

The logo for the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) is displayed in a large, bold, white sans-serif font. The background of the entire page is a dark blue gradient with a bokeh effect of out-of-focus light circles and a network of glowing blue lines and nodes, suggesting a digital or data-driven environment.

GDI

Global
Disinformation
Index

Media Market Risk Ratings: France

www.disinformationindex.org

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The Global Disinformation Index is a UK-based not-for-profit that operates on the three principles of neutrality, independence and transparency. Our vision is a world in which we can trust what we see in the media. Our mission is to restore trust in the media by providing real-time automated risk ratings of the world's media sites through a Global Disinformation Index (GDI). The GDI is non-political. Our Advisory Panel consists of international experts in disinformation, indices and technology. For more information, visit www.disinformationindex.org

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GDI Global
Disinformation
Index



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Preface

Since the invention of the web, how we live our lives online—and off—has changed in countless ways. This includes how news is funded, produced, consumed and shared.

With these shifts in the news industry have come risks. Disinformation is one of them. Disinformation has been used as a tool to weaponise mass influence and disseminate propaganda. During the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation has created an infodemic undermining public health, safety and government responses. No country or media market is immune from these threats.

To combat disinformation, we need to find ways to disrupt the system and its funding. This is where the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) has set its focus.

At the GDI, we believe that an independent, trusted and neutral risk rating of news sites’ disinformation risks is needed. These risk ratings can be used by advertisers and ad tech companies to ensure that where they direct

their online ad spends is aligned with their own brand safety and risk mitigation strategies for disinformation.

The GDI’s research offers a trusted and neutral assessment about a news domain’s risk of disinforming. By looking at structural, content, operational and context indicators, the GDI provides a domain-level rating about a news site’s risk of disinforming an online user.

The following report presents the results of applying the GDI risk rating methodology to some of the frequently visited media sites in France. In total we assessed 30 sites. The country has been chosen given its well-established and respected media market; its high levels of readers consuming their news online; their robust and growing programmatic advertising markets; and its past experiences with countering disinformation campaigns targeting online readers.

We consider the findings as the start of a discussion among news sites, advertisers and ad tech companies on how the GDI risk ratings should be used to strengthen the funding of an independent, diverse and trusted media. Please join us in this journey.

Figure 1. Media sites assessed in France (in alphabetical order)

1. www.20minutes.fr	11. www.laprovence.com	21. www.liberation.fr
2. www.bfmtv.com	12. www.lci.fr	22. www.mediapart.fr
3. www.bvoltaire.fr	13. www.lefigaro.fr	23. www.nicematin.com
4. www.egaliteetreconciliation.fr	14. www.lejdd.fr	24. www.nouvelobs.com
5. www.fdesouche.com	15. www.lemediatv.fr	25. www.ohmymag.com
6. www.francetvinfo.fr	16. www.lemonde.fr	26. www.parismatch.com
7. www.gentside.com	17. www.leparisien.fr	27. www.revolutionpermanente.fr
8. www.huffingtonpost.fr	18. www.lepoint.fr	28. www.ripostelaique.com
9. www.konbini.com/fr	19. www.lesechos.fr	29. www.slate.fr
10. www.ladepeche.fr	20. www.lexpress.fr	30. www.valeursactuelles.com

Introduction

The harms of disinformation¹ are proliferating around the globe—threatening our elections, our health, and our shared sense of accepted facts.

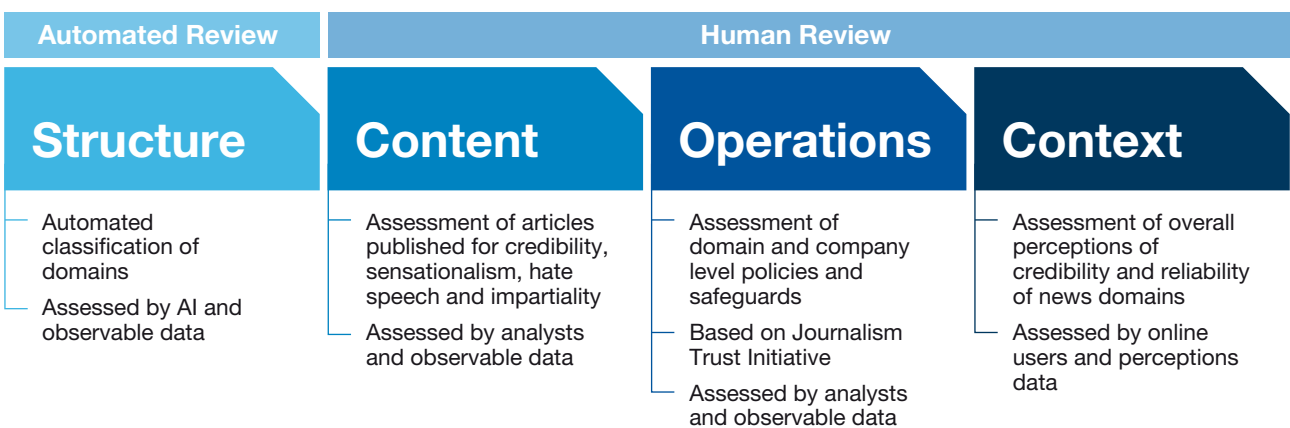
The infodemic laid bare by COVID-19 conspiracies clearly shows that disinformation costs peoples' lives. Websites masquerading as news outlets are driving and profiting financially from the situation.

The goal of the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) is to cut off the revenue streams that incentivise and sustain the spread of disinformation. Using both artificial and human intelligence, the GDI has created an assessment framework to rate the disinformation risk of news domains.

The GDI risk rating provides advertisers, ad tech companies and platforms with greater information about a range of disinformation flag's related to a site's Structure (i.e. metadata and lexical features),² Content (i.e. reliability of content), Operations (i.e. operational and editorial integrity) and Context (i.e. perceptions of brand trust; see Figure 2). The findings in this report are based on the three pillars that were manually reviewed: Content, Operations and Context.³

A site's disinformation risk level is based on that site's aggregated score across all of the reviewed pillars and indicators (see figure 2).⁴ A site's overall score ranges from zero (maximum risk level) to 100 (minimum risk level). Each indicator that is included in the framework is scored from zero to 100. The output of the index is therefore the site's overall disinformation risk level, rather than the truthfulness or journalistic quality of the site.

Figure 2. Overview of the GDI disinformation risk assessment



The following report presents findings pertaining to disinformation risks for the media market in France, based on a study of 30 news domains.⁵ The data provide an initial snapshot of the overall strengths and challenges that these sites face to mitigate disinformation risks.⁶

All of these findings come from the research conducted between February and June 2020. The market analysis is based on 15 disinformation flags from the human review of French websites performed by two researchers, and by an independent perceptions survey.⁷ This report presents the average scores for the market sample. Sites that are rated as a minimum-risk site and/or score above a 95 on any of the three pillars are named and profiled in the report.⁸

The GDI risk rating methodology is not an attempt to identify truth and falsehoods. It does not label any site as a disinformation site—or, inversely, as a trusted news site. Rather, our approach is based on the idea that a range of signals, taken together, can indicate a site's risk of carrying disinformation.

