GDI

Global
Disinformation
Index

Media Market Risk Ratings: South Africa

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

GDI Global Disinformation Index

CODE for AFRICA

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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 South Africa. In total we assessed 35 sites. The country was chosen because of its diverse and respected media market, its sizeable advertising market, and its challenges with misinformation and disinformation in the past.

Figure 1. Media sites assessed in South Africa (in alphabetical order)

1. www.blackopinion.co.za	13. www.livereport.co.za	25. www.sa-news.com
2. www.businessinsider.co.za	14. www.lowvelder.co.za	26. www.sabcnews.com
3. www.businesslive.co.za	15. www.mg.co.za	27. www.sanews247.blogspot.com
4. www.citizen.co.za	16. www.moneyweb.co.za	28. www.sauncut.co.za
5. city-press.news24.com	17. www.mybroadband.co.za	29. www.thesouthafrican.com
6. www.dailymaverick.co.za	18. www.netwerk24.com	30. www.southafricatoday.net
7. www.dailysun.co.za	19. www.news24.com	31. www.southcoastherald.co.za
8. www.enca.com	20. www.newslitesa.com	32. www.sowetanlive.co.za
9. www.ewn.co.za	21. www.newsoweto.co.za*	33. www.techcentral.co.za
10. www.fin24.com	22. www.nuus.net	34. www.timeslive.co.za
11. www.heraldlive.co.za	23. www.politicsweb.co.za	35. www.zululandobserver.co.za
12. www.iol.co.za	24. www.roodepoortrecord.co.za	

*Note: Site is no longer active.

Introduction

The harms of disinformation[1] are proliferating around the globe – threatening our elections, our health, and our shared sense of accepted facts.

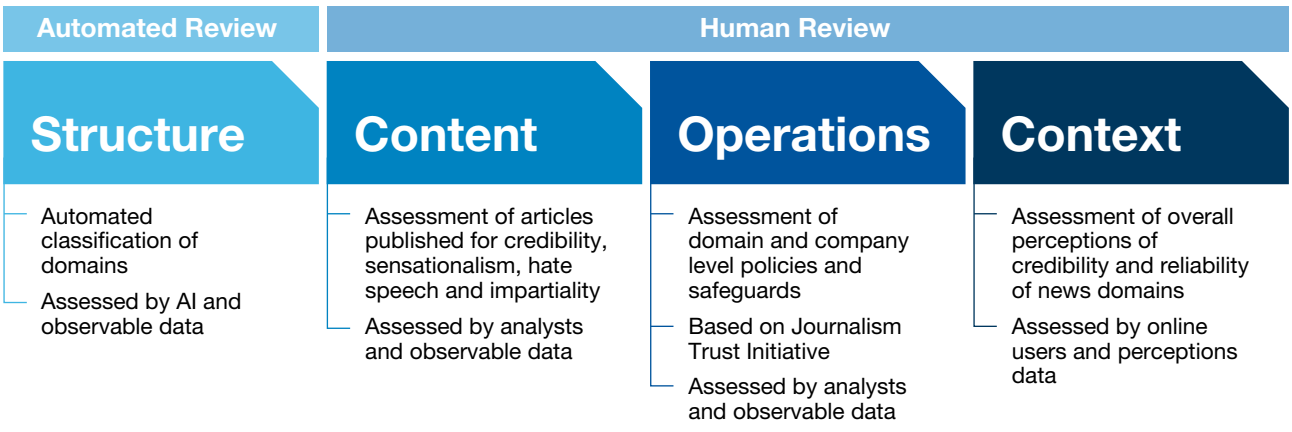
The infodemic laid bare by COVID-19 conspiracy theories clearly shows that disinformation costs peoples' lives. Websites masquerading as news outlets are driving and profiting financially from the situation.

