



# GDI

Global  
Disinformation  
Index

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## Risk Assessment: UK Media Market

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[www.disinformationindex.org](http://www.disinformationindex.org)

**Author:** Lucas Wright.

**Researchers:** Sophie Chauvet and Scarlet Dawson.

**Design:** [www.designbythink.co.za](http://www.designbythink.co.za)

**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](http://www.disinformationindex.org)

**GDI** Global  
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# Preface

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**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. No country or media market is immune from this threat.

To combat disinformation, we need to find ways to defund and disrupt the system. 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 aspires to offer a trusted and neutral assessment about a news domain's risk of disinforming. By looking at structural, content, operational and context indicators, the GDI will provide a domain-level rating about a news site's risk of disinforming a user.

We have designed the organisation – and our risk ratings – based on the three pillars of neutrality, independence and transparency.

**Neutrality:** We are apolitical, global, and evidence-based. We are establishing a governance structure which aspires to the highest standards of global corporate governance.

**Independence:** The GDI is established as a not-for-profit entity. We receive no benefit from the risk ratings we give to a particular site. We exist solely to assess online news domains' risk of disinforming their readers. We are advised by a panel of international experts.

**Transparency:** The GDI's rating criteria, assessments and methodology will be community-driven and made publicly auditable. A dispute mechanism will be developed and made available for the owners of domains that disagree with their rating. In completing the report, all sites were contacted when the assessment began and were provided with their individual scores to discuss, review and adjust where relevant.

The following report presents the results of a piloting of the risk rating methodology in the United Kingdom (UK). The UK has been chosen given its historical and respected media market, its high-level of readers consuming their news online; its robust and growing programmatic advertising market; and its past experiences with countering disinformation campaigns targeting online readers and public debates.

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

# Introduction

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**The harms of disinformation<sup>1</sup> are proliferating around the globe – threatening our elections, our health, and our shared sense of accepted facts.**

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. This was done in collaboration with ten noted experts working on media, fact-checking and disinformation. The GDI ratings will give greater control to advertisers and ad tech companies over where adverts appear.

Companies' programmatic adverts are a critical financial lifeline to disinforming sites. They create a perverse incentive for financially motivated actors to traffic in disinformation to get more clicks. The GDI estimates that at least US\$235 million in programmatic adverts annually is placed by ad tech companies on known disinformation sites.<sup>2</sup> The GDI's risk ratings can cut off this funding by providing a neutral and independent assessment of disinformation risk that can inform the brand safety and risk mitigation strategies of advertisers and ad tech companies.

The GDI risk ratings are relevant for more established and new media sites that are part of a country's broader media landscape. This includes highly-acclaimed and traditional news outlets that have online presences. The shifting nature of news consumption to online interfaces has meant a shift in the editorial and advertising policies and practices. As a result, there are risks and challenges now posed by disinformation actors to these sites that merit assessment. This is the objective of the risk rating and rationale for the pilot.<sup>3</sup>

For example, existing operational policies governing user-generated content may not have kept pace with the areas that they cover, such as how hate speech and privacy protections are handled on the comments section of a site. New issues like artificially and algorithmically-generated content (stories as well as videos and other visuals) are so fresh that sites may not even have thought of having policies in place.

Moreover, the current advertising model based on user clicks to generate site revenue has created challenges for media markets across countries and regions. This has meant the need for a news site to capture the clicks of an online reader whose attention is increasingly bombarded by different news headlines and sites of varying quality, reputation and credibility. In the UK, it is estimated that 75 percent of readers get their news online.<sup>4</sup>

**More online consumption of news does not necessarily equal more trusted content – or trust in media. Overall, the media are the least trusted institution in the world.<sup>5</sup>**

Recent research suggests that 37 percent of people in the UK distrust the media and that the UK has the lowest levels of trust in news from social media among 22 countries.<sup>6</sup> These low trust levels are reflected in findings that 70 percent of those surveyed in the UK are concerned by what news is real and “fake” online.<sup>7</sup>

Worries over media quality and disinformation also have led some advertisers to bluntly block news sites entirely due to concerns about risks to their brand safety. This has exacerbated the declining advertising revenues that news sites have suffered in recent years due to the exponential increase in content and news-related content online.

There is a need for advertisers to have a more trusted, neutral and independent standard to understand the nuances and contours of a site’s disinformation risks. The GDI risk rating addresses this need and provides advertisers and ad tech companies with greater information about a range of disinformation flags related to a site’s structure, content, operations and context. As a result, the GDI risk ratings will also cover the top-end of highly-used news sites across all types of media and advertising markets – as well as the “long tail” of smaller news sites. The GDI hopes that by providing a more rigorous assessment of disinformation risk for all news sites, formerly “news-averse” advertisers may be persuaded to support quality (“low-risk”) news to a greater extent.