The scores should be seen as offering initial insights into the French media market and its overall levels of disinformation risk.

The results are open to debate and refinement with stakeholders from news sites, advertisers and the ad tech industry. We look forward to this engagement. (The annex of this report outlines the assessment framework).⁹

Key Findings: France

In looking at the media landscape for France, GDI's assessment found that:

Most French news sites present a medium-risk level when it comes to disinformation.

- Over half of the media sample (17 sites) received a rating of medium risk (see Figure 3).
- The risk factors driving this finding are largely related to the absence of key operational checks and balances, such as transparency about their sources of funding, editorial independence and corrections policies.

About one in five French sites in our sample—six domains—have few disinformation risk flags and receive the lowest risk ratings among the sample.

- However, only one site—LeMonde.fr—received a minimum risk rating. For example, a survey of online users shows that it is perceived to be the most trusted and accurate source of information among the sample.¹⁰
- The remaining five sites are rated as having a low risk of disinformation. These sites include new media companies, traditional French newspapers and television stations.
- Overall, sites in this group are seen to publish more neutral, unbiased articles. They also have certain operational policies and information in place which are associated with good journalistic standards.

Seven media sites are seen as having high levels of disinformation risk.

- One French site has been assessed with a maximum-risk level while the other six sites receive high-risk ratings.
- The sites present numerous disinformation risks for their content, operations and perceptions of brand trust.

Notable operational and editorial integrity risks were found for French sites across the political and ideological spectrum.

- Most sites do not publish how they fund their operations or who owns them.
- Only one in four sites has public statements of their editorial independence.

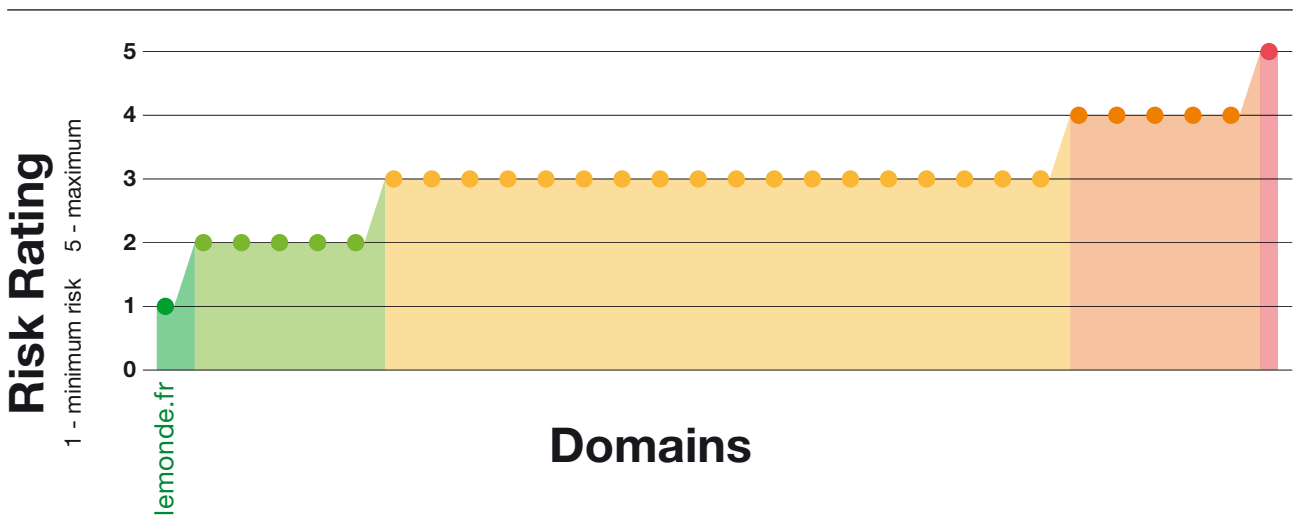
These risks to a site's operational integrity may be contributing to the lower perceptions of online user trust in many French media sites.¹¹

- Based on our survey data, online users perceive only a few French sites as providing accurate news.
- Further analysis shows a significant, strong and positive correlation between sites which are seen as being more accurate and sites which are perceived to issue more corrections and not use clickbait titles.¹²

French sites scoring more poorly on other disinformation indicators are perceived to do well at labeling news versus opinion stories.

- These are the same sites that score worse on other key disinformation flags.¹³
- In other markets we assessed, the exact opposite relationships were found.
- In Germany, for example, sites that were perceived to clearly label news and opinion were significantly and highly correlated to the same sites that were perceived to be most accurate, not use clickbait and visibly issue corrections.

Figure 3. Disinformation risk ratings by site



The French media market: Key features and scope

France benefits from a rich and diverse media market. It is estimated that there are around 8,000 different publishers¹⁴ and more than 1,500 local media outlets.¹⁵ In 2019, French media publishers had a daily circulation of nine million copies, while online media outlets had 60 million unique visitors each day.¹⁶

In recent years, the consumption of online news content in France has continued to rise and is currently up nearly 13 percent. It is estimated that 66 percent of readers get their news online, and mostly via their mobile phones (59 percent).¹⁷ Le Monde, Médiapart and Le Figaro are the French media sites that have the highest number of online subscribers.¹⁸

The digital advertising market in France is the eighth-largest in the world, and has continued to show steady growth. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, media ad spending in France had been projected to be as high as 11.2 billion euros in 2020.¹⁹ Of this total, digital ad spending represented nearly 50 percent (5.5 billion euros).²⁰

Projections are that digital ad spending will only accelerate and become increasingly programmatic in focus. By 2024, 84 percent of all ad revenues in France will be generated via programmatic ads: real-time page-level adverts targeted at online users.²¹

Yet the boon in online advertising hides a crisis facing French media sites. They are experiencing significant challenges to their business model and the public's trust in the French media.