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.[2]

The GDI risk rating provides advertisers, ad tech companies and platforms with greater information about a range of disinformation flags related to a site's structure (i.e. metadata and lexical features),[3] 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.[4]

A site's disinformation risk level is based on that site's aggregated score across all of the reviewed pillars and indicators.[5] 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 South Africa, based on a study of 35 news domains.[6] The data provide an initial snapshot of the overall strengths and challenges that these sites face to mitigate disinformation risks.[7]

All of these findings come from the research led by the GDI in collaboration with Code for Africa between March and October 2020. The market analysis is based on 15 disinformation flags that were assessed by Code for Africa and by an independent perceptions survey.[8]

This report presents the average scores for the market sample. Sites that are rated as minimum-risk sites and/or score over 95 on any of the three pillars are named and profiled in the report.[9]

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 South African 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. (The annex of this report outlines the assessment framework).[10] We look forward to this engagement.

Key Findings: South Africa

In reviewing the media landscape for South Africa, GDI's assessment found that:

Half the sites assessed in this sample present low to minimum levels of disinformation risk.

- Half of the sites assessed in South Africa scored a minimum or low risk; this is the largest share of the seven countries which GDI has assessed in 2020.[11]
- Three sites – fin24.com, news24.com and sabcnews.com – were rated as having a 'minimum' disinformation risk. They had near perfect scores in terms of content, and operational checks and balances. Fin24.com and news24.com belong to the same media company, but other sites belonging to the same group did not score as highly.
- Fifteen sites were rated with a 'low' level of disinformation risk. These sites also score well overall for publishing non-sensational content, but they lack a few of the operational checks and balances that are considered critical for running an independent and accountable newsroom.

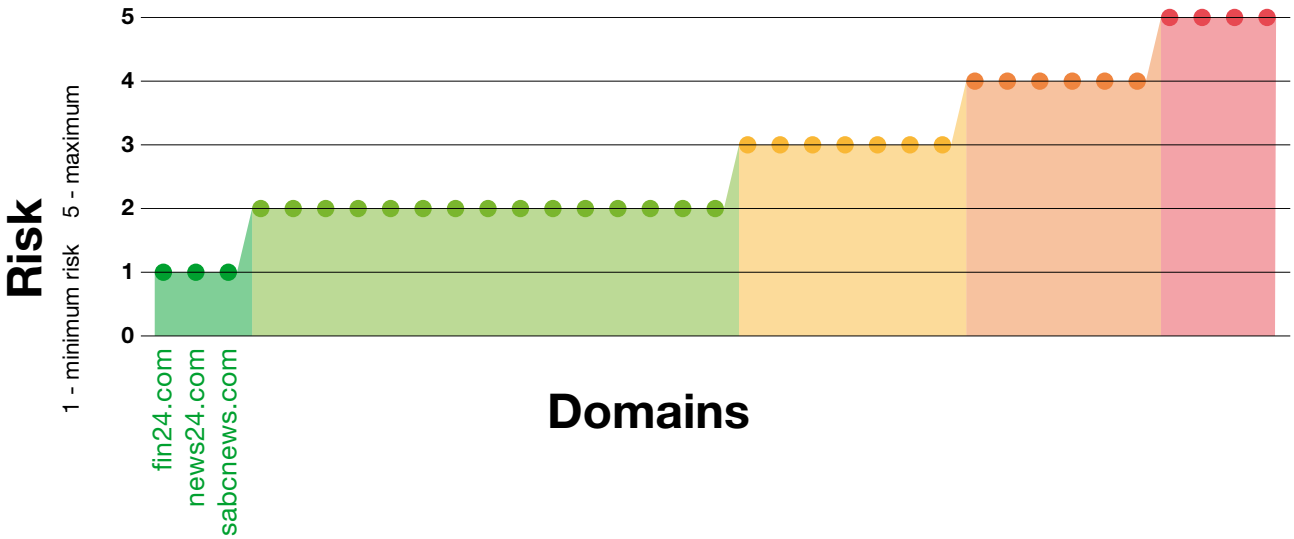
However, much of the rest of the market sample in South Africa presents high risks.

- Six sites received a high disinformation risk rating, while four sites had a maximum risk rating. This group includes sites that are published in English and Afrikaans.
- Eight sites in the sample have no operational information at all and more than half the sites are missing key editorial independence and corrections policies.
- Many of these sites publish biased content, thus creating an opportunity to manipulate their audience.
- These same sites publish stories not covered by other outlets—at times as exclusive investigative stories or in community-specific context—and publish in Afrikaans, with the potential to create informational asymmetries for certain groups in the country.