The following report presents preliminary findings pertaining to disinformation risks for the media market in the United Kingdom (UK), based on a pilot study that covered 30 of some of the country’s top news domains.<sup>8</sup> The data provides an initial snapshot of the overall strengths and challenges that these sites have to mitigate disinformation risks. **The report is the first time such a scoping and scoring for the UK media market has been done to assess the landscape at an aggregate level.** The report and its findings of the pilot are intended to be discussed and debated – and should be taken in that spirit. We will use exchanges with the sites to improve our methodology and to help sites reduce their disinformation risks.<sup>9</sup>

We have taken care at every stage to minimise bias and provide objective data. We recognise the need to work together across the media and ad industry to provide an independent, transparent and trusted assessment of news sites.<sup>10</sup>

## Key Findings: UK

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

***The current advertising model to drive traffic and clicks is creating potential disinformation risks for one of the world's oldest and most respected media markets.***

- A sizeable number of UK news sites have a mixed record when it comes to using emotionally-charged content in their articles. While historically UK media has used sensationalism in print, this is challenging in an online environment, particularly now that there is an increasing crisis of trust in the UK media.<sup>11</sup> Based on our assessment, the problem of highly-charged content runs across a range of news sites.<sup>12</sup> However, most UK news sites don't use such emotionally-driven language to negatively target specific groups or individuals, according to our findings.
- There appears to be a generalised trend when it comes to a site's prevalent use of clickbait headlines. The experts surveyed in the UK perceive that most UK sites in the sample peddle in clickbait titles.<sup>13</sup> This trend likely reflects the need to use eye-catching titles that help to drive traffic to news sites which then can be converted to revenue streams from a site's adverts.

***Many sites do not have all of the operational checks and balances in place which are needed to create safeguards against disinformation risks.***

- Related disinformation flags include the failure to publicly disclose a site's sources of funding and its owners, two areas in which many UK sites are lacking. Such information is critical to ensuring full transparency about who is funding and owning a country's media.
- Moreover, statements of editorial independence help to create a firewall between media ownership, funding sources and the content that is covered.

***Perceptions of brand trust in UK news sites reflect the overall crisis of confidence in the country's media by its users.***

- According to media sector experts surveyed in the GDI assessment, their responses show that many do not feel that the sites generally carry highly accurate content or correct published errors.<sup>14</sup>
- These findings align with other studies about trust – and distrust – in the UK media market.<sup>15</sup> It speaks to a broader perspective of concerns about how news sites in our sample are viewed over time by UK media experts. While such opinions may not be aligned with current site practices at this time, they are important to consider to assess overall perceptions of trust in a site and to target areas for remedy. For example, sites could make it more visible and clear that they are always correcting content errors in instances where sites are perceived as not doing this in practice.

All of these findings come from the pilot research led by the GDI from September to November 2019. The market analysis is based on 13 disinformation flags that were assessed for the UK by an analyst and by an independent survey of over 100 experts.<sup>16</sup> While we present the average scores for the market sample, no specific sites are named or individually scored in this report.<sup>17</sup> The scores should be seen as offering initial insights into the UK media market and its overall levels of potential disinformation risk. The pilot's results are being debated and refined with stakeholders from news sites, advertisers and the ad tech industry. (The annex of this report outlines the assessment framework).

# The UK media market: Key features and scope

**The UK media market is one of the oldest and most highly regarded markets in terms of its journalism and long-established news outlets.**

Increasingly, the internet has become an essential medium for news consumption in the UK. According to the Reuters Institute,<sup>18</sup> over 70 percent of people get their news online, more than TV and print, but only 40 percent trust the news. Trust in online news is even lower – with 22 percent trusting news via search engines and 10 percent trusting news from social media.

The UK’s high internet usage and reliance on online news is accompanied by a massive market for online advertising. Nearly £14.7 billion will be spent on digital ad formats in the UK in 2019, roughly 62 percent of all ad spends in the market.<sup>19</sup> These sizeable ad flows make it essential for brands and ad tech companies to know whether their programmatic adverts are appearing on sites with elevated disinformation risks, compromising their brand safety.<sup>20</sup>

For this study, we defined the UK media market based on an initial list of 80 news sites, which included well-known global and national outlets, tabloids, regional newspapers, and blogs. 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 Alexa rankings, Facebook followers, and Twitter followers. We also consulted with a local expert to identify domains with lower reach but high relevance among decision makers and niche audiences (see Figure 1).<sup>21</sup>

**Figure 1. UK media sites assessed**

1. Another Angry Voice	11. LAD Bible	21. The Evening Standard
2. BBC News	12. Left Foot Forward	22. The Financial Times
3. Breitbart	13. Manchester Evening News	23. The Guardian
4. Channel 4	14. Metro	24. The Independent
5. Conservative Home	15. Sky News	25. The Liverpool Echo
6. Daily Mail	16. The Canary	26. The Poke
7. Daily Record	17. The Daily Express	27. The Sun
8. Guido Fawkes	18. The Daily Mirror	28. The Telegraph
19. ITV News	19. The Daily Star	29. The Times/ The Sunday Times
10. LabourList	20. The Economist	30. Wings Over Scotland



