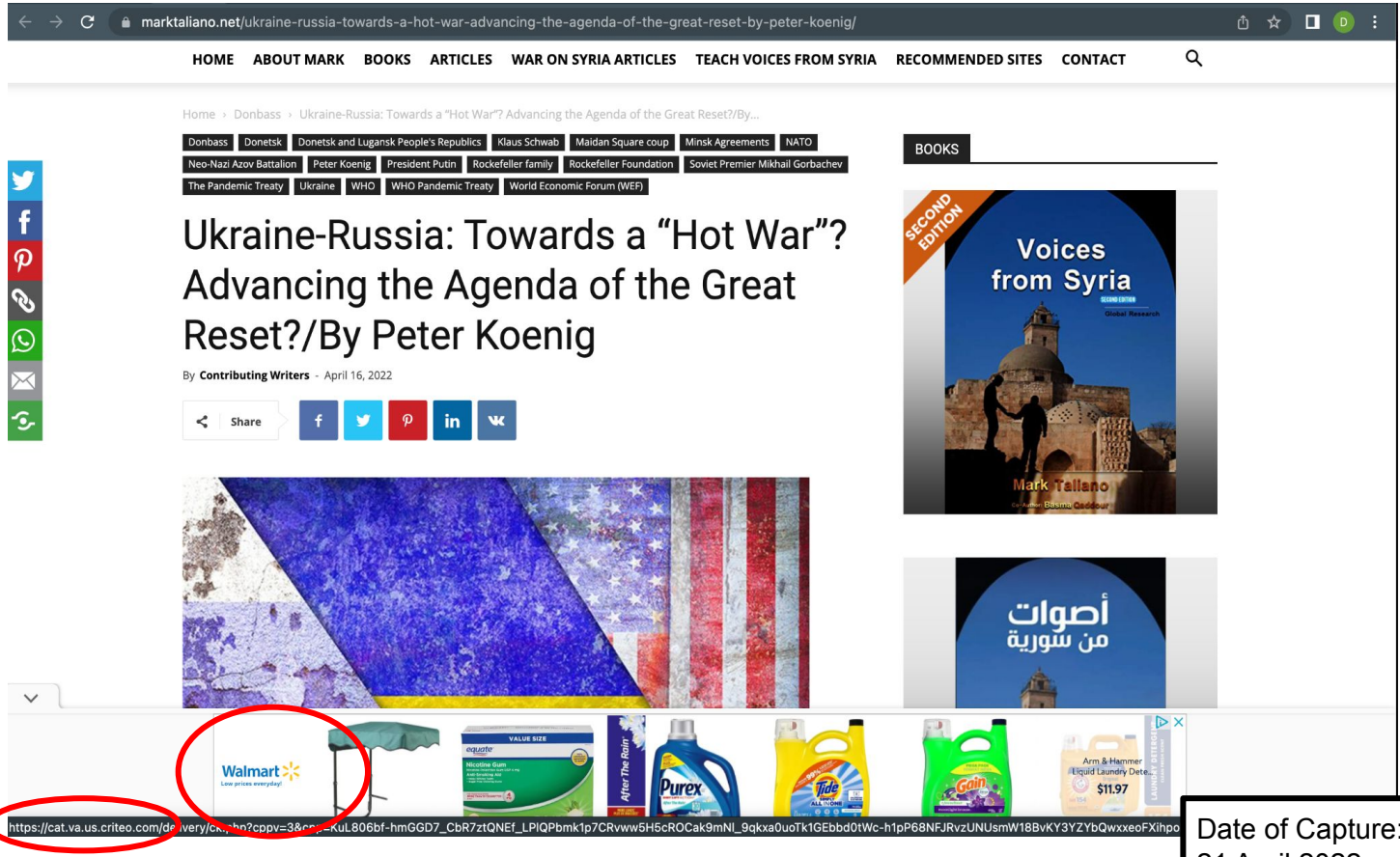
Brand:
Walmart

Ad served by:
Criteo

Site:
Marktaliano.net

Disinformation:
Anti-democratic

Language:
English



Date of Capture:
21 April 2022

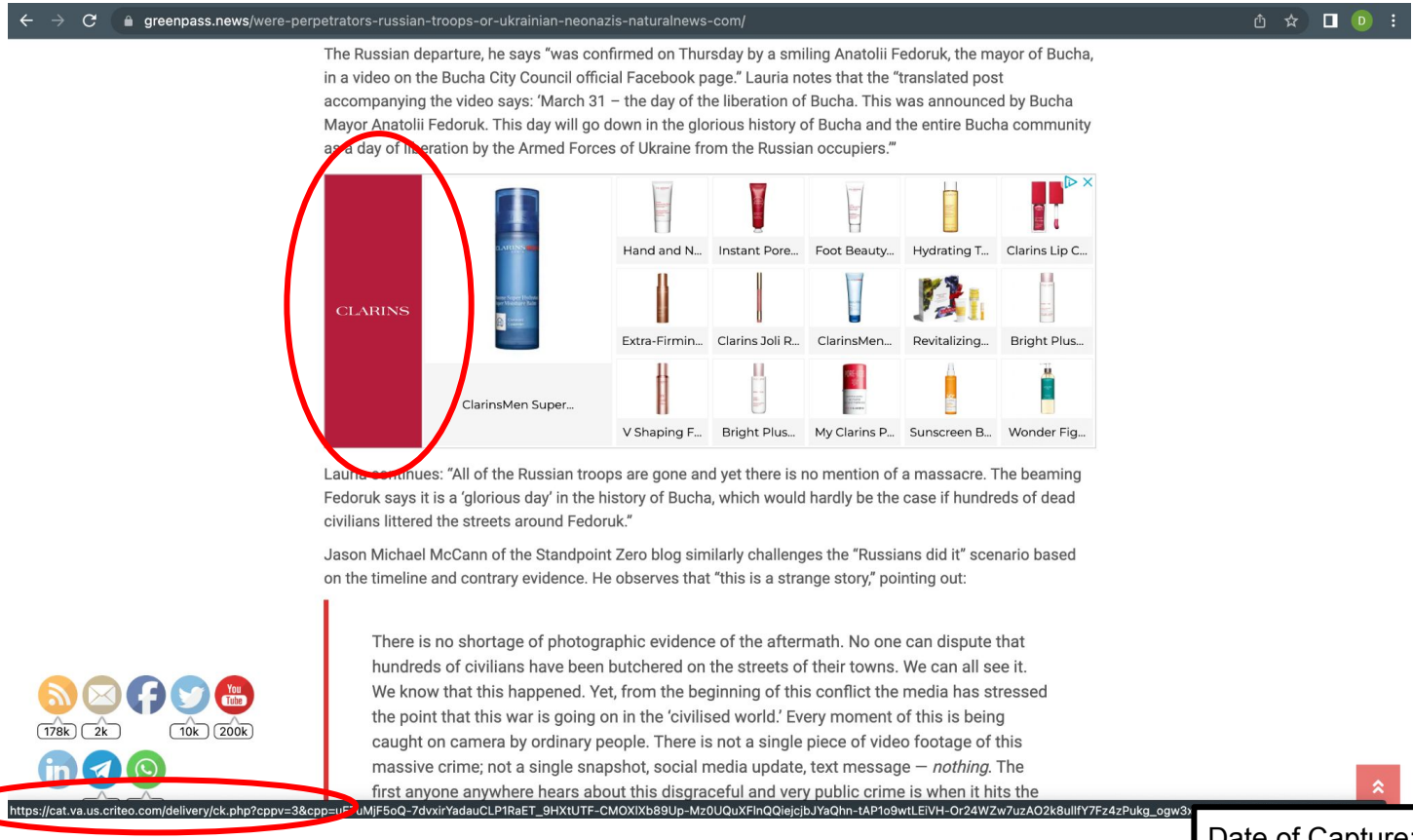
Brand:
Clarins

Ad served by:
Criteo

Site:
Greenpass.news

Disinformation:
Anti-Ukrainian

Language:
English



Date of Capture:
25 April 2022

For more information:

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