Operational shortfalls cut across a range of newsroom checks and balances and are reflected in the site content assessed.

- Nearly half of the sample did not publish any transparent information about their owners (14 sites) or their sources of funding and revenue (17 sites). Transparency about a newsroom's operations can be a key mechanism for building online user trust in news sites by dispelling any concerns about conflicts of interest or shadow owners.
- The lack of key operational policies in place, such as on banning hate speech and harassment in site content, was highly correlated with sites that were assessed as producing more sensational content, clickbait headlines and stories that negatively targeted groups.[12]
- Similar relationships between a site's operational integrity and the reliability of a site's content emerge from the findings, particularly when sites in the sample were found to have clear correction policies and processes as well as statements of editorial independence.
- The market findings suggest that most news sites could lower their overall risk ratings by addressing these operational shortfalls.

Figure 3. Disinformation risk ratings by site



The South African media market: Key features and scope

South Africa's news consumption is mostly dominated by the internet, with the majority of users accessing news on smartphones. According to the Reuters Institute,[13] the percentage of South Africans who access news online remained at 90 percent from 2019 to 2020, and this still outranks TV (68 percent) and print (37 percent).

The report also shows an increase of four percentage points in 2020 for YouTube as a news source, which now stands at 39 percent. This shift to YouTube raises further concerns about news consumption and information bubbles in South Africa, due to well-documented critiques of the platform's algorithmic biases.[14]

The market for online news in South Africa is dominated by News24 and SABC. Based on the most recent survey, the number of South Africans who said they accessed these two online sources in the seven days prior to responding to the survey is 70 percent and 45 percent, respectively.[15] News24, which is the country's largest news site, launched a 'freemium' paywall, which presents breaking news to users for free, but makes longer investigative stories and premium content available only to subscribers.[16]

In South Africa's media landscape, a key change between 2019 and 2020 has been the continual decline in trust in news sources and the media. Research shows that those surveyed are concerned about political and business interference in media, which is reflected in a decrease in their overall trust in news sources (48 percent).[17] The same study documents an increase in the percentage of people in South Africa who have overall distrust in the media (40 percent) and the news they see on social media (43 percent).[18]

Rising levels of distrust partly reflect an apparent worsening in the disinformation landscape in South Africa. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the opportunity for sites to provide misleading articles. One study, by the Atlantic Council's DFRLab, exposed a network of sites exploiting racial tensions and disinformation, and consequently generating ad revenue for the owner through increasing numbers of clicks on the sites.[19] Two websites that were part of the sample for this research have since shut down and had been ranked as maximum-risk news sites.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also forced changes on established media and publishers. The South African market showed consolidation, with the trigger being the COVID-19 crisis on top of years of declining revenue. A number of magazine titles shut down in 2020, partly as the result of a noted publishing company, Associated Media Publishing, closing its doors.[20]

In South Africa and globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on ad revenues for media companies, with most media outlets surveyed expecting flat or declining revenues.[21] This has occurred even as there has been an increase in audience growth over the same period – with an estimated increase in online news readers in South Africa of up to 76 percent.[22] While the figures for South Africa's advertising spend in 2020 are not yet available, figures are expected to fall or stay flat as ad spending is directed onto different digital platforms and advertisers work to contain costs.[23] This comes on the back of an overall increase in digital ad spend, which is expected to continue to take an increasing share of the South African ad market in 2020. Online advertising has risen from 9.2 percent in 2016 to 13.1 percent in 2019, according to sector experts, and is a multi-billion rand industry.[24] For example, in 2018, nearly R5 billion (US$3.5 million) was spent on digital display adverts, an increase of more than 24 percent over the previous year.[25] In South Africa, this combination of a robust

demand for online news and a growing market for ad monies provides opportunities to direct more online ad revenues to trustworthy news sites—but it also offers increased incentives for actors trying to make money from the clicks generated by disinformation.

The South African media market as defined in this study is based on a list of 35 news sites, which included well-known national outlets, tabloids, regional newspapers, and blogs, 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.