While the consumption of free content is rising, ad revenues have sharply fallen for media companies in France. News outlets are struggling to monetise their content in an online news market increasingly dominated by platforms like Facebook and Google.²² At the same time, people are not willing to pay for online news: only 10 percent of media sites' online users are paid subscribers.²³ Sites luckily have some financial buffer thanks to access to state funding. Like several

other European countries, France provides a significant amount of public support to its media.²⁴

At the same time, French media sites are dealing with plummeting levels of public trust in their content. Findings show that public confidence in French media is at its lowest point since 1987.²⁵ Recent research suggests that only 23 percent of people in France trust the media and that 13 percent trust the news they see on social media.²⁶ Disinformation has a role to play. Findings show that 67 percent of those surveyed in France are concerned by what online news is real and 'fake'.²⁷

The factors driving this distrust in content are diverse. The general lack of diversity in French newsrooms²⁸ shapes the stories that get coverage—or don't. In France, studies have shown that wealthier groups are overly represented in the stories published.²⁹ For example, general news coverage of the Yellow Vests movement in France has been criticised for being mostly framed around a narrative of violence.³⁰

At the same time, tight publication schedules and the need to boost site traffic mean that there is a constant churn and demand for attention-grabbing, repetitive and low-quality content. This reality has affected people's trust in online news. A study of French online users showed that 63 percent of those surveyed are convinced that information found on digital outlets is erroneous.³¹

At the operations level, past studies have flagged concerns over sites' editorial independence from their media owners and how high-profile media investigations are protected from outside interference.³² Public perceptions also reflect these concerns and their trust in journalists. Of those surveyed, 68 percent believe that journalists are not independent from political and governmental pressures, and 61 percent believe journalists are susceptible to financial pressures.³³

For this study, we defined the French media market based on an initial list of more than 60 news sites, which included well-known national outlets, tabloids

and regional newspapers. We then worked with local media experts to refine the list based on each site's reach and relevance.

We defined reach and relevance based on a site's traffic rankings,³⁴ and its Facebook and Twitter followers. We also consulted with local experts to identify domains with lower reach but high relevance among decision-makers, or which have been deemed relevant outlets targeting specific groups in France.

As such, this list contains public service broadcasters, new media sites, and the online sites run by well-known French media outlets (e.g. magazines, television stations, and national and local newspapers).³⁵

Disinformation risk ratings

Based on our sample, France's media market presents some strengths when it comes to mitigating disinformation risks. Twenty percent of the sample presents a minimum or low risk for disinformation.

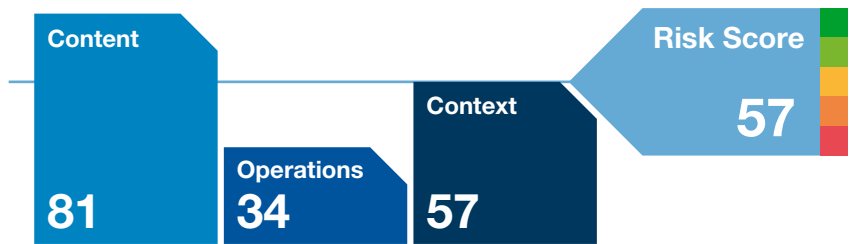
Market overview

The sites in this sample represent a diverse array of national outlets: dailies and magazines, public service, digital only, advertising and/or subscription-based. However only one site has a minimum-risk level: www.lemonde.fr. The site has a minimum-risk rating due to its relatively neutral and unbiased articles, its numerous operational checks and balances, and its high levels of user trust in its content.

The five sites in our low-risk category include new media companies, traditional French newspapers and television stations. Overall, sites in this group are seen to publish more neutral, unbiased articles. They also have certain operational policies and information in place which are associated with good journalistic standards. Still, some sites in this group have challenges with online users' perceptions of trust in their content.

The medium-risk category is over half the sample (18 sites). The risk factors driving this finding are largely related to the absence of key operational checks and balances, such as transparency about their sources of funding, editorial independence and corrections policies. These sites could significantly improve their risk rating by establishing such editorial checks and balances. Yet it will take for them to win online users' trust. The survey data show that many sites are perceived to rely on clickbait titles and to not always provide accurate information.

Figure 4. Overall market scores, by pillar



Seven sites in the French sample are classified as a high- or maximum-risk site. There are six high-risk sites and one maximum-risk site assessed in the French media sample. All sites are composed of news outlets which produce sensational content, including articles that negatively target groups. Their operational and editorial standards also fall short of industry-agreed practices as outlined by the Journalism Trust Initiative.³⁶ For example, the only maximum-risk site in this sample has none of these recommended policies and transparency measures.

Figure 5. Average pillar score by risk rating level



The current risk groups capture potential integrity breakdowns, which could eventually trigger higher content-related risks for the stories covered on these sites. Since the French media sites in the sample have a general lack of policies that support editorial checks and balances, disinformation stories and narratives could be spread inadvertently—or intentionally. For example, some sites with weak editorial policies mimic the appearance of more established sites, copying their content and using more sensational tone and framing. The sections that follow provide a closer examination of these latent risks by pillar.

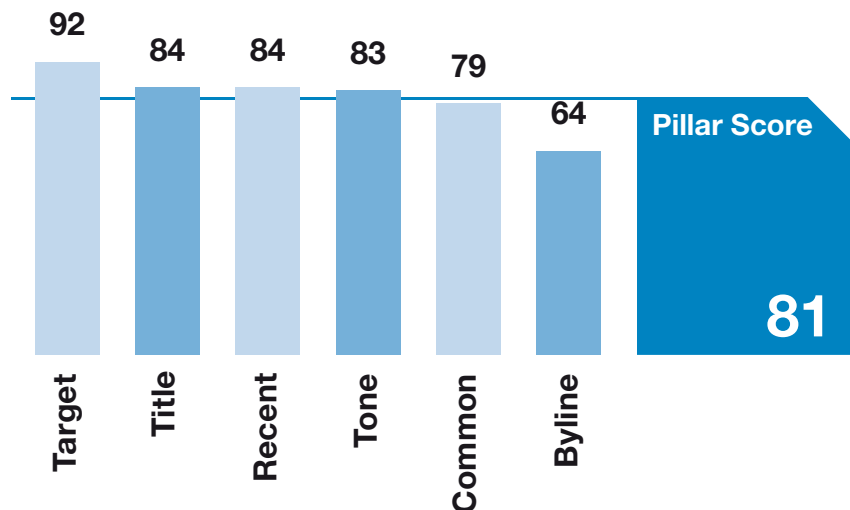
Pillar Overview

CONTENT PILLAR

This pillar focuses on the reliability of the content provided on the site. Our analysis for the ‘Content’ pillar is based on an assessment of ten anonymised articles for each domain. These articles are drawn from among the most frequently shared pieces of content during the data collection period. All article scores are based on a scale of zero (worst) to 100 (best), as assessed by the country reviewers.

In total, six indicators were used to look at each story to assess its level of sensational headlines (i.e. clickbait), sensationalism (i.e. biased coverage), negative targeting of specific groups or individuals (i.e. hate speech), and the overall credibility of an article (i.e. common coverage; see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Average Content pillar scores by indicator



Based on the sample of articles, most French media sites are seen to provide neutral content to their online users. More than five out of every six sites receive a passing score (70 or greater) for their headlines accurately presenting the topic of their stories, as well as for not using biased or sensational coverage. The site which performs the best on this pillar, scoring a 96, is www.lesechos.fr. Still some sites with a medium or high disinformation-risk rating on this assessment do relatively well on the content pillar as they often republish content from wire stories and other credible sources to improve their own credibility.

