


Truth Social

Truth Social (also stylized **TRUTH Social**) is a proposed social media platform to be launched by Trump Media & Technology Group (TMTG). It is planned to have a limited launch on Apple's App Store in November 2021, and a full public launch in 2022.^{[1][2]}

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Truth Social	
	
Type of site	<u>Social networking service</u>
Founded	2021
Industry	<u>Internet</u>
URL	<u>truthsocial.com</u> (<u>http://truthsocial.com</u>)
Current status	Unreleased

Background

Former President of the United States Donald Trump raised the prospect of building a new social media platform after he was banned from Facebook and Twitter in 2021, following his response to the 2021 United States Capitol attack.^[3] In May 2021, Trump launched "From the Desk of Donald J. Trump", a site where he posted short tweet-like announcements; *USA Today* reported in early June that it was shut down after less than a month.^[4]

History

On October 20, 2021, Trump Media & Technology Group issued a press release which announced the platform, slated to enter limited beta on iOS in November 2021 before a 2022 public launch.^{[5][1][2]}

Hours after the press release, a person identifying themselves as a part of the hacker collective Anonymous used Shodan to discover domains related to the company, eventually locating what appeared to be a publicly-accessible mobile beta of the website. The URL, which permitted users to sign up and use the platform, was leaked across social media.^[6] Users began trolling on the site, creating parody accounts, and posting humorous and comedic content. Users were able to sign up with usernames of high-profile individuals including Trump, Mike Pence, and Jack Dorsey.^[7] The link was later taken offline.^[8]

Truth Social is based on Mastodon, free and open-source software that is released under the AGPLv3 license. AGPLv3 requires any derivative source code to be publicly available. Because Truth Social's terms describe its software as proprietary, Mastodon founder and lead developer Eugen Rochko has said: "that would be a problem, as that would indicate a license violation".^[9] On October 22, the Software Freedom Conservancy said that Truth Social was in violation of the terms of the license, and that TMTG had 30 days to comply.^{[10][11]}

Terms of service

When the company was first announced in October 2021, its terms of service^[12] said the company would not be legally responsible for "the content, accuracy, offensiveness, opinions [or] reliability" of anything users might post to the site. Some commentators noted that this self-declared immunity appeared to rely on Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, a law that Trump firmly opposed during his presidency.^{[13][14][15]}

The terms of service further added that users would be forbidden to "disparage, tarnish, or otherwise harm, in our opinion, us and/or the Site". Truth Social said it has the right to "suspend or terminate your account" and also "take appropriate legal action".^[14]

Company and finances

On October 20, 2021, the special-purpose acquisition company (SPAC) Digital World Acquisition Corp (DWAC) announced a merger with Trump Media & Technology Group. The merger valued the Trump Media & Technology Group at \$875 million, as of October 21, 2021.^[16] On October 21, 2021, shares of DWAC rose by 400%, from \$10 to \$45.50, following the announcement of Truth Social.^[17] The next day, the stock price increased by an additional factor of two.^[18] Trading of the company's stock was halted multiple times due to its volatility.^[17] The run-up in stock price was considered similar to the GameStop short squeeze earlier that year.^[18]

SPACs are structured such that they first sell shares to the public and then raise funds from investors to later acquire a private company, the identity of which cannot be known by the SPAC or its investors in advance. Some investors were surprised to learn that their investment money was being used to finance a Trump company. SPACs have long had questionable reputations because they can give companies access to public markets that would otherwise be difficult, due to a poor or nonexistent track record.^[19]

The New York Times reported days after the TMTG deal was announced that the founder of the Digital World SPAC, Miami banker Patrick Orlando, had been discussing the deal with Trump by March. The formation of the SPAC was announced in May and it was taken public in September. The *Times* reported that by summer 2021 people affiliated with TMTG were telling Wall Street investors that the company was nearing a deal to merge with a SPAC. Digital World was not specifically named, but if it was the SPAC in question this may have skirted securities laws and stock exchange rules, since SPACs are not allowed to have a target company in mind prior to going public. Trump and Orlando had initially discussed a deal through another of Orlando's SPACs that was already publicly-traded, but it was deemed too small for the Trump deal. Some bankers told the *Times* that because the deal discussions began when the first SPAC was being considered, which would be proper, an argument could be made that discussions did not occur after the Digital World SPAC was formed, which would be improper. Digital World stated in three prospectuses that it had not had "any substantive discussions, directly or indirectly, with any business combination target."^[20]

The company applied for trademarks on the name "Truth Social" and other terms including "truthing", "retruth", and "post a truth".^{[8][21][22]}

Technology

Truth Social uses a custom version of the free and open-source software Mastodon, which is typically used to connect to a broader collection of social networking websites known as the Fediverse. Truth Social's version of Mastodon removes several features, including polls and post visibility options.^[9] On October 21, 2021, the Software Freedom Conservancy group has accused Truth Social of violating Mastodon's Affero General Public License by not offering its source code to all users, as Truth Social claims that its software is "proprietary".^{[23][24]}

The platform is modeled heavily after Twitter. Users can make posts ("truths") and share other users' posts ("retruths"). The platform also features a newsfeed, called a "truth feed", as well as a notification system.^[8]

Reception

Pre-launch

BBC journalist James Clayton stated that the platform could be a more successful version of other alt-tech social media platforms like Parler and Gab, and is an attempt by Trump to gain his "megaphone" back.^[25] Chris Cillizza of CNN wrote that the platform was doomed to fail.^[26]

Noah Berlatsky, writing in *The Independent*, described it as a potential threat to democracy.^[27] *The Forward* raised concerns of antisemitism becoming prominent on the platform, noting similar platforms that have become known for hosting antisemitic content, such as Parler, Gab and Telegram.^[28]

Rolling Stone observed that while Truth Social promises to be an open and free platform, Truth Social's terms of service include a clause stating that users cannot disparage the site.^[29]

Gettr CEO Jason Miller, a former advisor of Trump, praised Truth Social, said that the platform will cause Facebook and Twitter to "lose even more market share".^[30] Gab said in a statement that it supports Truth Social and that users of Gab can follow Trump on his reserved Gab account.^[31]

See also

- Social media use by Donald Trump

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