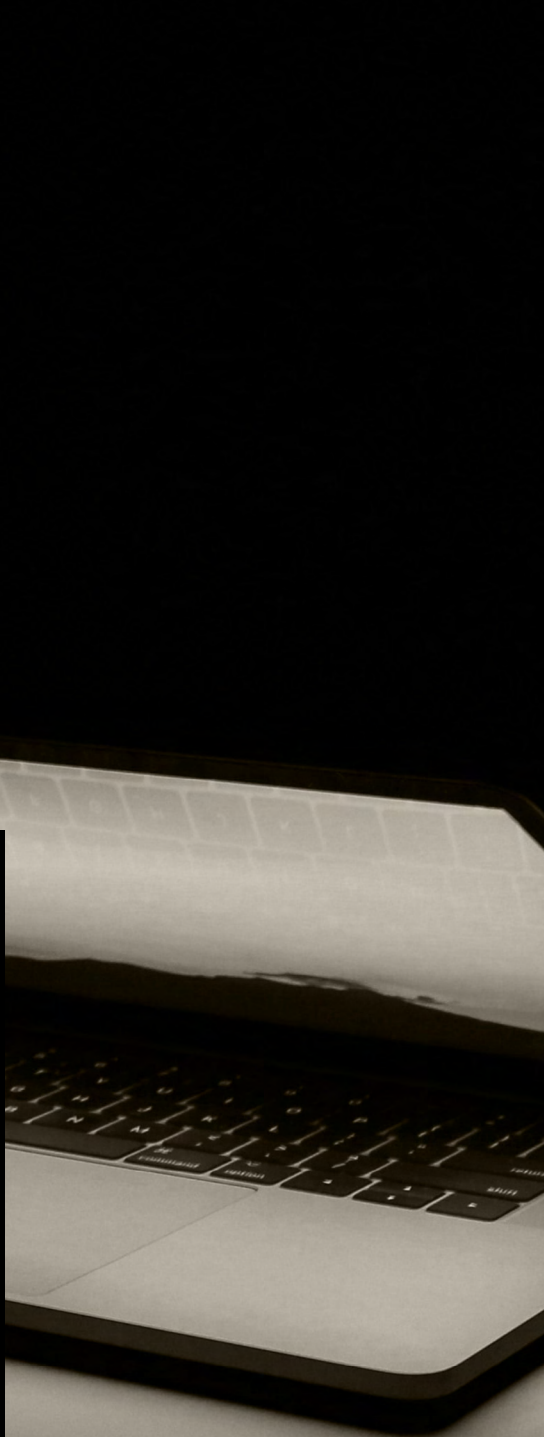




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Index

Disinformation Risk Assessment: The Online News Market in Kenya



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The Global Disinformation Index is a not-for-profit that operates on the three principles of neutrality, independence and transparency. Our vision is a world free from disinformation and its harms. Our mission is to catalyse industry and government to defund disinformation. We provide disinformation risk ratings of the world's news media sites. For more information, visit www.disinformationindex.org

Code for Africa (CfA) is the continent's largest network of civic technology and data journalism labs, with teams in 21 countries. CfA builds digital democracy solutions that give citizens unfettered access to actionable information that empowers them to make informed decisions, and that strengthens civic engagement for improved public governance and accountability. This includes building infrastructure, like the continent's largest open data portals at openAFRICA and sourceAFRICA, as well as incubating initiatives as diverse as the africanDRONE network, the PesaCheck fact-checking initiative and the sensors.AFRICA air quality sensor network. CfA also manages the African Network of Centres for Investigative Reporting (ANCIR), which gives the continent's best muckraking newsrooms the best possible forensic data tools, digital security and whistleblower encryption to help improve their ability to tackle crooked politicians, organised crime and predatory big business. CfA also runs one of Africa's largest skills development initiatives for digital journalists, and seed funds cross-border collaboration. CfA is a non-profit organisation, registered as a public benefit organisation in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa.

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Executive summary

Since the news business has expanded to the online world, transformations in news production and distribution have exposed the industry to new disinformation risks.

News websites have financial incentives to spread disinformation, in order to increase their online traffic and, ultimately, their advertising revenue. Meanwhile, the dissemination of disinformation has disruptive and impactful consequences. The COVID-19 pandemic offers a recent example. By disrupting society's shared sense of accepted facts, these narratives undermine public health, safety and government responses.

To combat ad-funded disinformation, the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) deploys its assessment framework to rate news domains' risk of disinforming their readers. These independent, trusted and neutral ratings are used by advertisers, ad tech companies, and platforms to redirect their online ad spending, in line with their brand safety and disinformation risk mitigation strategies.

GDI defines disinformation as 'adversarial narratives that create real-world harm'. The GDI risk rating provides information about a range of indicators related to the risk that a given news website will disinform its readers by spreading these adversarial narratives. These indicators are grouped under the index's **Content** and **Operations pillars**, which respectively measure the quality and reliability of a site's content and its operational and editorial integrity.¹ A site's overall risk rating is based on that site's aggregated score across all the indicators, and ranges from zero (maximum-risk level) to 100 (minimum-risk level).

The GDI risk rating methodology is not an attempt to identify and label disinformation sites or trustworthy news sites. Rather, GDI's approach is based on the idea that a combined set of indicators can reflect a site's overall risk of carrying disinformation. The ratings should be seen as offering initial insights into Kenya's media market and its overall levels of disinformation risk, along with the strengths and challenges the sites might face in mitigating disinformation risks.

The following report presents the findings pertaining to disinformation risks for the media market in Kenya based on a study of 29 news domains. These findings are the result of research led by the GDI in partnership with Code for Africa from June through September of 2021. All sites included in the report were privately informed of their individual scores and risk ratings to allow for engagement and feedback.

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

Key findings: Kenya

In reviewing the media landscape in Kenya, the GDI assessment found that:

Only four sites in our sample presented a high to maximum risk of sharing disinformation with their online users.