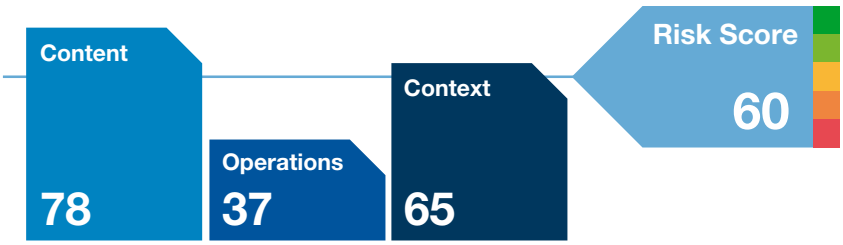
Disinformation risk ratings

The findings for South African media sites show a moderate distribution when it comes to disinformation risks.

Market overview

At the same time, one fifth of the sites were assessed with a medium risk rating. It is this group of sites which often have the greatest likelihood of reducing their risks going forward. Overall, many of the risk factors in South Africa are related to operational and editorial checks and balances, such as a lack of transparency on corrections policies as well as declarations of editorial independence. (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Overall market scores, by pillar



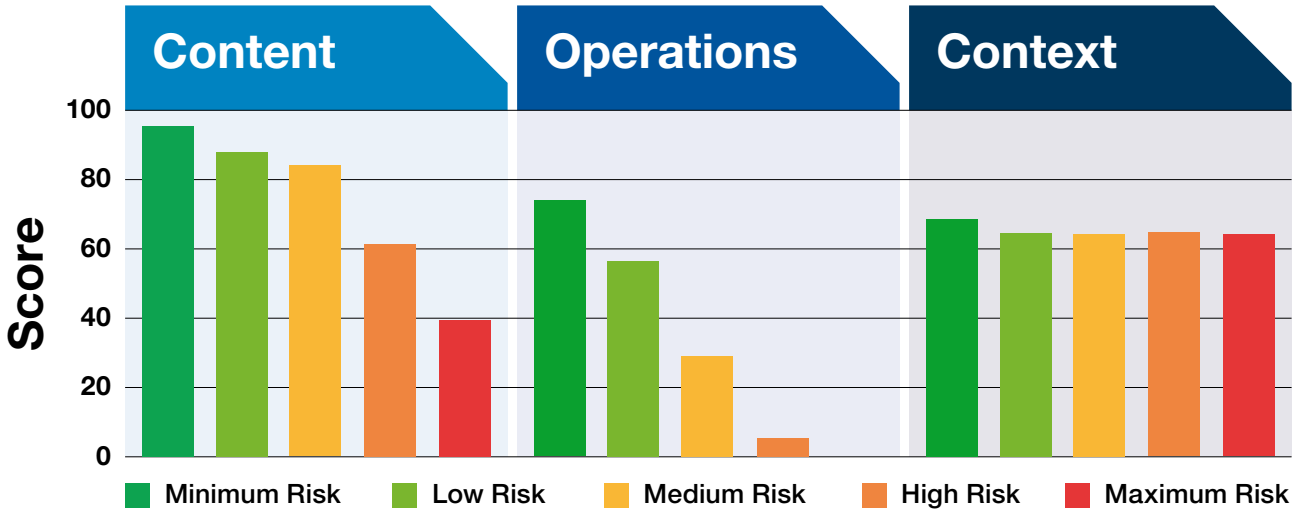
Three sites received a minimum-risk rating: sabcnews.com, news24.com and fin24.com. The sites perform well on all of the content flags: the majority of the articles assessed are neutral and unbiased, carry bylines, use headlines that match the stories' content, and do not negatively target groups or individuals. All three sites have most of the key operational policies in place, including information about funding and ownership and a statement of editorial independence (although they do lack a clear process for correcting

errors). Also, online users perceive these sites to be a fairly accurate source of news. News24.com and fin24.com, which are owned by the same parent company, Media24, lead the group in terms of guidelines for user-generated content. However, the other Media24 sites in our sample—Business Insider, CityPress, Daily Sun, Netwerk24—do not fall into this minimum risk category.

There are 15 sites in South Africa that were rated as low-risk sites. These sites – mostly in English and one in Afrikaans – tend to perform relatively well on the content indicators, especially for having neutral and non-sensational content that generally avoids inappropriately targeting any specific individual or groups. They are also perceived to be fairly well trusted by online users. However, nearly half the sites lacked clear revenue source information. Most sites in the low-risk category have ownership information, but do not have robust corrections policies and processes.