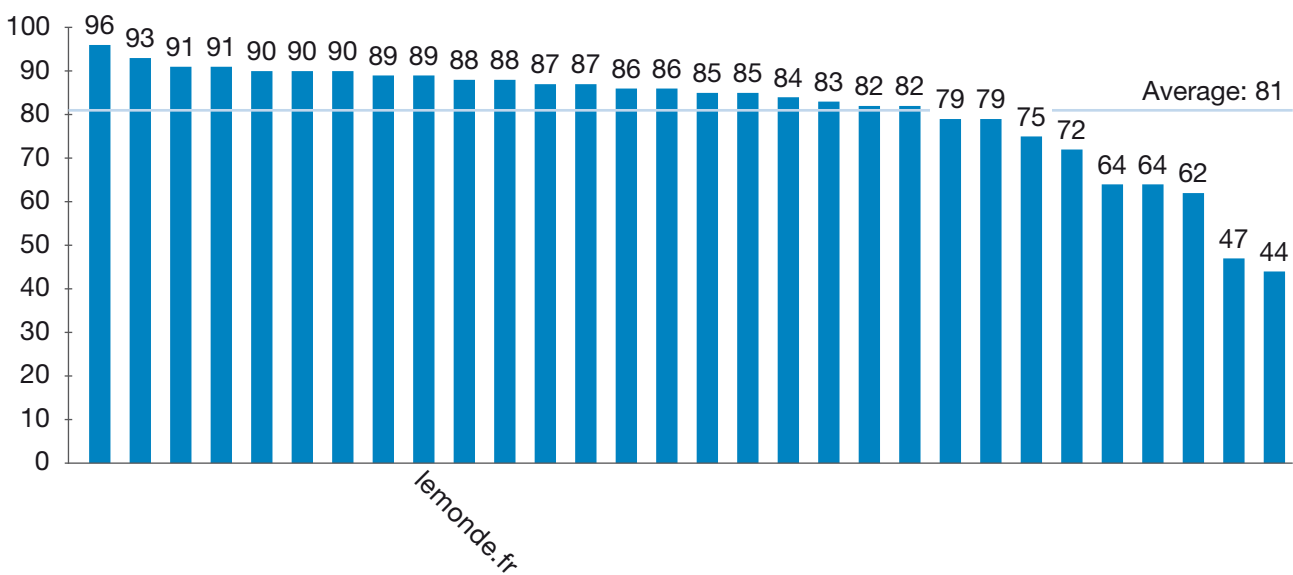
All of the content indicators are strongly and significantly correlated with each other. This finding means that for the French sites reviewed, a descriptive and representative title is a good indicator of the article’s objectivity. Conversely, a vague, misleading or emotional title very often signals biased or inflammatory content.³⁷

The high correlation between tone (bias) and common coverage of stories suggests that the more neutral an article’s topic is, the more likely it will be covered by several other newsrooms.³⁸ However, this tendency can lead to

situations in which sensational stories are covered only by more biased and higher-risk sites. This is evident in the fact that some partisan outlets score very low on common coverage in this assessment (i.e., their topics have not been covered by other news sites). This lack of common coverage can feed conspiratorial narratives of so-called ‘hidden truths’.

Based on the study’s analysis, the common coverage of stories is strongly correlated to these stories being more recent, correctly titled and unbiased. This finding suggests that when outlets publish stories which are not commonly covered, the sites are more likely to have more disinformation risk flags.³⁹

Figure 7. Content pillar scores by site

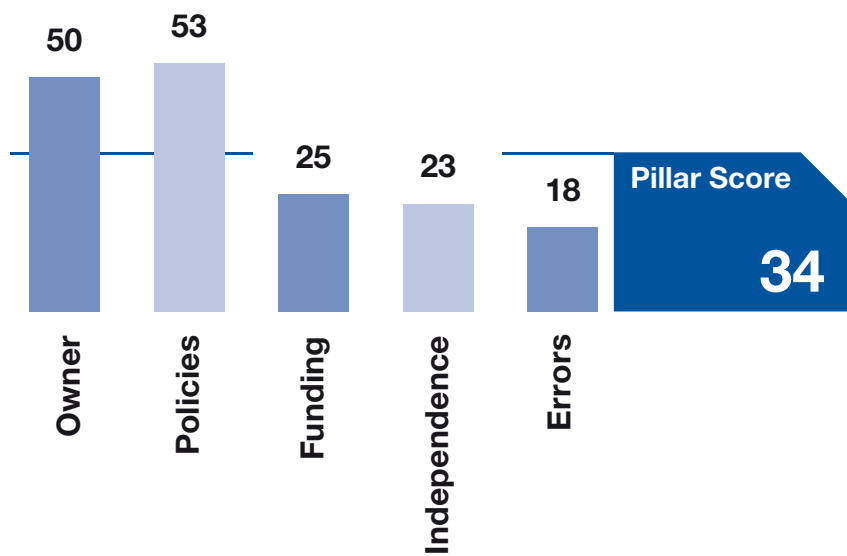


OPERATIONS PILLAR

This pillar assesses the operational and editorial integrity of a news site. All scores are based on a scale of zero (worst) to 100 (best), as scored by the country reviewers according to the information available on the site. The operations indicators are the quickest wins to reduce disinformation risk ratings, as they represent policies that domains can immediately establish and make public.⁴⁰

However, almost all of the sites of this study have been found to be missing publicly available information for many key areas of their operational and editorial integrity. Only one site—www.mediapart.fr—received a nearly perfect score. The site has all the transparency measures in place and is missing only one publicly available policy: a policy on the use of artificially and/or synthetically-generated content (i.e. stories, radio or video content produced using artificial intelligence). In fact, no French site currently has such a policy. Most of the other French news sites lag far behind, regardless of their reputation. More than half of the sites in our sample have roughly 30 percent of all of the operational measures in place (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Average Operations pillar scores by indicator



For example, roughly one in six sites publishes transparent and easy-to-find information about its sources of funding. Twenty percent of the sites have full information about their owners. Without knowing who owns and funds a site’s operations, clear statements of editorial independence by sites are important. Yet only seven of the sites in our sample have such statements on their sites.

Interestingly, many of the operational indicators are not correlated to the content indicators for the French sites in our sample. For example, a media site can score quite well on the content pillar but lack key operational policies.

However, there is a strong and significant correlation between low content risks and sites that have policies related to user- and artificially-generated content (i.e. as part of comments sections or other related content). For example, the statistical findings show that sites which have key policies governing their user comments sections—such as for hate speech, harassment, defamation and privacy—have more neutral, unbiased and less targeted content in their articles.⁴¹

The area where there is most room for improvement concerns policies regarding corrections. Only three of the outlets assessed—www.mediapart.fr, www.huffingtonpost.fr and www.bfmtv.com—have explicit and publicly accessible policies regarding their corrections process. While this indicator is not about proving accurate reporting, the absence of such a policy presents a serious disinformation risk. For example, if a site published a mistake, a reader would not know how to report it or how the site corrects it.