- Two sites presented a high risk of disinforming, and two other sites presented a maximum risk. Most of the sites in the high- to maximum-risk category scored fairly well on the **Content pillar** indicators, but quite poorly on the **Operations pillar** indicators.
- Half of the domains in this category covered content that had not been published by other reliable local media outlets, and also covered events which occurred more than 30 days prior to the publication of the articles.
- All four domains scored very low when it came to the **Attribution** of their stories, facts and media. These four domains did not clearly publish policies to **Ensure accuracy** on their websites and did not openly state their **Editorial principles and practices**. At least two domains in this category did not have any policies for regulating their comments section.

Approximately 45 percent of the domains that we analysed had a medium risk of disinforming their audiences.

- All the domains in this category performed very well on the **Content pillar**, but very poorly on the **Operations pillar** indicators.
- These domains performed very poorly in attributing their stories, facts and media, providing a comprehensive comments policy, providing pre-publication fact-checking or post-publication corrections policies and being transparent about their sources of funding, ownership structures, and editorial principles and practices.

A substantial number of domains, approximately 41 percent, presented a low to minimum risk of disinforming their online audiences.

- Eight domains had a low-risk rating, and four other domains obtained a minimum-risk rating. Although they were among the domains that had the lowest risk of disinforming their online audiences, these domains still performed poorly on the **Operations pillar**.
- More than half of the domains in this category fell short on the **Attribution** and **Ensuring accuracy** indicators.
- A majority of these domains failed to provide full details about their sources of **Funding** and **Ownership**, with only one domain providing full **Ownership** information. However, a majority of domains displayed comprehensive **Comment policies** on their websites.

The Kenyan media market: Key features and scope

Kenya's media landscape is diverse, vibrant and sophisticated, with the freedom of media guaranteed in the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 (Articles 33, 34 and 35).

Media oversight within the country is conducted by the Media Council of Kenya, established by the Media Council Act, No. 20 of 2013, with the purpose of setting media standards and ensuring compliance with those standards as set out in Article 34(5) of the Constitution.

Digital media in Kenya are in competition with radio and TV as the main source of news consumption. The radio sector is thriving – while the Economic Survey 2021 puts the total number of radio stations at 204, the Communication Authority of Kenya (CAK) data indicates there are 186 radio stations. During CAK's research between April to June 2021, the number of commercial Free-To-Air (FTA) TV stations remained unchanged at 130, with public FTA and community FTA TV stations also remaining constant at 3 and 2, respectively.²

The switchover to digital terrestrial television transmission in 2015 considerably increased the number of TV stations, while the rapid growth of mobile phones is seen to have been responsible for Kenya having one of highest internet penetration rates in Africa as of December 2020.^{3,4} While circulation of printed daily and weekly newspapers has steadily declined, data suggest that readership is moving online, as the number of daily online visitors is increasing. By 2020, the number of average online visitors stood at 3.7 million, which was a 28 percent increase compared to 2019.⁵

However, ownership of the nation's news media is highly concentrated, with six major media corporations controlling 95 percent of both the audience and advertising market share.⁶ This ownership distribution is a threat to media freedom, as most of these media owners have direct editorial influence on the work of the journalists in those

newsrooms.⁷ Additionally, some of these media houses are owned by politicians, creating real potential for journalists in those media outlets to apply self-censorship when publishing content concerning those politicians. The politicians influence not only the kind of content published, but also the revenue streams available to the media houses.⁸

Despite editorial influence, Kenyans still follow the news closely across a range of media, including broadcast and print. Statistics from the Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK) on access to media from July to September 2019 showed that radio is the most regularly accessed, followed by television, with online media and newspapers in third and fourth place, respectively.⁹ By 2021, this distribution had changed, as a digital news report by the Reuters Institute shows that a hefty 88 percent of respondents consume news online (including social media), while 73 percent get their news from television stations and 36 percent rely on newspapers for the same. Eighty-three percent of the respondents prefer to use their mobile phones to get news, while 49 percent use their computers and 9 percent use their tablets.¹⁰

However, internet access is still expensive for the majority of the Kenyan population, with internet penetration rates significantly differing across different demographic segments. According to the Alliance for Affordable Internet 2020 Affordability Drivers Index, Kenya ranked 10th out of the 34 African countries surveyed, which was an improvement over the 2019 ranking.¹¹ The improved ranking was credited to investments in international bandwidth and the improved transparency of frequency allocations. However, most rural areas in Kenya have not benefited from this high-capacity bandwidth, due to market discrepancies and weaknesses in last-mile connectivity. Internet expansion to the rural areas is expensive and requires connection to the power grid and roads, which are poorly developed in the rural areas. There is also a gender-based digital gap, as more men than women use mobile and internet services.¹² Another barrier to internet access is poverty.

Since 2016, Kenya's information technology sector has grown at an annual rate of 10.8 percent, contributing to the country's new nickname: the 'Silicon Savannah'.¹³ The findings of a report by the research firm IPSOS shows increased spending on digital ads in Kenya in 2021 compared to the same period in 2020. According to the report, ad spending grew from Ksh52.2 billion to Ksh60.3 billion (0.7 percent of GDP), representing a growth of Ksh8.1 billion in that period. The Statista Research Department estimates that Kenya's advertising spending will grow by 7 percent in 2022, and by yet another 5.9 percent in 2023.^{14,15}

Although most Kenyans are comfortable with the quality of news and information they get from the media, fake news (which 79 percent of Kenyans interviewed between 19 and 20 December 2020 said they receive from time to time), and production quality, as well as the topics, depth and accuracy of the content offered, are issues which remain pertinent in the Kenyan media landscape.¹⁶ The 2021 survey by the Reuters Institute revealed that 75 percent of respondents found it hard to differentiate between fake and real news on the internet. More than half of those surveyed between January and early February 2021 said they had come across false information about health/COVID-19 (56 percent) or about politics (63 percent).¹⁷

There have been several instances of disinformation campaigns in Kenya. These campaigns often spread narratives against the different sides of Kenya's political divide. Such cases mainly target political leaders, either promoting character assassination or exposing involvement in public scandals relating to development.¹⁸ Most recently, researchers identified at least eight disinformation campaigns aimed at Kenyan Twitter users between May and June 2021. The campaigns amplified narratives to support the constitutional review process, to discredit civil society activists opposed to the review, and to delegitimise judges perceived to be opposed to the president. The researchers found that the extent of the campaigns – over 23,000 posts distributed by 3,700 accounts – disheartened legitimate activism on Twitter.¹⁹ Fake death claims about prominent politicians and celebrities have also become very prominent on Facebook, Twitter and in tabloids.²⁰ In spite of these challenges, the Reuters Institute survey revealed that

Kenyans have relatively high trust in their media, with 61 percent saying that they trust the majority of the news.²¹ According to the survey, commercial television networks pull in big audiences for news and are highly trusted, while tabloid newspapers are the least trusted.