# The GDI framework: Theory and methodology

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**Our index 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.**

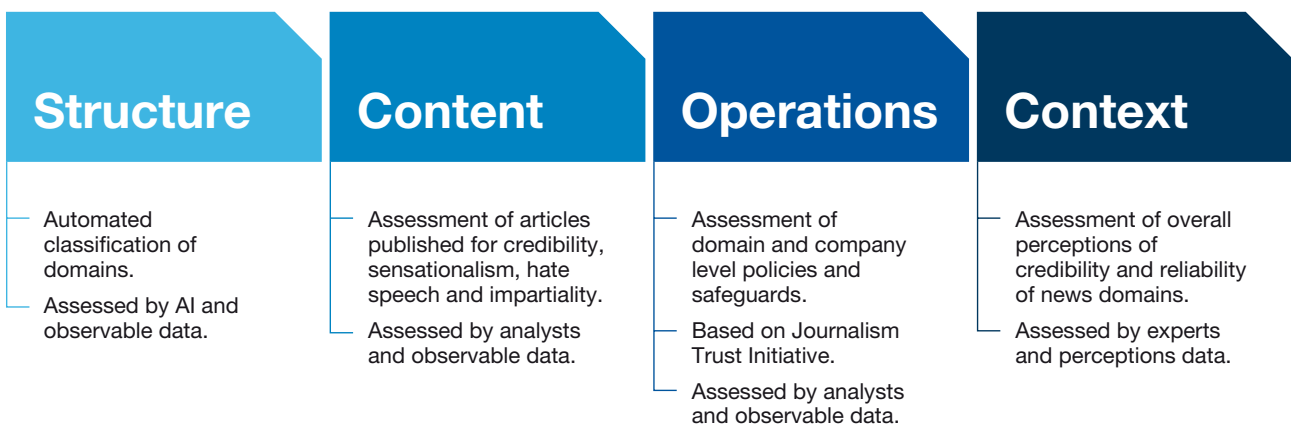
Disinformation risk flags relate to the structure (i.e. technical features), content (i.e. reliability of content), operations (i.e. operational and editorial integrity) and context (i.e. perceptions of brand trust) of the site. The output of the index is therefore the site’s overall disinformation risk level, rather than the truthfulness or journalistic quality of the site. The aim is to provide advertisers and ad tech companies with a trusted, independent and neutral assessment of potential disinformation risks for a site. The assessment is applicable to all media markets and all types of sites, including mainstream media and more developed media markets.

A site’s disinformation risk level is based on its aggregated score across all of the pillars and indicators (see Figure 2). A site’s overall score ranges from 0 (maximum risk level) to 100 (minimum risk level). This report presents the findings of disinformation risks from the pilot run in the UK media market. The findings are based on the three pillars that were manually reviewed: **‘Content’**, **‘Operations’**, and **‘Context’**.<sup>22</sup>

The ‘Content’ and ‘Operations’ pillars are 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. 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 ‘Context’ pillar, which assesses long-term trends and indicators that are harder to measure.<sup>23</sup>

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 an independent expert survey that contextualises our findings. Over 100 media experts were asked a series of questions about domains which they knew operationally and editorially. The survey was conducted by the respected global opinion and data company YouGov.

Figure 2. Overview of the GDI disinformation risk assessment



The ‘Structure’ pillar is used as the first step to determine which sites require a deeper, human review. Sites are 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<sup>24</sup> of the website itself, and currently produces a binary assessment: it either is or is not a high-risk disinformation site.

The GDI’s work builds on initial experiments performed in 2018 under a grant from the Knight Foundation Prototype Fund. In this demonstration, we trained a neural network classifier on hundreds of pre-labelled high-risk and low-risk news sites, focusing on over twenty different technical metadata signals. The prototype classifier correctly identified 98.8 percent of the domains that had been pre-labelled as “high-risk” for carrying disinformation. This prototype demonstrates the predictive power of metadata and other computational signals to rate the disinformation risk of news sites.

For this pilot of the index, the structural indicators were used only as a filter for selecting domains in need of human review. As such, their scores on this pillar were not used to calculate the final risk rating.<sup>25</sup> None of the domains included in our sample were identified as high-risk disinformation sites by the automated classifier. As the sample is composed of some of the most popular sites in the UK media market, they would not be expected to share structural features with high-risk sites.

# Disinformation risk ratings

The UK media market is mature, presenting a unique set of disinformation risks.