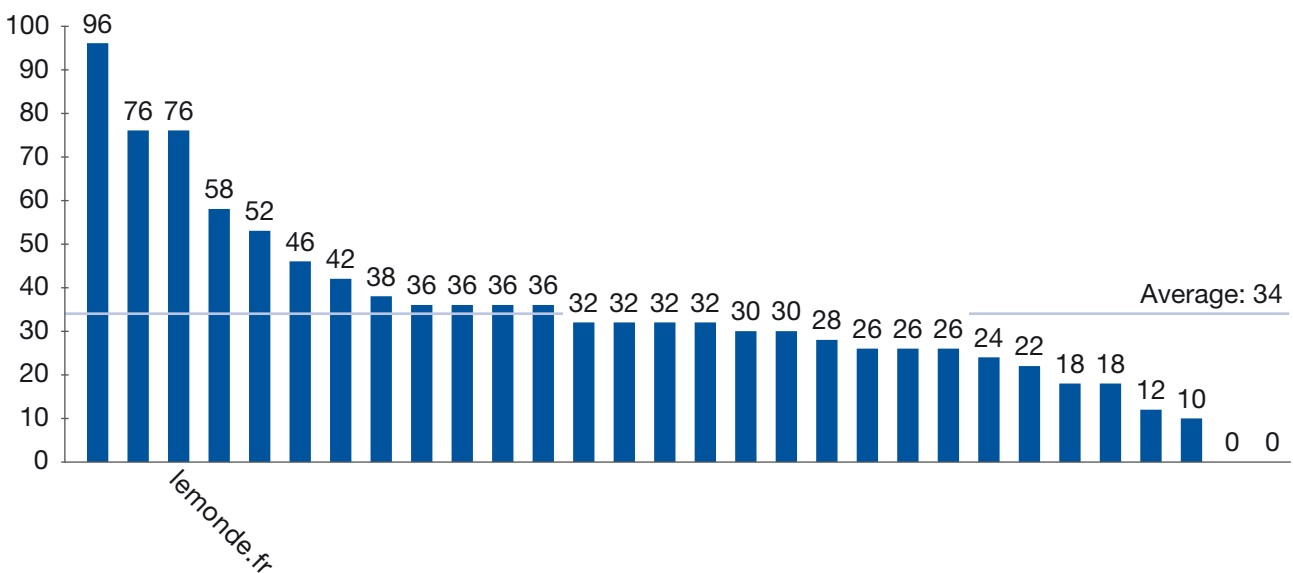
In terms of potential conflicts of interest, only four media sites provide full transparency on their sources of funding, and twenty percent of the sample discloses no information about their owners.

Furthermore, nearly four out of every five French sites have no statement of editorial independence whatsoever, signaling an implicit gap in accountability. An example of good practice is Médiapart, which has a Code of Ethics that outlines its editorial independence: its shareholders “refrain from intervening in editorial choices... The management... undertakes to protect journalists from any pressure from economic partners, public authorities, political, trade union or religious organisations.”

The lack of such a statement is disconcerting, given that many French media outlets benefit from state funding, corporate owners and sponsors. Moreover, France’s media has been criticised both by media watchdogs and the public for being vulnerable to corporate interests.⁴² Providing a public statement of editorial independence could potentially help sites to counter such claims.

All 30 sites in our sample have the potential to score perfectly on all the indicators of the Operations pillar if they adopt and disclose such operational policies and information. The indicators for the Operations pillar are taken from the standards which have been set by journalists as part of the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI).⁴³ As the JTI points out,⁴⁴ adopting these standards raises credibility in the eyes of the public, compels traditional media to reassess their practices in the digital age, and encourages new media outlets to be more transparent about their business models. Currently, in France there are no media-wide policies that encourage such behaviour at the organisational level. However, there is guidance for individual journalists.⁴⁵

Figure 9. Operations pillar scores by site

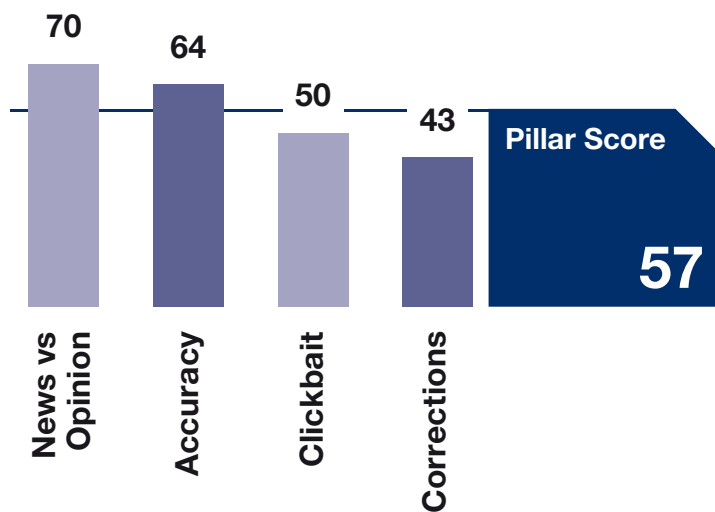


CONTEXT PILLAR

A site’s performance on this pillar is a good measure of perceptions of brand trust in a given media site. All scores are based on a scale of zero (worst) to 100 (best), as rated by online users.

Context pillar scores have significant room for improvement for many domains, although online user perceptions can shift only over the medium to long term.⁴⁶ This is partly due to the fact that perceptions can be ‘sticky’ and take time to realign with a site’s current realities. That said, our statistical analysis indicates that respondents’ perceptions do reflect several of the Content and Operations indicators, so adopting the content and operations standards measured in those pillars may have the additional effect of improving perceptions in the eyes of the country’s readers.

Figure 10. Average Context pillar scores by indicator



The Context pillar findings are based on an independent survey⁴⁷ conducted of online user perceptions of brand trust in French media sites included in our sample (see Figure 10). Overall, the findings indicate good scores on perceptions of accuracy for many of the sites in our sample, with no site scoring below 50 percent.

At the same time, there seems to be room for improvement when it comes to corrections, which confirms the findings of the operations pillar. For example, a good score on corrections is also a good indicator of the quality and reliability of the content. There is a strong and significant correlation between sites that are perceived to clearly correct their errors and sites that publish content with more neutral headlines, unbiased reporting and stories that do not negatively target groups or individuals.⁴⁸ However, the survey findings show that all the media sites in our sample receive a sub-standard grade by respondents when it comes to online readers’ perceptions that errors are being visibly corrected.