In 2021, Kenya ranked 102 in the World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF).²² This was a slight improvement over the 2020 Index ranking, which placed Kenya at position 103. Research done by ARTICLE 19 between 12 March and 31 August 2020 documented 48 cases of violations against journalists, including: physical assault, arrest, telephone or verbal threats, online harassment, and lack of access to public information, officials and buildings.²³ Media outlets and journalists sometimes bear the brunt of the pressure for their critical coverage that paints the president or other politicians in a bad light. For instance, four commercial TV channels were shut down at the start of 2018 for defying the president's ban on live coverage of opposition leader Raila Odinga's inauguration ceremony as the "people's president" in protest against President Uhuru Kenyatta's declaration of victory in the 2017 election. Kenyatta had won a second presidential term with 98 percent of the vote following a controversial election rerun in November, after the country's Supreme Court nullified the previous ballot, also won by Kenyatta, due to 'illegalities and irregularities'.²⁴ Journalists usually face the most abuse during election campaigns.

The results of this election were annulled, with a repeat vote scheduled for 2 months later in October 2017. Attacks against journalists continued during this time. ARTICLE 19 recorded a total of 41 cases of violations against journalists during this two-month period alone, with politics, the election, corruption and security among the top dangerous stories to report on. As a result, self-censorship by journalists and outlets was widespread ahead of the October 2017 election.²⁵

During Kenya's national election in 2017, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) documented how journalists were targeted by attacks and intimidation during the election and campaign.²⁶ Journalists also face physical attacks by security officers and the public and, on occasion, have had equipment confiscated by police or been subject to intimidation and threats from politicians.

Disinformation risk ratings

This study looks at a sample of 29 news websites in two languages, English and Kiswahili.

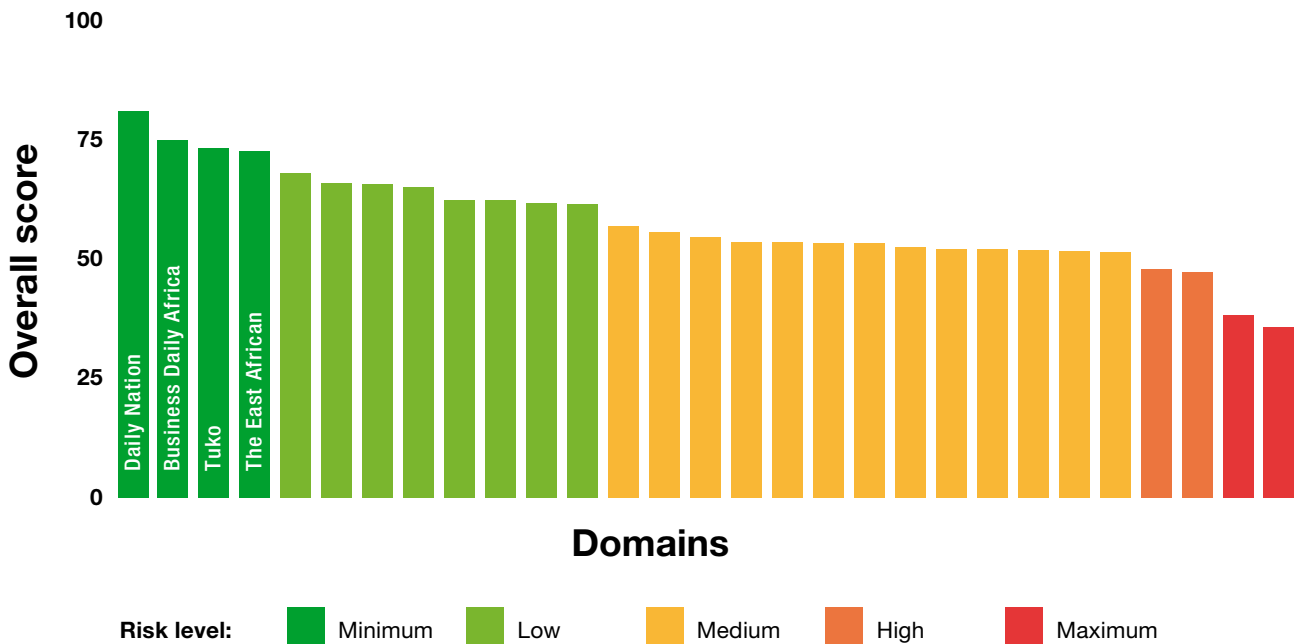
Market overview

The sample was defined based on the sites' reach (using each site's Alexa rankings, Facebook followers and Twitter followers), relevance, and the ability to gather complete data for the site.