## Market overview

The UK media market is highly sophisticated and includes some of the longest running news companies globally. Still, the changing context globally of media and the shifting ad revenue structure has meant that disinformation risks still are present. Based on the pilot, the findings show that there are a fair number of reliable, minimum-risk sites, as well as higher-risk sites that present challenges across all three pillars (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Disinformation risk ratings by site for the UK market (based on total score)

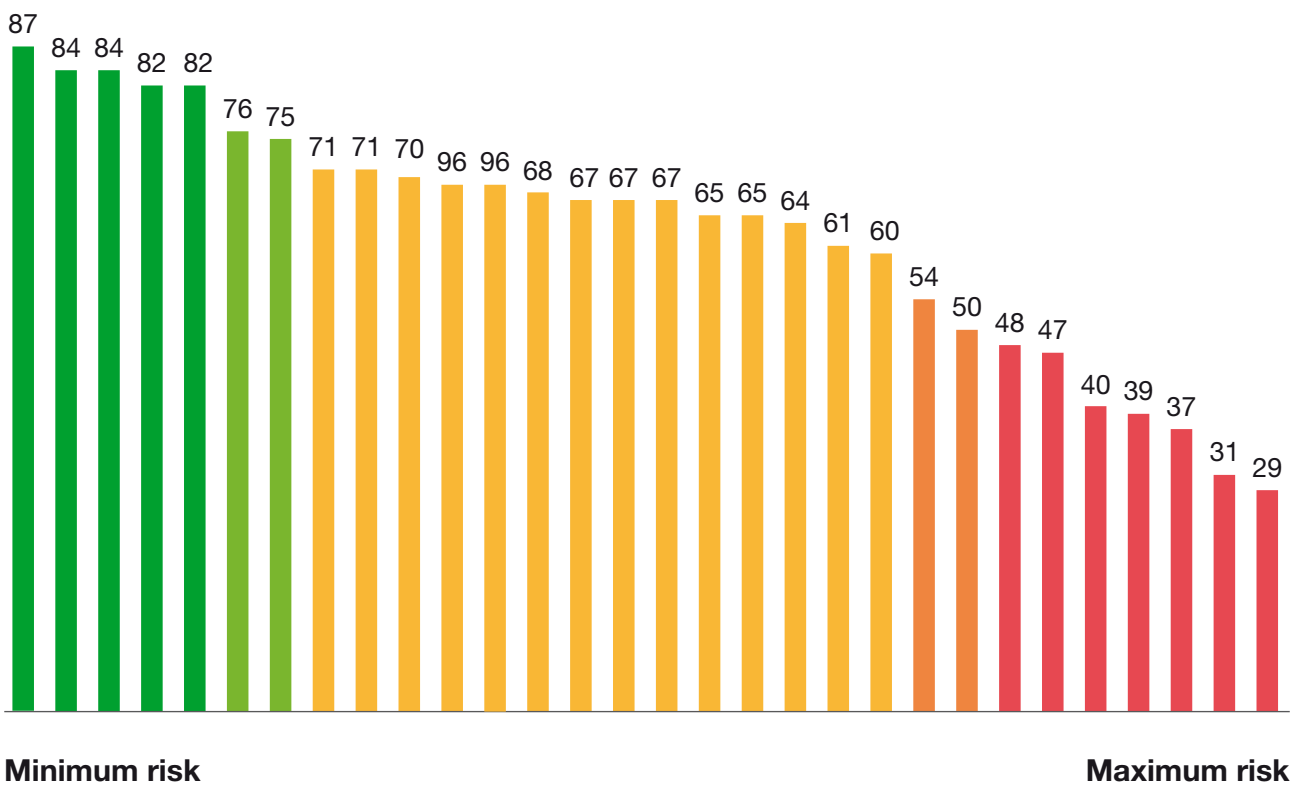
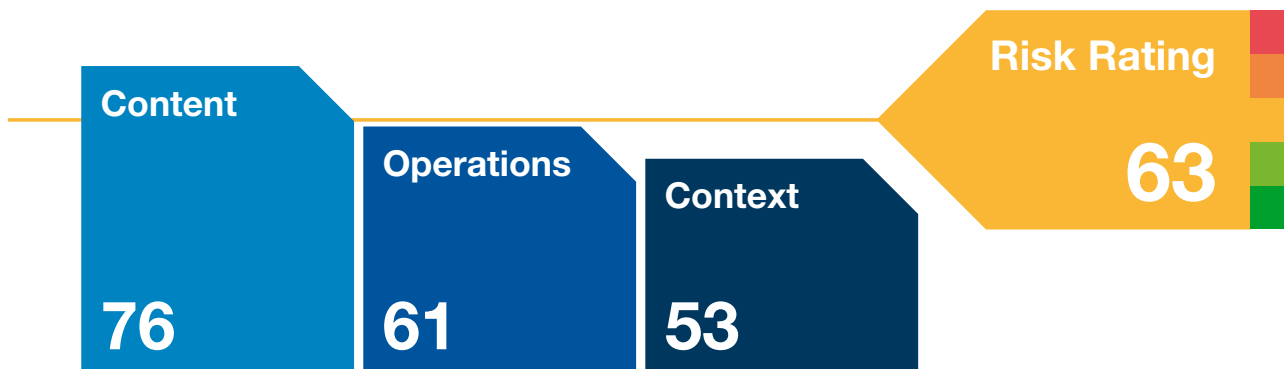