Another disinformation indicator where most French media sites scored quite low is their perceived use of clickbait titles. Such headlines are seen as a good indicator of sensationalism and/or biasedness. Interestingly, results of

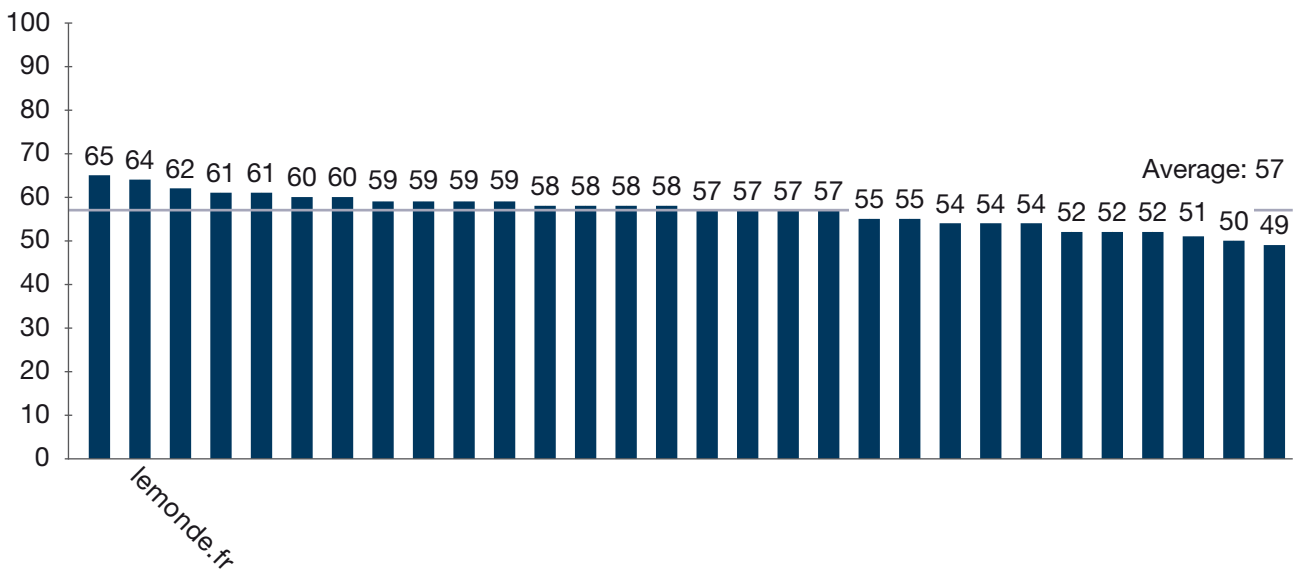
the content pillar found that most sites do not use sensationalist headlines. This finding implies that some newsrooms may suffer from ‘sticky’ reputations which date to their use of clickbait titles in the past, even though they might not engage in this practice currently.

Additionally, online users’ perceptions of sites’ use of clickbait headlines is highly and strongly correlated to their perceptions of how accurate the news is on a site. This finding suggests that outlets which are perceived to be the most accurate and trustworthy are those that are perceived to be more neutral.

What is surprising is the finding for people’s perceptions about how well sites differentiate between news and opinion stories. All sites score above 60, and the relationships to other disinformation indicators suggests that even higher risk disinformation sites score well on this indicator. As a result, sites that are perceived to clearly label news and opinion stories are also more likely to have sensationalist headlines, carry biased stories and produce content that negatively targets groups and individuals.⁴⁹ This evidence suggests that high-risk domains may be mimicking the policies of established outlets as a way to create a veneer of credibility or to score well on related global assessments of journalistic credibility.⁵⁰

In the other markets we assessed, the exact opposite relationships were found between online users’ perceptions of news sites and their practices. The indicator provided a strong flag for how sites performed across all pillars of the risk framework. It also correlated well with the indicators that you would expect to be a positive signal of lower disinformation risks. In Germany, for example, sites that were perceived to clearly distinguish between news and opinion were significantly and highly correlated with the same sites that were perceived to be most accurate, to not use clickbait and to accurately issue corrections.

Figure 11. Context pillar scores by site



Conclusion

France's media market is vibrant and diverse. The market benefits from increased traffic of online users to French news sites, yet it faces an unprecedented crisis of trust.

While this study has found that most sites have few disinformation flags regarding their content, they have significant operational and editorial shortfalls. The lack of these checks and balances can undermine a newsrooms' ability to act as a reliable safeguard against the threat of disinformation.

French media outlets could address these shortcomings in the short term by taking actions that:

- Establish policies that promote a newsroom's operational and editorial integrity, as outlined by the Journalism Trust Initiative.
- Ensure transparency around a site's ownership and sources of funding to prevent any suspicions of conflicts of interest.
- Put in place clear corrections policies that online users can access and understand, and clearly publish any corrections that are made to a story.
- Limit the use of clickbait titles that create perceptions of sensationalism and biased coverage of news, undermining online users' trust in the information provided.
- Assess the current labelling of news and opinion pieces across the French media landscape to develop a better understanding of how straight news is being presented on low-, medium- and high-risk media sites.
- Improve the coverage of more diverse and representative points of views and news by established media outlets. Many well-known outlets publish the same content, which may lead online readers to seek alternative media sources. Too often, these sites feed on the narrative that established outlets are 'hiding the truth'.

The need for a trustworthy, independent rating of disinformation risk is pressing. The launch of this risk-rating framework will provide crucial information to policy-makers, news websites, and the ad tech industry, enabling key decision-makers to stem the tide of money that incentivises and sustains disinformation.

Annex: Methodology⁵¹

Pillar scoring

The Structure, Content, and Operations pillars of the GDI risk ratings are all designed to capture discrete, observable features of a domain by analysing a snapshot of a particular moment in time. This approach is effective at mitigating bias and standardising our analysis across domains and countries, but it is limited in scope. Historical information about a domain's content and practices is not captured by these pillars—nor are less observable disinformation flags (such as regularly disinforming readers by saying nothing about a story or topic). Both of these limitations are addressed by the fourth pillar, Context, which assesses long-term trends and indicators that are harder to measure. In this report, two-thirds of a domain's score is based on a snapshot of observable features (through the Content and Operations pillars), while the final third comes via a public perceptions survey that contextualises our findings.

The Content pillar produces a score based on six indicators reviewed by two dedicated country analysts across ten articles published by a domain. These ten articles were randomly selected from among that domain's most frequently shared articles within a two-week period and then stripped of any information that could identify the publisher. The indicators included in the final risk rating are: title representativeness, author attribution, article tone, topicality, and common coverage of the story by other domains.

The Operations pillar is scored at the domain level by the same country analysts. We selected five indicators from the Journalism Trust Initiative's list of trustworthiness signals in order to capture the risk associated with a domain's potential financial conflicts of interest, vulnerability to disinformation in its comments sections, and editorial standards. This is not meant to capture the

actual quality of journalism, as this pillar rates a domain based on its public disclosure of operations, which may differ from actual operations. The indicators included are: disclosure of true beneficial owners, transparency in funding sources, published policies for comments sections and the flagging of algorithmically-generated content, a clear process for error reporting, and a public statement affirming editorial independence.