Table 1. Media sites assessed in Kenya (in alphabetical order)

News outlet	Domain	Language
Baraka FM	www.barakafm.org	English
Bizna Kenya	www.biznakenya.com	English
Business Daily Africa	www.businessdailyafrica.com	English
Business Today	www.businesstoday.co.ke	English
Capital FM	www.capitalfm.co.ke	English
Citizen TV	www.citizentv.co.ke	English
Daily Nation	www.nation.africa	English
K24 TV	www.k24tv.co.ke	English
Kass Media Group	www.kassfm.co.ke	English
KBC	www.kbc.co.ke	English
Kenya News Agency	www.kenyanews.go.ke	English
Kenya Today	www.kenya-today.com	English
Kenyan Post	www.kenyan-post.com	English
Kenyan Wall Street	www.kenyanwallstreet.com	English
Kenyans	www.kenyans.co.ke	English
Kiss FM	www.kiss100.co.ke	English
Mpasho	www.mpasho.co.ke	English
Mwakilishi	www.mwakilishi.com	English
Nairobi Wire	www.nairobiwire.com	English
People Daily Kenya	www.pd.co.ke	English
Sauti ya Pwani	www.sautiyapwanifm.com	Kiswahili
Standard Media	www.standardmedia.co.ke	English
Taifa Leo	www.taifaleo.nation.co.ke	Kiswahili
The East African	www.theeastafrican.co.ke	English
The Elephant	www.theelephant.info	English
The Star	www.the-star.co.ke	English
Tuko	www.tuko.co.ke	English
TV47	www.tv47.co.ke	English
West FM	www.westfm.co.ke	English

Figure 1. Disinformation risk ratings by site



Only a few media sites (four) in Kenya present a high to maximum disinformation risk. Two sites received a high-risk rating, while two sites were in the maximum-risk category. The highest-risk domains within our sample consist largely of sites that scored poorly on the **Content pillar**, as they often publish articles that can be characterised as sensational and/or biased, and which may negatively target groups and individuals. They also entirely fail to meet universal standards for editorial and operational policies, scoring particularly poorly on the **Operations pillar**.

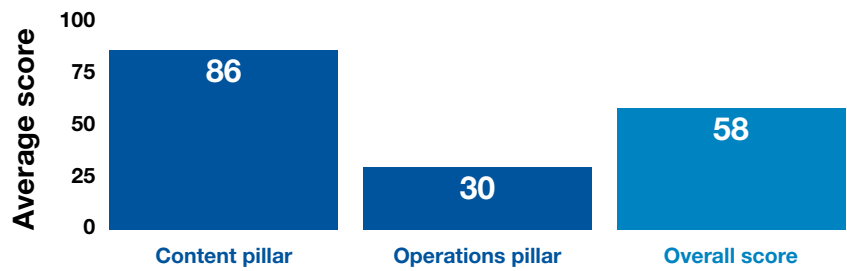
Most (13) of the sites assessed fall within the medium-risk rating. While these sites generally perform well with regards to providing reliable and unbiased content, they lack key operational policies including information on their funding sources. Such policies are associated with strong universal journalistic standards. Most of the sites that currently fall in the middle range for risks could move into a lower risk group with improvements to their site’s operational and editorial policies.

A good number (12) of the domains we analysed fell between a low to minimum disinformation-risk level, which is encouraging as it shows high content quality, as well as good levels of transparency regarding their journalistic practices.

Four of these sites achieved a minimum-risk rating. These sites perform quite well on all of the content indicators: all of the articles assessed are neutral and unbiased, carry bylines and headlines which match the story’s contents, and do not negatively target groups or individuals. The sites also have many of the key operational policies in place, including information about their funding and ownership, guidelines for user-generated content, and a statement of editorial independence; although they do lack a clear process for correcting errors.

Eight of these sites received a low-risk rating. These sites tend to perform relatively well on the content indicators, especially for having neutral content that is not sensational and that does not negatively target any specific individual or groups. However, they lack some operational transparency and editorial safeguards, including information on their sources of funding.

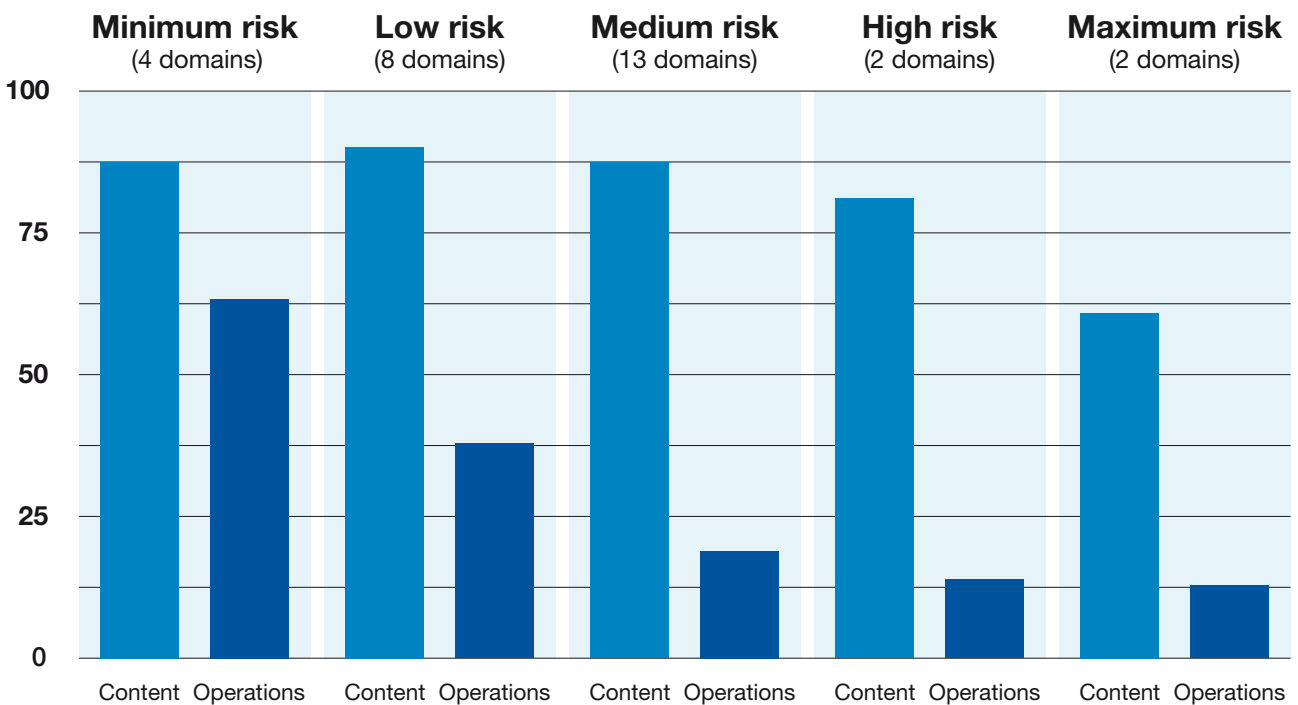
Figure 2. Overall market scores, by pillar



Overall, Kenyan media perform well on the **Content pillar** (average score of 86), but a majority of sites studied performed poorly on the **Operations pillar** (the average score is 30), suggesting that most domains could improve their overall scores by adopting the recommended operational checks and balances, or by codifying and publishing these procedures for the public to access (see Figure 2).