Figure 4. Overall market scores, by pillar



In between these extremes, our results show that UK media sites usually present some dimension of disinformation risks on at least one pillar of the GDI assessment. Most often this is the ‘Context’ pillar, suggesting that their reputation – especially on perceptions of using clickbait headlines and regularly issuing corrections to errors – lags behind their operational transparency and the quality of the articles we reviewed. This could be because reputation is ‘sticky’ and has yet to catch up to current site practices.<sup>26</sup>

In fewer cases, the lowest score is the ‘Operations’ pillar, indicating that these domains could elevate their overall scores by adopting best practice standards for journalistic transparency, ethics, and integrity. It may be the case that the sites are running their newsrooms

with these good practices, but that they have yet to be codified and the policies made publicly available. Such a step towards transparency is needed.

The findings from the pilot suggest that independent expert responses help to point to where latent risk may exist in the market. Based on further statistical analysis, expert scores are positively correlated with the scores for several indicators from the other two pillars. In this sense, both the snapshot findings and the longer-term views for a site are aligned.<sup>27</sup>

Closer examination of each of the pillars and specific disinformation flags reveals that there are a few areas where the UK market as a whole could reduce its disinformation risk. These areas are covered in the following sections.

## Pillar Overview

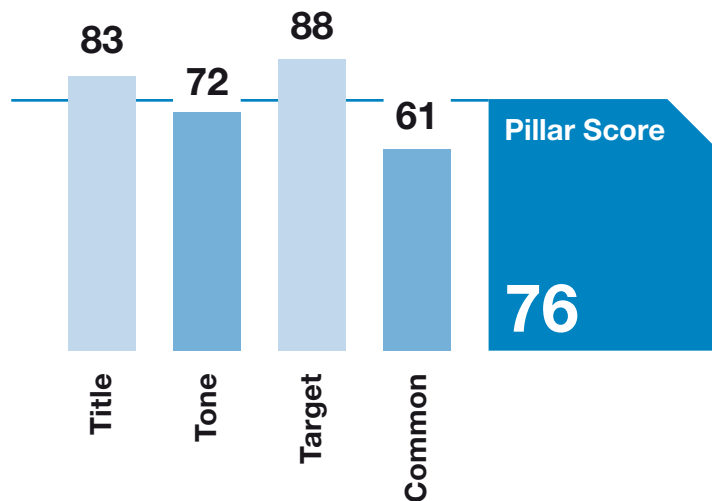
### CONTENT PILLAR

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.

For the UK media market, we find low indicators of risk based on the content published on these domains (see Figure 5). As the scores show, the common level of coverage for a site's stories is the indicator with the highest potential for determining a site's disinformation risk score (i.e. greater common coverage of stories on a site tends to signal a lower disinformation risk for that site).

**Figure 5. 'Content' pillar indicators and scores**

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The findings also reveal that other risks associated with the 'Content' pillar come from the scores given for the tone of the article. Based on our statistical analysis, the tone indicator is a significant predictor of ten other indicators covered by our framework. This finding suggests that article tone is significantly correlated with a large share of a domain's risk.<sup>28</sup>

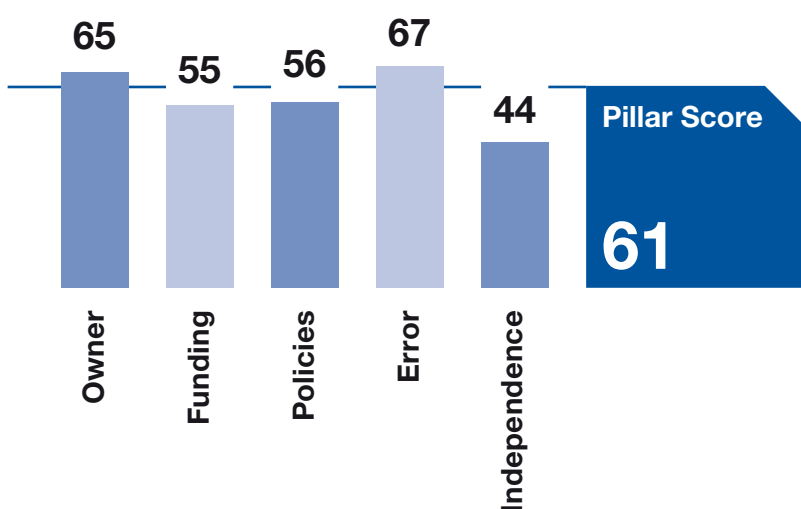
Overall, domains score better on this pillar when publishing titles that reflect the content of the article, and by avoiding the negative targeting of groups and individuals.