Seven assessed sites received a medium-risk rating. While these sites generally perform well on providing reliable and unbiased content, they lack a variety of operational policies, including information on their funding sources, corrections policies and declarations of independence. Such policies are associated with strong universal journalistic standards. These journalistic standards have been set by the Journalism Trust initiative (JTI).[26] 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.

Figure 5. Average pillar score by risk rating level



The ten remaining sites received a high- or maximum-risk rating. Six sites received a high-risk rating, while four sites were in the maximum-risk category. The highest-risk domains within our sample consist largely of sites that score poorly on the credibility of their content. They often publish articles that are sensational and/or biased, and that negatively target groups and individuals. They also entirely fail to meet universal standards for editorial and operational policies (see Figure 5). The maximum risk sites scored zero on the entire Operations pillar. Critically, they failed to have any of the information or policies called for by the JTI.

Pillar Overview

CONTENT PILLAR

The Content pillar focuses on the reliability of the content provided on the site, 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.

Comparing the 2019 data with the 2020 set, the research indicates a decrease in the content pillar scores among a number of sites. Previously the sites' pillar scores differed only marginally, with one maximum-risk site scoring much lower than the rest. In 2020, the scores are a lot more varied—ranging between 28 and 90—with the two top performing sites from 2019 losing points this year.

Figure 6. Average Content pillar scores by indicator

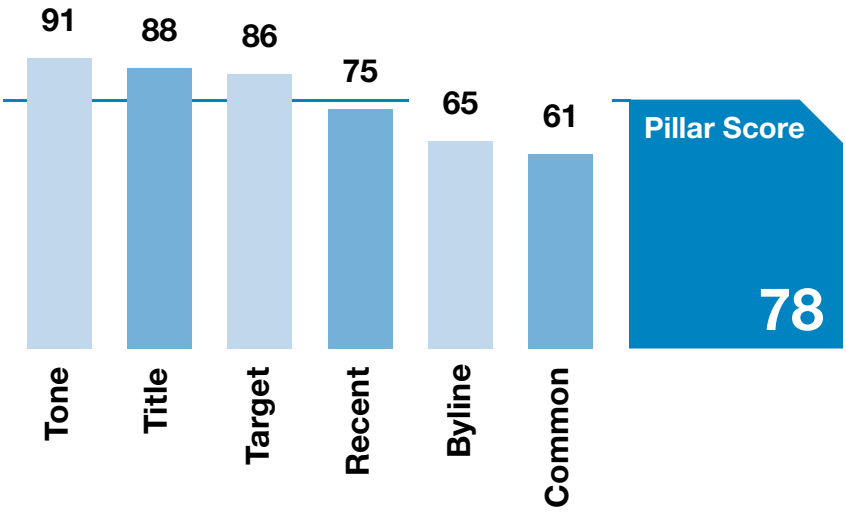
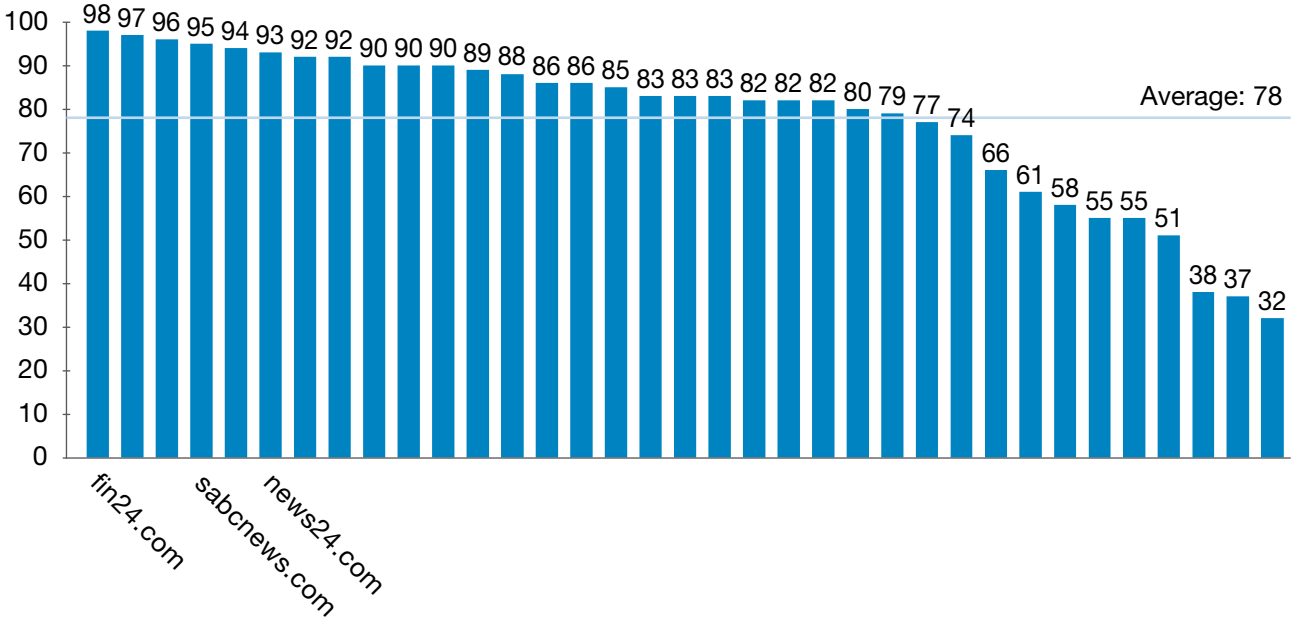