Key risk factors of the Kenyan websites in the **Content pillar** include failing to cover news events that have taken place within 30 days (**Recent coverage**), as well as covering articles which have not received **Common coverage** by other outlets. Within the **Operations pillar**, most domains have shown a lack of transparency when it comes to **Attribution**, displaying **Comment policies**, and declaring their source of **Funding** and **Ownership**. A good number of domains also do not openly display the editorial guidelines or policies they use to ensure their content is accurate.

Figure 3. Average pillar scores by risk rating level

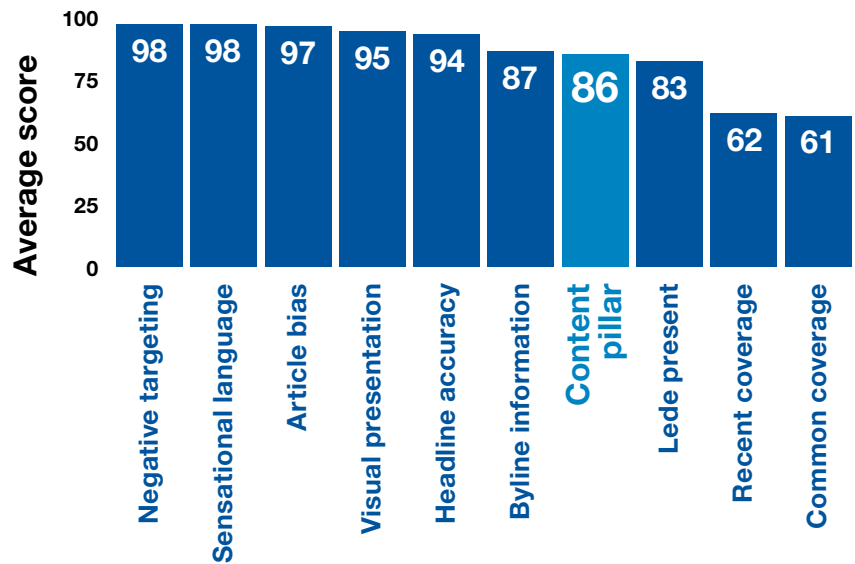


Pillar overview

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 (1) the most frequently shared pieces of content during the data collection period; and (2) articles on topics that are likely to polarise and carry disinformation. All article scores are based on a scale of zero (worst) to 100 (best), as assessed by the country reviewers.

Figure 4. Average Content pillar scores by indicator

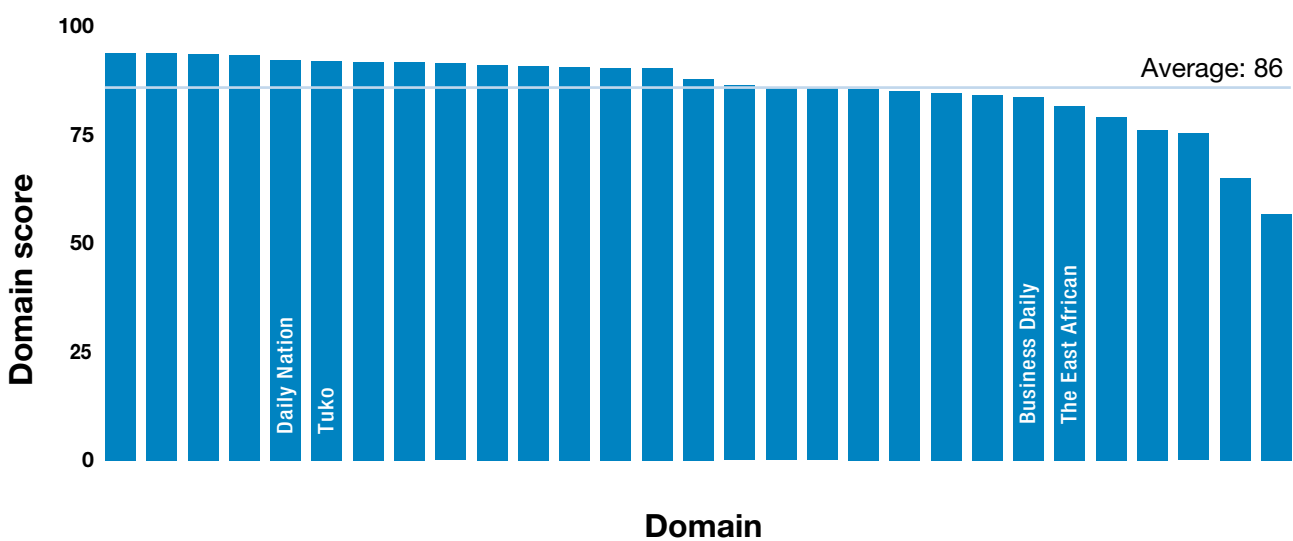


Most of the domains that we analysed performed very well on the **Content pillar**, with scores ranging from 57 (lowest) to 94 (highest), resulting in an average **Content pillar** score of 86. Fourteen domains scored between 90 and 94, while 10 domains achieved scores between 82 and 88. Only three domains had scores ranging from 75 to 79; one domain scored 65, and another 57. Sites achieved their high scores based on: headlines that accurately described the main content of the stories (**Headline accuracy**), the presence of bylines (**Byline information**), the avoidance of negatively targeting individuals or groups (**Negative targeting**), neutral, non-sensational and fact-based writing (**Sensational language** and **Article bias**), as well as neutral article presentation (**Visual presentation**).

