

An Open Letter to Spotify: A call from the global scientific and medical communities to implement a misinformation policy

On Dec. 31, 2021, the *Joe Rogan Experience* (JRE), a Spotify-exclusive podcast, uploaded a highly controversial episode featuring guest **Dr. Robert Malone** < <https://www.politifact.com/article/2022/jan/06/who-robert-malone-joe-roigans-guest-was-vaccine-sci/> > (#1757). The episode has been **criticized** < <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucelee/2022/01/02/what-is-mass-formation-psychois-robert-malone-makes-covid-19-vaccine-claims-on-joe-rogan-show/?sh=35939fb71d4c> > for promoting baseless conspiracy theories and the JRE has a concerning **history** < <https://www.mediamatters.org/joe-rogan-experience/joe-rogan-wrapped-year-covid-19-misinformation-right-wing-myths-and-anti-trans> > of broadcasting misinformation, particularly regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. By allowing the propagation of false and societally harmful assertions, Spotify is enabling its hosted media to damage public trust in scientific research and sow doubt in the credibility of data-driven guidance offered by medical professionals. JRE #1757 is not the only transgression to occur on the Spotify platform, but a relevant example of the platform's failure to mitigate the damage it is causing.

We are a coalition of scientists, medical professionals, professors, and science communicators spanning a wide range of fields such as microbiology, immunology, epidemiology, and neuroscience and we are calling on Spotify to take action against the mass-misinformation events which continue to occur on its platform. With an estimated 11 million listeners per episode, JRE is the world's largest podcast and has tremendous influence. Though Spotify has a responsibility to mitigate the spread of misinformation on its platform, the company presently has no misinformation policy.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Joe Rogan has repeatedly spread misleading and false claims on his podcast, provoking distrust in science and medicine. He has **discouraged** < <https://www.thewrap.com/joe-rogan-slammed-for-deeply-irresponsible-anti-vaccine-comments/> > vaccination in young people and children, **incorrectly** < <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2021/aug/31/joe-rogan/joe-rogan-falsely-says-mrna-vaccines-are-gene-ther/> > claimed that mRNA vaccines are "gene therapy," promoted off-label use of **ivermectin** < <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/joe-rogan-covid19-misinformation-ivermectin-spotify-podcast-1219976/> > to treat COVID-19 (contrary to FDA **warnings** < <https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/why-you-should-not-use-ivermectin-treat-or-prevent-covid-19> >), and spread a number of unsubstantiated conspiracy theories. In episode #1757, Rogan hosted Dr. Robert Malone, who was

<https://metro.co.uk/2021/12/31/prominant-virologist-kicked-off-twitter-for-spreading-anti-vaxx-video-15844655/>> from Twitter for spreading misinformation about COVID-19. Dr. Malone used the JRE platform to further promote numerous baseless claims, including several **https://www.instagram.com/unbiasedscipod/p/CYT5hwmL4ND/?utm_medium=copy_link**> about COVID-19 vaccines and an **<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-science-health-joe-rogan-ap-fact-check-a87b1044c6256968dcc33886a36c949f>**> theory that societal leaders have “hypnotized” the public. Many of these statements have already been **<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/covid-psychosis-theory-joe-rogan-b1989552.html>**> . Notably, Dr. Malone is one of two recent JRE guests who has compared pandemic policies to the **[Holocaust](https://healthfeedback.org/claimreview/joe-rogan-interview-with-peter-mccullough-contains-multiple-false-and-unsubstantiated-claims-about-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-vaccines/)** < **<https://healthfeedback.org/claimreview/joe-rogan-interview-with-peter-mccullough-contains-multiple-false-and-unsubstantiated-claims-about-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-vaccines/>**> . These actions are not only objectionable and offensive, but also medically and culturally dangerous.

The average age of JRE listeners is **[24](https://www.mediamonitors.com/audience-demographic-variations-specific-to-genre/)** < **<https://www.mediamonitors.com/audience-demographic-variations-specific-to-genre/>**> years old and according to **[data](https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/data-tables/421-010-CasesInNotFullyVaccinated.pdf)** < **<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/data-tables/421-010-CasesInNotFullyVaccinated.pdf>**> from Washington State, unvaccinated 12-34 year olds are 12 times more likely to be hospitalized with COVID than those who are fully vaccinated. Dr. Malone’s interview has reached many tens of millions of listeners vulnerable to predatory medical misinformation. Mass-misinformation events of this scale have extraordinarily dangerous ramifications. As scientists, we face backlash and resistance as the public grows to distrust our research and expertise. As educators and science communicators, we are tasked with repairing the public’s damaged understanding of science and medicine. As physicians, we bear the arduous weight of a pandemic that has stretched our medical systems to their limits and only stands to be exacerbated by the anti-vaccination sentiment woven into this and other episodes of Rogan’s podcast.

This is not only a scientific or medical concern; it is a sociological issue of devastating proportions and Spotify is responsible for allowing this activity to thrive on its platform. *We, the undersigned doctors, nurses, scientists, and educators thus call on Spotify to immediately establish a clear and public policy to moderate misinformation on its platform.*

Signed,

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