The Context pillar score is based on results from a survey of online users' perceptions of a domain's content and operations. Incorporating survey data in calculating the risk rating is essential because it captures a wider range of opinions, and because online users' perceptions are based on a site's long-term behaviour and performance. This pillar offers a good complement to our Content pillar, which goes into greater depth but analyses only ten articles. The survey captures four indicators: accuracy, clear differentiation between news and opinion articles, use of clickbait titles, and error reporting.

Domains are placed into one of five risk categories based on their final risk score. The cut-offs for the categories are determined by combining the risk ratings for domains in all countries in the current version of the index, and calculating this global sample's mean and standard deviation. Domains are placed into a category based on the number of standard deviations that separate their rating from the global mean score. Table 1 shows each category and its cut-offs.

Table 1: Overview of risk bands

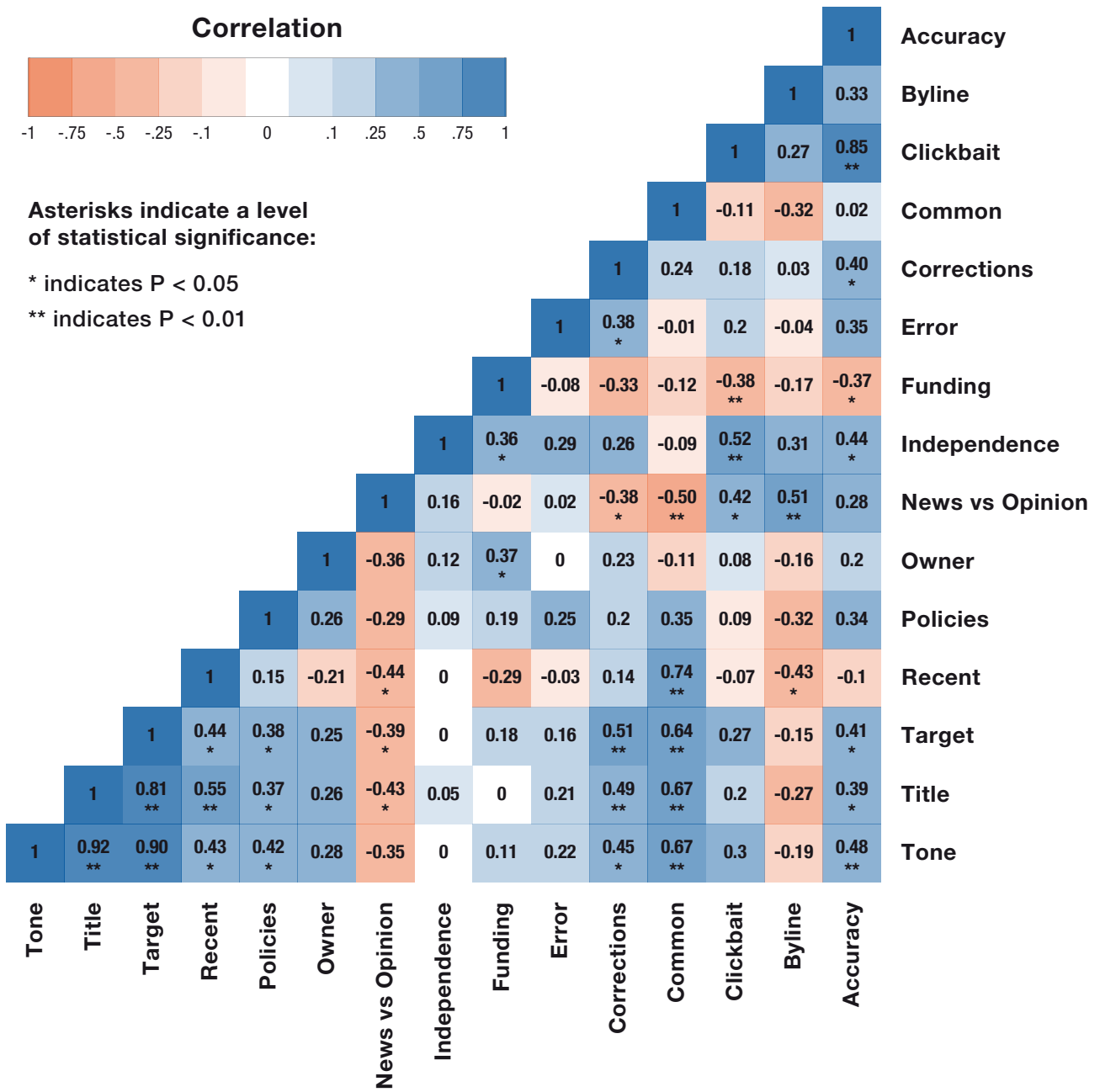
TOTAL DOMAIN SCORE	DISINFORMATION RISK LEVEL	DISINFORMATION RISK CATEGORY
< -1.5 SD from mean	5	Maximum risk
≥ -1.5 and ≤ -0.5 SD from mean	4	High risk
> -0.5 and ≤ 0.5 SD from mean	3	Medium risk
> 0.5 and ≤ 1.5 SD from mean	2	Low risk
> 1.5 SD from mean	1	Minimum risk

Data collection

Each of the French domains was assessed by two analysts who were trained on the GDI framework by our staff according to a codebook that provides detailed instructions for assessing each indicator.

The survey was conducted by YouGov and includes 502 respondents drawn from sophisticated online users. Each respondent was asked a series of questions about domains that they indicated they were familiar with. Each respondent assessed up to ten sites from the sample, based on their familiarity with the site. The maximum of respondents for a site was 138 and the minimum 28. These numbers suggest a robust survey size that allows for a robust analysis.