### OPERATIONS PILLAR

This pillar assesses the operational and editorial integrity of a news site. For UK news sites to perform better on this pillar, domains should focus on improving statements of editorial independence, disclosing sources of revenue, and publishing policies on the use of algorithmically-generated content on their websites (see Figure 6).

Most of the risks identified by this pillar are found among newer media sites which may not have their operational policies in the public domain.

**Figure 6. ‘Operations’ pillar indicators and scores**



When it comes to opportunities for sites to improve their risk ratings, the operational indicators are the quickest wins to reduce potential disinformation risk by creating the right policy environment.<sup>29</sup> These operational indicators are all areas that have already been agreed upon by journalists as part of the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI).<sup>30</sup> As the JTI points out,<sup>31</sup> 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.

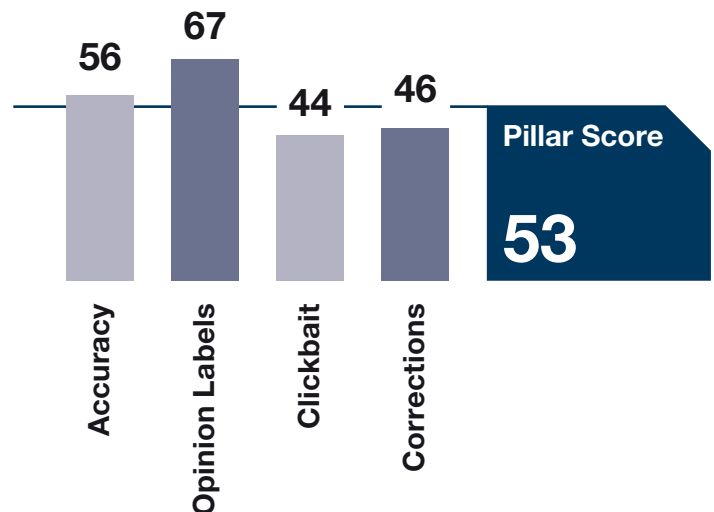
For example, a majority of the UK media sites are missing a statement of editorial independence, and half could improve their scores by ensuring the disclosure of their sources of funding. All sites, except one, are missing a publicly-disclosed policy governing the publication of algorithmically-generated content on their websites. The sites in our sample do better with disclosing ownership and publishing their policy for correcting errors, with a majority of domains scoring 100 on both of these indicators.

Based on the UK site sample, traditional media outlets consistently score higher on the ‘Operations’ pillar than younger, digital native media sites (with a few exceptions.) This suggests that new media websites present a greater potential risk of carrying disinformation as a result of weaker operational policies. They could greatly benefit from rethinking the public disclosure of their funding and internal practices.

### CONTEXT PILLAR

A site’s performance on this pillar is a good measure of expert perceptions of brand trust in a given media site. With few exceptions, media sector experts in the UK consider most of the sites in our market sample to present potential risks when it comes to publishing clickbait headlines and not frequently issuing corrections (see Figure 7). This “race-to-the-bottom” for using clickbait titles is likely a reflection of sites’ increasing dependence on the ad-funded business model that rewards clicks. It speaks to a deeper problem of the global news market that the GDI disinformation risk ratings may help to address. For this reason, improving experts’ perceptions on the corrections indicator may be more feasible. This could simply require a site issuing more corrections to factual errors as well as making this process more visible and clear to its readers – both online and offline.

**Figure 7. ‘Context’ pillar indicators and scores**



However, the same cannot be said for the other indicators in this pillar that measure perceptions of a site’s overall accuracy and how easy it is to differentiate between news stories and opinion pieces. Here the results show a range of perceptions related to potential risks, with a distribution that captures a handful of lower-risk and higher-risk sites.<sup>32</sup>

These disinformation risk flags are significantly correlated with many of the other signals from the other pillars. In other words, as a domain presents a higher score on an indicator reviewed by one of our analysts, it also is seen to have a higher level of trustworthiness in the eyes of experts. For example, the title indicator (the ‘Content’ pillar) and the clickbait indicator (the ‘Context’ pillar) are positively correlated, as are the error policy indicator (the ‘Operations’ pillar) and the corrections indicator (the ‘Context’ pillar). This finding suggests that higher-quality content and operational performance is reflected by an improved perception of brand trust and reputation for a news site (as assessed by experts). Domains can improve their reputation by meeting the standards which are set out by the indicators of the ‘Content’ and ‘Operations’ pillars.