Figure 7. Content pillar scores by site

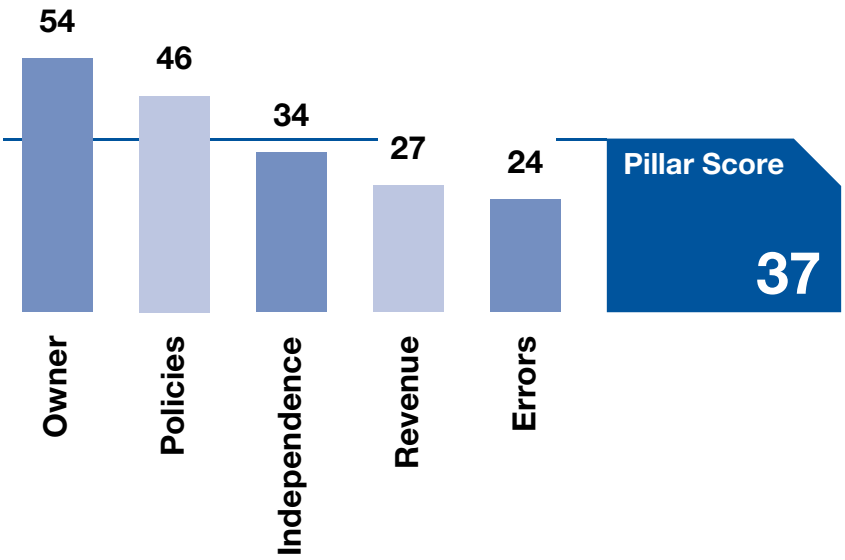


OPERATIONS PILLAR

The Operations pillar assesses the operational and editorial integrity of a news site, based on how transparent its policies are. 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.[27] Many sites in our sample did not make the information easy to find – either through site pages or with links to external sites. Only 12 out of the 35 sites visibly declared their editorial independence and only two offered clear corrections policies. The way in which Media24 titles, for instance, have taken to publishing a link to the South African Press Code and even publishing it on their websites helps to publicly demonstrate their editorial independence and accountability procedures. This is a model that could be used by other media sites which are signatories to the press code. Ensuring that all of this information is accessible in one place on the site helps online users to easily find key operational information, which can be used to (re)build reader trust in the impartiality and trustworthiness of a news site.