Specifically, 23 domains did not negatively target any individual or group. The remaining six domains had very few stories that negatively targeted some individuals or groups. A majority of domains (17) did not contain any sensational or biased language in their articles, while the remaining domains published very few articles with sensational or biased coverage. Moreover, a majority of the headlines reviewed conveyed the most relevant points of the articles in our sample correctly and succinctly, giving readers a good indication of what to expect in the article text. Regarding the visual presentation of articles on the domain, 10 domains did not use any sensationalising elements, while the remaining 19 domains had very few stories with sensationalising elements in the presentation. Overall, these scores demonstrate that Kenyan domains publish neutral, accurate and unbiased content. All articles published by 28 of the reviewed domains contained at least partial **Byline information**, with 10 domains publishing full authorship information in the byline, showing that a majority of Kenyan domains value the attribution of stories and the transparency gained from this process, but that there is space for improvement on this indicator.

Domains generally performed poorly on the **Common coverage** and **Recent coverage** indicators, as numerous articles published were not covered by other domains or did not cover events which occurred within 30 days of the article publication. The score on the latter indicator suggests that some domains in Kenya occasionally recycle old content – a potential disinformation risk, since when presented out of context, such outdated content may be used to promote a particular viewpoint or political agenda. Moreover, many of the examined articles did not include a valid, fact-based lede, which should be used to provide readers with a clear and neutral overview of the relevant facts covered in the article.

Figure 5. 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 pillar** looks at whether relevant policies are in place and made transparent to the public. It is not able to measure how well the policies are being implemented.

With an average **Operations pillar** score of 30, Kenyan domains have substantial space for making their operational principles and practices more transparent. Overall, the sites reviewed scored low on the **Operations pillar** as a result of multiple factors. Domains performed particularly poorly on the **Ensuring accuracy** indicator, with an average score of 11, and **Attribution**, with an average score of 18. These scores imply that a vast majority of sites lack pre- and post-publication fact-checking policies, as well as policies for ensuring that facts, stories and general media are appropriately sourced. Such policies are essential to increase the credibility of domains and the trustworthiness of the information published. Additionally, domains in Kenya largely lack information about **Funding** and **Ownership** information which helps to monitor the incentives and conflicts of interest that can arise from opaque ownership structures. Domains performed better on the **Editorial principles and practices** and the **Comment policies** indicators. However, these indicator scores, both under 50, can both also be substantially improved and thus aid readers with assurances that the information published on the domain is subject to a strict and enforced set of guidelines which ensure editorial quality, and that the comment sections of domains are properly moderated as needed.

All 29 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) launched and operated by Reporters without Borders.²⁷ As the JTI points out, 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.

Figure 6. Average Operations pillar scores by indicator

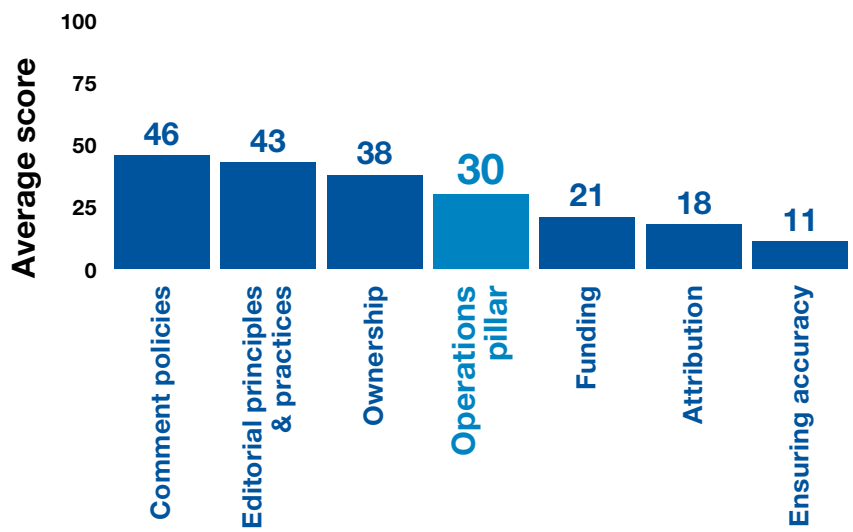
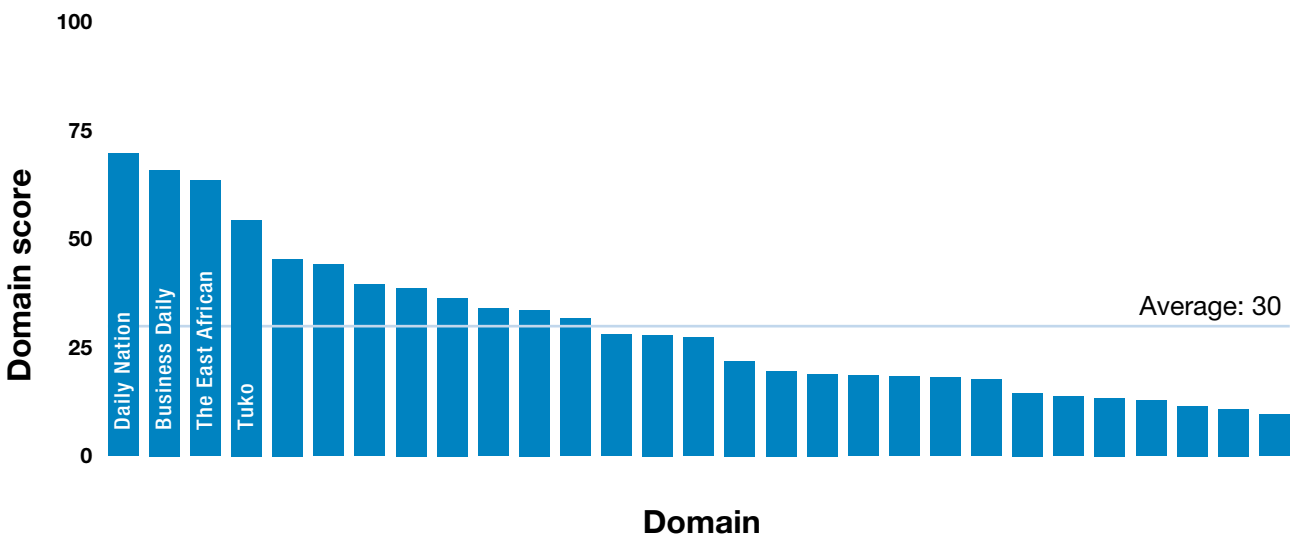