# Conclusion

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**Our assessment of the disinformation risk of news sites in the UK finds that this established and ad-driven media market possesses a range of disinformation risks that need to be addressed.**

No site we sampled scored perfectly on our framework. All had areas for improvement, particularly when it came to their operational and editorial policies.

This reality points to the fact that UK news sites still have space for improvement to strengthen their safeguards against disinformation. Areas for action include efforts that:

- put in place the operational and editorial policies needed to prevent breakdowns that could lead to them carrying disinformation – in the future as well as the present.
- ensure that their sources of funding and information about their ownership are clearly disclosed and easily findable to the reader. This information should be found directly on the news sites rather than multiple clicks away.
- improve and make more visible a site's correction practices. It is important that such site corrections are clearly seen and understood, rather than being hidden on a web page below the fold.
- attempt to address the challenge of the “clickbait” culture and its race-to-the-bottom by presenting headlines that are clear and which accurately reflect the text of a story. This includes working with advertisers and ad tech companies over the long-term to shift the incentives of the overall online advertising business model.

- work to improve perceptions of trust. Over time, adopting the standards for content and operations set out in our framework is likely to lead to an increase in reputation among experts. These changes include adopting policies and improving corrections reporting, alongside greater transparency on ownership and funding.

Longer-term challenges remain for all news sites that are primarily funded by online advertising in a world of ever increasing amounts of content competing for clicks – and the algorithmic amplification of the headlines and stories which are most engaging. This reality underpins much of the crisis of trust in news sites.

The GDI risk ratings are an attempt to address this shortfall. The need for a trustworthy, independent rating of disinformation risk is pressing. The launch of this risk-rating framework will provide crucial information to policymakers, news websites, and the ad tech industry. The end goal is to enable key decision-makers to stem the tide of money that incentivises and sustains disinformation.

In 2020, we will reassess these 30 domains and expand our index to a greater number of countries around the world. We look forward to engaging with news sites and the tech industry throughout this process.



# Annex: Methodology

## Pillar scoring

The ‘Content’ pillar produces a score based on a series of indicators reviewed by a dedicated country analyst across ten articles published by a domain.

These ten were randomly selected from a domain’s most shared articles within a two-week period, and then stripped of any information that could identify the publisher (i.e. anonymised). The indicators included in the final risk rating for the pilot are: title representativeness, author attribution, article tone, negative targeting of specific groups and/or individuals, and recent and common coverage of the topic or story among other domains.

The ‘Operations’ pillar is scored at the domain level by the same country analyst. 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 actual quality of journalism, as this pillar rates domains 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 the comments sections and the publication 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 local media experts’ 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. Moreover, experts’ perceptions are based on a site’s long-term behaviour and performance – a good complement to our ‘Content’ pillar, which is a snapshot in time. The survey captures four indicators: accuracy, clear differentiation of news and opinion articles, use of clickbait headlines, and error reporting.

Domains are placed into one of five risk categories based on their final risk score. The cutoffs for the categories are determined by combining the risk ratings for domains in all countries in 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.

The table below shows each category and its cutoffs.

**Figure A.1: Risk Levels and Categories**

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

## Data collection

The UK domains were reviewed by an expert analyst who was trained by GDI staff on our framework according to a codebook that provides detailed instructions for assessing each indicator. We also hired a second analyst to review articles from ten domains so that we could test for inter-rater reliability and ensure the quality of our data.

The survey was conducted by YouGov using a snowball sampling method, and includes approximately 100 media experts from academia, civil society, and industry. Each respondent was asked a series of questions about domains that they indicated they were familiar with but do not actively contribute to.