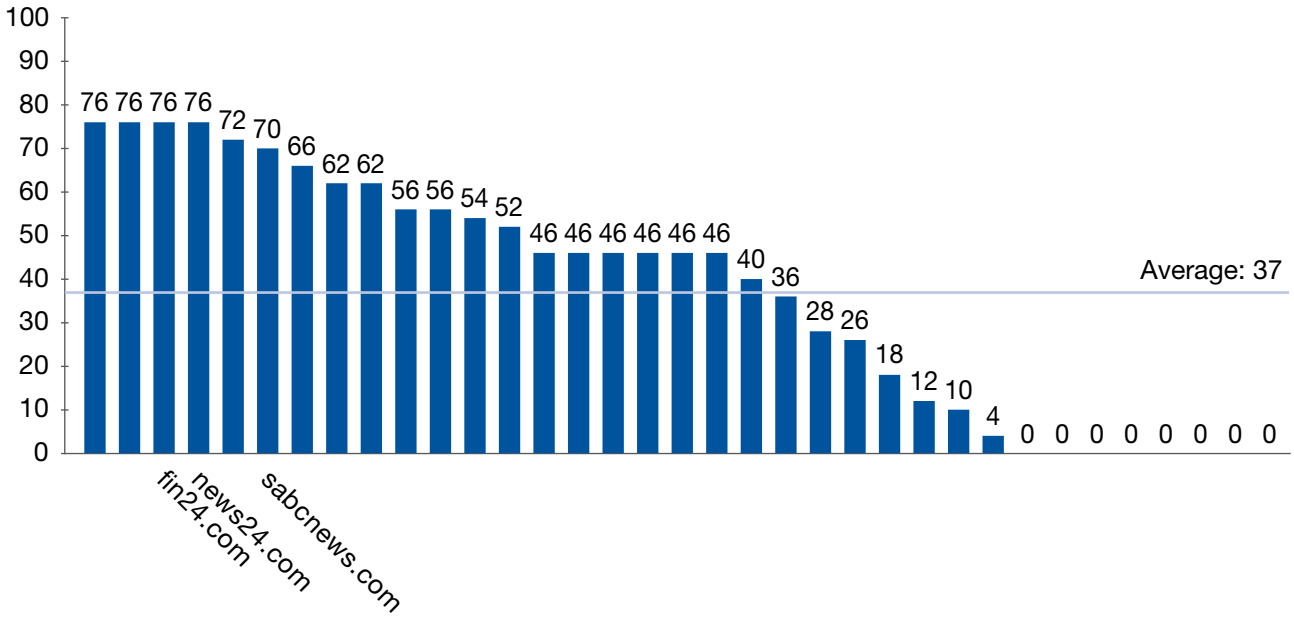
Transparent operations and editorial checks and balances are seen to have a significant and positive impact on the type of content that sites carry. Our findings show that the lack of key operational policies in place, such as on banning hate speech and harassment in site content, was highly correlated with sites that were assessed as producing more sensational content, clickbait headlines and stories that negatively targeted groups.[28] Similar relationships between a site's operational integrity and the reliability of a site's content emerge from the findings, particularly when sites in the sample were found to have clear correction policies and processes as well as statements of editorial independence.

Figure 8. Average Operations pillar scores by indicator



All 35 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).[29] As the JTI points out,[30] 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 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. The context pillar findings are based on an independent survey[31] conducted to measure online users' perceptions of brand trust in the media sites included in our sample for South Africa.

Context pillar scores have significant room for improvement for many domains, although online users' perceptions can be shifted only over the medium to long term. This is partly due to the fact that perceptions can be 'sticky' and take time to realign with a site's current realities. The scores in Figure 10 indicate that readers feel that sites in the sample cover news accurately, that labeling of opinion and news content is clear, and that clickbait is less of a concern to readers. From the survey results, the differences in scores for the sites were minimal, especially for accuracy and distinctions between news and opinion, including sites that were ranked as maximum-risk. Worryingly, this may indicate that readers perceive no significant difference between low-risk and maximum-risk sites in terms of the accuracy of their news coverage.