Figure 7. Operations pillar scores by site



Conclusion

Our assessment of the disinformation risk of news sites in Kenya finds a fairly neutral range of risks.

While 86 percent of the sites sampled show minimum- to medium-risk levels, four sites fall in the high- to maximum-risk range. Kenya's media sites typically demonstrate low risk in our framework when it comes to indicators that assess the reliability and quality of content. Still, the overall ratings of these domains are negatively impacted by operational shortcomings, especially around transparency of information about a site's true or beneficial owners, its sources of funding and other operational and editorial policies.

News sites in Kenya can address these shortcomings by taking actions such as:

- Focus on adopting journalistic and operational standards like those set by the Journalism Trust Initiative that make transparent information about overall policies of the site.
- Publish a statement of editorial independence, guidelines for ensuring accuracy and attribution in reporting, and policies for user-generated comments.
- Clearly publish their sources of funding, as well as ownership information. This information helps to build trust in the site and dispel doubts about site funding and conflicts of interests in the content publication.
- Ensure that bylines are published. Publishing the identity of the author or a policy as to why this information was withheld is an easy way to ensure transparency and accountability.
- Ensure that every story includes a fact-based lede that immediately gives the reader a good sense of the overall story.
- Refrain from publishing news articles that have not been published by other reliable local media outlets or which cover outdated events, or ensure that relevant primary sources are quoted when doing so.

Appendix: Methodology

The Global Disinformation Index evaluates the level of disinformation risk in a country's online media market. The country's online media market is represented by a sample of approximately 30 to 35 news domains that are selected on the basis of their Alexa rankings, their number of social media followers, and the expertise of local researchers. The resulting sample features major national news sites with high levels of online engagement, news sites that reflect the regional, linguistic and cultural composition of the country, and news sites that influence ideas among local decision-makers, groups or actors.

The index is composed of the **Content** and **Operations pillars**. The pillars are, in turn, composed of several indicators. The **Content pillar** includes indicators that assess elements and characteristics of each domain's content, in order to capture its level of credibility, sensationalism, and impartiality. The **Operations pillar** indicators evaluate the policies and rules that a specific domain establishes to ensure the reliability and quality of the news being published. These policies concern, for instance, conflicts of interest, accurate reporting and accountability.

Each of GDI's media market risk assessments is conducted in collaboration with a local team of media and disinformation experts who develop the media list for the market sample, contribute to the sampling frame for the content included in the **Content pillar** review, conduct the data collection for the **Content** and **Operations pillars**, vet and interpret the index results, and draft the market report.

Site selection

The market sample for the study is developed based on a mix of quantitative and qualitative criteria. GDI begins by creating a list of the 50 news websites with the greatest traffic in the media market. This list is provided to the country research team, along with data on the number of Facebook and Twitter followers for each site,

to gauge relevance and reach. The local research team then reduces the list, in this case 29 sites, ensuring that the sample provides adequate geographic, linguistic and political coverage to capture the major media discourses in the market. International news outlets are generally excluded, because their risk ratings are assessed in the market from which they originate.²⁸ News aggregators are also excluded, so that all included sites are assessed on their original content. The final media market sample reflects the complete set of approximately 30 to 35 sites for which complete data could be collected throughout the review process.

Global Disinformation Index Technical Advisory Group

GDI's risk assessment framework is developed with the advice and support of a technical advisory group (TAG), including:

- Ben Nimmo (Facebook)
- Camille François (Niantic)
- Miguel Martinez (co-founder and chief data scientist, Signal AI)
- Nic Newman (Reuters Institute of Journalism)
- Olaf Steenfadt (Reporters without Borders)
- Cristina Tardáguila (Lupa)
- Amy Mitchell (Pew Research)
- Scott Hale (Meedan and Credibility Coalition)
- Finn Heinrich (OSF), and
- Laura Zommer (Chequeado)

Data collection

The content indicators are based on the review of a sample of ten articles published by each domain. Five of these articles are randomly selected from a domain's most frequently shared articles on Facebook within a two-week period. The remaining five articles are randomly selected from a group of a domain's articles which cover topics that are likely to carry disinformation narratives. The topics, and the associated set of keywords used to identify them, are jointly developed by GDI and the in-country research team. Each country team contributes narrative topics and the keywords used to identify them in the local media discourse to GDI's global topic classifier list, developed by GDI's data science and intelligence teams. Country teams also manually verify the machine translation of the entire topic list in the relevant study languages.

The sampled articles are anonymised by stripping them of any information that allows the analysts to identify the publisher or the author of the articles. The anonymised content is reviewed by two country analysts who are trained on the GDI codebook. For each anonymised article, the country analysts answer a set of 13 questions designed to evaluate the elements and characteristics of the article and its headline, in terms of bias, sensationalism and negative targeting. The analysts subsequently review how the article is presented on the domain and the extent to which the domain provides information on the author's byline and timeline. While performing the **Content pillar** reviews, the analysts are required to provide a thorough explanation and gather evidence to support their decisions.

The **Operations pillar** is based on the information gathered during the manual assessment of each domain performed by the country analysts. The country analysts answer a set of 98 questions designed to evaluate each domain's ownership, management and funding structure, editorial independence, principles and guidelines, attribution policies, error-correction and fact-checking policies, and comments section rules and policies. The analysts gather evidence to support their assessments as they perform each **Operations pillar** review.