# Endnotes

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- 1 We define disinformation in terms of the verb ‘to disinform’: “to deliberately mislead; opposite of inform.”
- 2 Figures are estimates by the GDI as of September 2019. See: [https://disinformationindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/GDI\\_Ad-tech\\_Report\\_Screen\\_AW16.pdf](https://disinformationindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/GDI_Ad-tech_Report_Screen_AW16.pdf).
- 3 The funding for the pilot in the UK does not use any UK government funds to assess the local media market. All pilot activities are funded through other core funding sources, as disclosed on the GDI website. For additional information on GDI’s funders, please see: <https://disinformationindex.org/about/>.
- 4 See: <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/united-kingdom-2019/>.
- 5 2019 Edelman Trust Barometer reveals ‘My Employer’ is the most trusted institution. (2019, January 20). Retrieved from [www.edelman.com/news-awards/2019-edelman-trust-barometer-reveals-my-employer-most-trusted-institution](http://www.edelman.com/news-awards/2019-edelman-trust-barometer-reveals-my-employer-most-trusted-institution).
- 6 See: [www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2019-03/2019\\_Edelman\\_Trust\\_Barometer\\_Global\\_Report.pdf](http://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2019-03/2019_Edelman_Trust_Barometer_Global_Report.pdf). Also see: <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/technology/articles-reports/2019/05/07/britons-least-likely-22-nations-trust-information->.
- 7 See: [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/DNR\\_2019\\_FINAL.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/DNR_2019_FINAL.pdf).
- 8 We conducted a similar study for South Africa, and a report with those findings can be found on our website. For this pilot stage of the index, scores should not be compared between the two countries.
- 9 The findings for the UK will be updated in 2020 based on inputs on this report, its findings and another round of country level assessment of the ‘Content’ and ‘Operations’ pillars. All media sites in the sample were originally contacted in September 2019 about their assessment. Six sites in the UK responded with additional questions or queries. In November 2019, all the sites were given their individual performance findings from the pilot. As of 11 December, five sites in the UK have responded. As a result of this dialogue, some sites’ operational scores may be updated. However, this should not affect the overall market level findings.
- 10 The GDI looks forward to working with the “whole-of-industry” in this effort. There is a notable concern that there is a demand for such a risk assessment of sites which less trusted and independent actors may seek to fill.
- 11 Trust in the news has fallen over 11 percentage points since 2015 according to findings from the Reuters Institute. See: [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/DNR\\_2019\\_FINAL.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/DNR_2019_FINAL.pdf).
- 12 Overall, we find that an article’s tone is strongly correlated with other organisational policies and expert perceptions of a site’s trustworthiness.

- 13 We define clickbait as: “Sensational, outrageous or emotional headlines online that are aimed at stirring the reader’s interest to click on a story.”
- 14 Expert perceptions of a domain’s use of clickbait and their issuing of corrections are significantly correlated with our reviewers’ assessments of the related indicators, suggesting that a news site’s perceived reputation reflects the responses of the country reviewers.
- 15 Please see the Reuters Institute and its Digital News Report for the UK (2019): <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/united-kingdom-2019/>.
- 16 A total of 100 experts were surveyed in the UK. These were drawn from the media sector and included experienced journalists, senior-level media researchers, academics, executives from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and think tanks, and media industry business leaders.
- 17 This research is based on a pilot of the GDI risk rating tool. The scores are preliminary and will be updated in 2020 when the assessment is re-run.
- 18 See: <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/united-kingdom-2019/>.
- 19 See: <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/resources/articles-reports/2019/06/05/online-advertising-make-62-uk-ad-spend-2020> and <https://www.emarketer.com/content/uk-digital-ad-spending-2019>.
- 20 For additional discussion of brand safety concerns and examples of adverts, see: [https://disinformationindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/GDI\\_Ad-tech\\_Report\\_Screen\\_AW16.pdf](https://disinformationindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/GDI_Ad-tech_Report_Screen_AW16.pdf).
- 21 As part of the pilot, we intentionally included several regional outlets and domains that had been criticised for disinformation in the past in order to test how our framework would respond. We also included global sites that are used by readers in the UK and form part of the media landscape.
- 22 For more on our methodology, see the annex.
- 23 Based on our methodology, 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 an expert survey that contextualises our findings (the ‘Context’ pillar).
- 24 For example, the use of ads.txt, security protocols, and site-specific email aliases.
- 25 In the scaled-up version of the index to be released in 2020, the ‘Structure’ pillar will produce a score that will be factored into a domain’s risk rating.
- 26 Some of the difference could also be explained by the articles that were reviewed based on a random and anonymised sample of ten recent articles. This difference provides an important rationale for including expert survey responses in addition to the analysts’ review of articles.
- 27 All domains assessed by experts meet the minimum threshold of survey responses and can be considered statistically sound and representative.
- 28 This is not to say that UK domains do not publish disinformation. A few high-risk domains do score poorly on this pillar. This pillar should be interpreted as a measure of risk based on a sample of articles from a domain, and understood within the broader context of the assessment (as per how a site scores on the other pillars).
- 29 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, nor does it 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 expert perceptions on how often sites correct errors, or whether they are viewed as carrying accurate content.
- 30 For more information on the JTI, which has adopted an ISO standard for the industry, please see: <https://jti-rsf.org/en/>.
- 31 See: <https://www.cen.eu/news/workshops/Pages/WS-2019-013.aspx>.
- 32 A point of reflection is merited here. As noted above, our analyst found that websites in our sample tend to publish titles that are representative of the article. Additionally, we also found that publishing a corrections policy is the highest-scoring ‘Operations’ indicator, yet experts have a negative opinion of domains when it comes to correcting errors in practice. While this could be interpreted as a discrepancy in the pillars, the two sets of indicators are positively correlated. So, for example, an expert’s opinion of a domain’s headlines does increase as our scores increase for the title indicator (in the ‘Content’ pillar). This suggests that expert opinion does reflect the observations made by our country reviewers.



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