Table 2. Correlations matrix



Endnotes

- 1 We define disinformation in terms of the verb ‘to disinform’: ‘to deliberately mislead; opposite of inform.’
- 2 The ‘Structure’ pillar is assessed by a machine-learning algorithm prototype that is trained on metadata from thousands of websites known for regularly disinforming readers. It identifies these domains according to technical features. For example, use of ads.txt, security protocols, and site-specific email aliases. For more on our methodology, see the appendix.
- 3 For more on our methodology, see the appendix and methodology at: <https://disinformationindex.org/research/>.
- 4 The Structure pillar is assessed by a machine-learning algorithm prototype that is trained on metadata from thousands of websites known for regularly disinforming readers. It identifies these domains according to technical features of the website itself, and currently produces a binary assessment: it either is or is not a high-risk disinformation site. For this study, the structural indicators were used only as a filter to cross-check the domains which were selected for the human review. Their scores on this pillar were not used to calculate the final risk rating. As the sample is composed of some of the most popular sites in the French media market, they would not be expected to share structural features with high-risk sites.
- 5 In this round of reports for 2020, media market assessments will be produced for the following countries: Argentina, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Latvia, India, South Africa, UK and the US. Additional countries may also be added.
- 6 All sites included in the report were informed of their individual scores and risk ratings, as well as the overall market averages.
- 7 The survey was commissioned and conducted by YouGov (www.yougov.com). YouGov is an international research data and analytics group headquartered in London. The company has a proprietary panel of over 9+ million people globally and is one of the world’s largest research networks.
- 8 Individual site scores were shared confidentially with the site operators to allow for engagement, feedback and any necessary changes. All sites were contacted in advance to provide them with information on the methodology and rating process. In all countries covered by the risk ratings, the composite ratings are shared only for the sites assessed to have a low or minimal disinformation risk. As a result, the number of sites disclosed in the report will vary by country.
- 9 The GDI looks forward to working with the entire industry in this effort. There is strong demand for such a risk assessment of sites, and a notable concern that less trusted, less independent actors may seek to fill this gap.
- 10 A perceptions survey of over 500 online readers in France was conducted by YouGov between 18 and 22 May 2020. The sample is based on a YouGov panel of what is called a ‘catalyst audience’. This is a group that YouGov defines as the top 10 % of its survey panel for a country. It is composed of ‘change-makers drawn from civil society, business, politics, media, the third sector and beyond. They are defined by their recent activities which include entrepreneurialism, leadership and activism. Typical roles in this group include business & social entrepreneurs, organisational leaders, and political activists.’
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 See statistical correlations in the Annex.
- 13 See statistical correlations in the Annex.
- 14 See: www.ccomptes.fr/sites/default/files/2018-01/12-aides-presse-ecrite-Tome-2.pdf.
- 15 See: www.festival-infolocale.fr/medias-locaux-aidez-nous-a-vous-compter/.
- 16 See: www.acpm.fr/Les-chiffres/Observatoire-2020-de-l-ACPM-Syntheses-2019.
- 17 See: <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2020/france-2020/>.
- 18 The total number of visits on mobile is up 12.2% (from 2018 to 2019). Source: <https://www.acpm.fr/Media/Files/CdP-ACPM-OJD-Diffusion-DSH-Frequentation-avril-2020>.
- 19 See: www.emarketer.com/content/france-germany-digital-ad-spending-update-q2-2020.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 See: www.statista.com/outlook/216/136/digital-advertising/france?currency=eur#market-revenue.
- 22 See: www.statista.com/statistics/386071/online-news-consumption-in-france/ and www.snptv.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CSA_M%C3%A9dias-et-publicit%C3%A9s-en-ligne-restitution.pdf.
- 23 See: reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2020-06/DNR_2020_FINAL.pdf. Based on figures for 2019.

- 24 See: reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-11/Public%2520support%2520for%2520Media.pdf.
- 25 See: fr.kantar.com/m%C3%A9dias/digital/2020/barometre-2020-de-la-confiance-des-francais-dans-les-media/.
- 26 See: reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2020-06/DNR_2020_FINAL.pdf.
- 27 See: reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/DNR_2019_FINAL.pdf.
- 28 See: www.csa.fr/Informer/Collections-du-CSA/Travaux-Autres-publications/L-observatoire-de-la-diversite/Les-resultats-de-la-vague-2018-du-barometre-de-la-diversite.
- 29 See: www.csa.fr/Informer/Collections-du-CSA/Travaux-Autres-publications/L-observatoire-de-la-diversite/Les-resultats-de-la-vague-2018-du-barometre-de-la-diversite.
- 30 See: www.lerass.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/GJ-V3.pdf.
- 31 See: www.la-croix.com/Economie/Medias/Barometre-medias-pourquoi-4-Francais-10-boudent-linformati-on-2020-01-15-1201072072.
- 32 See: rsf.org/en/france.
- 33 See: www.la-croix.com/Economie/Medias/Barometre-medias-pourquoi-4-Francais-10-boudent-linformati-on-2020-01-15-1201072072.
- 34 The traffic numbers were based on ACPM's February 2020 figures. The ACPM is the French organisation that certifies media reach in France. See: www.acpm.fr/Les-chiffres/Frequentation-internet/Sites-Grand-Public/Classement-unifie?periode=202002.
- 35 While all these outlets present different business models and sources of funding, the content analysed for this study was only that content which was freely accessible. The focus on such content was to capture the disinformation risk of accessible and shareable content—and its potential for high visibility, which is not limited to just subscribers. The fact that the selection happened at the height of the COVID-19 crisis may represent a limitation. French media coverage, as in other countries globally, may have significantly focused on the pandemic rather than the site's traditional topics.
- 36 See: jti-rsf.org/en/.
- 37 See statistical correlations in the Annex.
- 38 See statistical correlations in the Annex.
- 39 See statistical correlations in the Annex.
- 40 The Operations pillar looks at whether relevant policies are in place. It does not assess the level of robustness of the policy based on good practice, and does not look at how the policies are being implemented. However, other indicators in the framework do capture some of the relevant practices, such as by measuring perceptions on how often sites correct errors or are viewed as presenting accurate content.
- 41 See statistical correlations in the Annex.
- 42 See: rsf.org/en/france, www.la-croix.com/Economie/Medias/Barometre-medias-pourquoi-4-Francais-10-boudent-linformation-2020-01-15-1201072072.
- 43 For more information on the JTI, which has adopted an ISO standard for the industry, please see: jti-rsf.org/en/.
- 44 www.cen.eu/news/workshops/Pages/WWS-2019-013.aspx.
- 45 See: medialandscapes.org/country/france/policies/accountability-systems and <http://www.snj.fr/content/charte-d%E2%80%99%C3%A9thique-professionnelle-des-journalistes>.
- 46 The survey responses are based on a panel of 502 respondents. Respondents scored sites that they were 'familiar' with and also identified how many times a month they read the specific site. Each respondent answered questions on up to ten sites. The survey was conducted online by YouGov between 18 and 22 May 2020.
- 47 The sample is based on a YouGov panel of what is called a 'catalyst audience'. This is a group that YouGov defines as the top 10 % of its survey panel for a country. It is composed of 'change-makers drawn from civil society, business, politics, media, the third sector and beyond. They are defined by their recent activities which include entrepreneurialism, leadership and activism. Typical roles in this group include business & social entrepreneurs, organisational leaders, and political activists.'
- 48 See statistical correlations in the Annex.
- 49 See statistical correlations in the Annex.
- 50 It is possible that external assessments such as by NewsGuardTech of the French media market are driving sites to create policies associated with journalistic credibility to score better on the assessments. While media sites in Germany, the US and UK have also been assessed by NewsGuardTech, we have not recorded these same inverse relationships between the existence of good operational policies being associated with higher-risk sites for disinformation. For more information on NewsGuardTech, see: www.newsguardtech.com/.
- 51 Please note the full GDI methodology is available at: disinformationindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/GDI_Index-Methodology_Report_Dec2019.pdf.



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