Data analysis and indicator construction

The data gathered by the country analysts for the **Content pillar** are used to compute nine indicators. The **Content pillar** indicators included in the final risk rating are: **Article bias**, **Byline information**, **Common coverage**, **Headline accuracy**, **Lede present**, **Negative targeting**, **Recent coverage**, **Sensational language**, and **Visual presentation**. For each indicator, values are normalised to a scale of zero to 100. The domain-level score for each indicator in this pillar is the average score obtained across the ten articles. The pillar score for each domain is the average of all the scores for all of the pillar's indicators, and ranges from zero to 100.

For the **Operations pillar**, the answers of the country analysts are translated into a set of sub-indicators. The six indicators are calculated as the averages of these sub-indicator scores. The resulting **Operations pillar** indicators are: **Attribution**, **Comment policies**, **Editorial principles and practices**, **Ensuring Accuracy**, **Funding**, and **Ownership**. For each indicator, values are normalised to a scale of zero to 100. The domain score for the **Operations pillar** is the average score across indicators.

Table 2. Global Disinformation Index pillars and indicators

Pillar	Indicator	Sub-indicators	Unit of analysis	Definition	Rationale
Content	Headline accuracy	None	Article	Rating for how accurately the story's headline describes the content of the story	Indicative of clickbait
	Byline information			Rating for how much information is provided in the article's byline	Attribution of stories creates accountability for their veracity
	Lede present			Rating for whether the article begins with a fact-based lede	Indicative of fact-based reporting and high journalistic standards
	Common coverage			Rating for whether the same event has been covered by at least one other reliable local media outlet	Indicative of a true and significant event
	Recent coverage			Rating for whether the story covers a news event or development that occurred within 30 days prior to the article's publication date	Indicative of a newsworthy event, rather than one which has been taken out of context
	Negative targeting			Rating for whether the story negatively targets a specific individual or group	Indicative of hate speech, bias or an adversarial narrative
	Article bias			Rating for the degree of bias in the article	Indicative of neutral, fact-based reporting or well-rounded analysis
	Sensational language			Rating for the degree of sensationalism in the article	Indicative of neutral, fact-based reporting or well-rounded analysis
	Visual presentation			Rating for the degree of sensationalism in the visual presentation of the article	Indicative of neutral, fact-based reporting or well-rounded analysis
Operations	Attribution	None	Domain	Rating for the number of policies and practices identified on the site	Assesses policies regarding the attribution of stories, facts and media (either publicly or anonymously); indicative of policies that ensure accurate facts, authentic media and accountability for stories
	Comment policies	Policies		Rating for the number of policies identified on the site	Assesses policies to reduce disinformation in user-generated content
		Moderation		Rating for the mechanisms to enforce comment policies identified on the site	Assesses the mechanism to enforce policies to reduce disinformation in user-generated content
	Editorial principles and practices	Editorial independence		Rating for the number of policies identified on the site	Assesses the degree of editorial independence and the policies in place to mitigate conflicts of interest
		Adherence to narrative		Rating for the degree to which the site is likely to adhere to an ideological affiliation, based on its published editorial positions	Indicative of politicised or ideological editorial decision-making
		Content guidelines		Rating for the number of policies identified on the site	Assesses the policies in place to ensure that factual information is reported without bias
	Ensuring accuracy	News vs. analysis		Rating for the number of policies and practices identified on the site	Assesses the policies in place to ensure that readers can distinguish between news and opinion content
		Pre-publication fact-checking		Rating for the number of policies and practices identified on the site	Assesses policies to ensure that only accurate information is reported
	Funding	Post-publication corrections		Rating for the number of policies and practices identified on the site	Assesses policies to ensure that needed corrections are adequately and transparently disseminated
		Diversified incentive structure		Rating for the number of revenue sources identified on the site	Indicative of possible conflicts of interest stemming from over-reliance on one or few sources of revenue
		Accountability to readership		Rating based on whether reader subscriptions or donations are identified as a revenue source	Indicative of accountability for high-quality information over content that drives ad revenue
	Ownership	Transparent funding		Rating based on the degree of transparency the site provide regarding its sources of funding	Indicative of the transparency that is required to monitor the incentives and conflicts of interest that can arise from opaque revenue sources
		Owner-operator division		Rating based on the number of distinct executive or board level financial and editorial decision-makers listed on the site	Indicative of a separation between financial and editorial decision making, to avoid conflicts of interest
	Transparent ownership	Rating based on the degree of transparency the site provides regarding its ownership structure	Indicative of the transparency that is required to monitor the incentives and conflicts of interest that can arise from opaque ownership structures		

Risk ratings

The overall index score for each domain is the average of the pillar scores. The domains are then classified on the basis of a five-category risk scale based on the overall index score. The risk categories were defined based on the distribution of risk ratings from 180 sites across six media markets in September 2020.

This cross-country dataset was standardised to fit a normal distribution with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. The standardised scores and their distance from the mean were used to determine the bands for each risk level, given in Table 3. These bands are then used to categorise the risk levels for sites in each subsequent media market analysis

Table 3. Disinformation risk levels

Risk level	Lower limit	Upper limit	Standard deviation
Minimum risk	69.12	100	> 1.5
Low risk	59.81	69.11	> 0.5 and ≤ 1.5
Medium risk	50.5	59.8	> -0.5 and ≤ 0.5
High risk	41.2	50.49	≥ -1.5 and ≤ -0.5
Maximum risk	0	41.19	< -1.5

Endnotes

- 1 The GDI assessment framework is outlined in the annex of this report.
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- 27 For more information on the JTI, which has adopted an ISO standard for the industry, please see:
<https://jti-rsf.org/en/>.
- 28 In select cases, international news outlets may be included in a study if the domestic market is small, the sites are considered highly relevant, the content on the site is specific to the market assessed, and GDI has not developed a risk rating for that site elsewhere.



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