Still, improving site performance on the content and operations risk flags may have the additional effect of improving perceptions in the eyes of the country's readers. For example, the study's findings show a strong and positive correlation between sites that are perceived by readers to carry more accurate news and those sites whose headlines accurately reflect their news stories (i.e avoiding clickbait).[32]

Figure 10. Average Context pillar scores by indicator

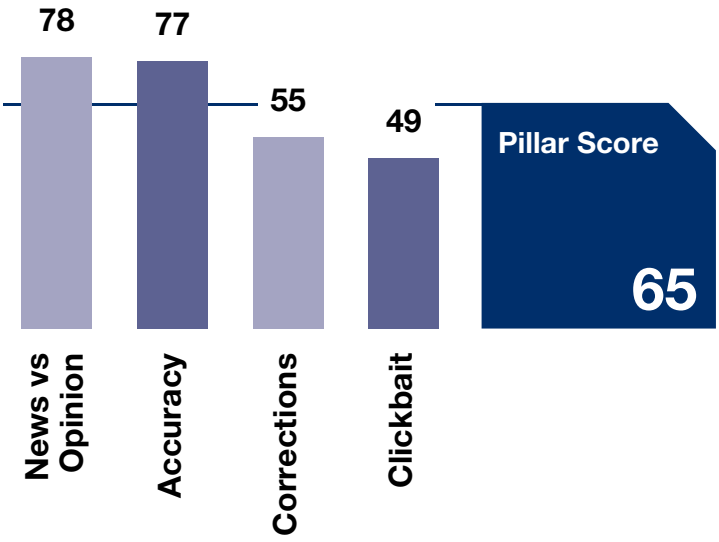
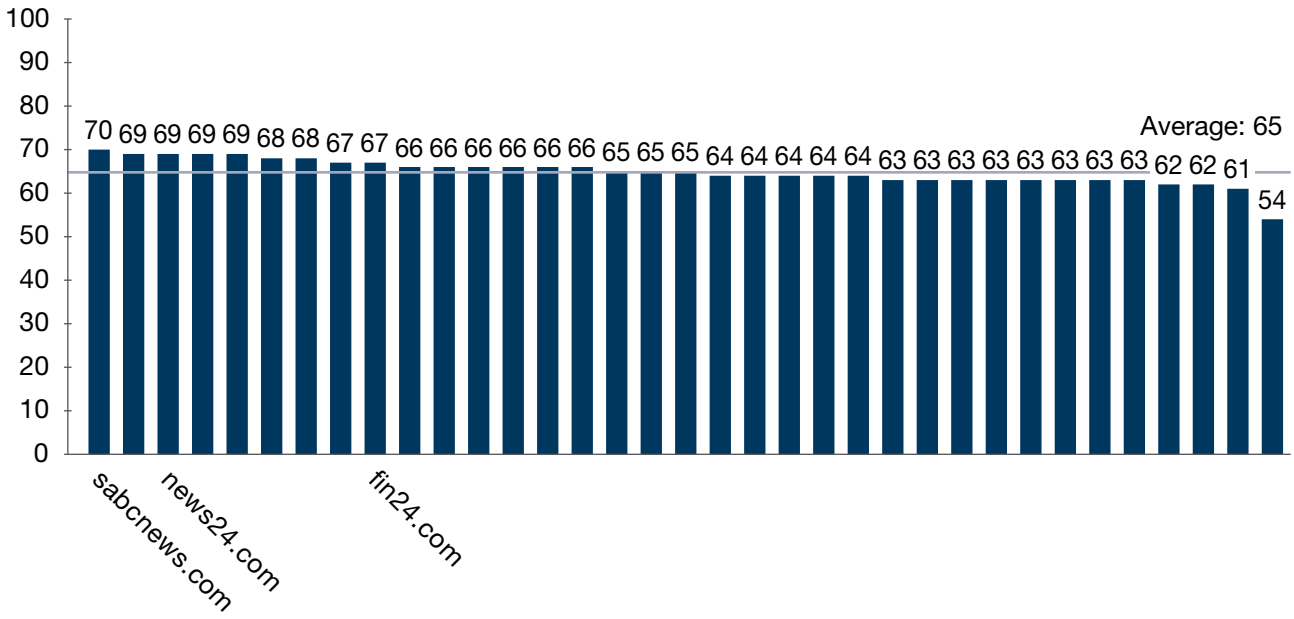


Figure 11. Context pillar scores by site



Conclusion

Our assessment of the disinformation risk of news sites in South Africa finds a middling range of risks but a fairly divergent media landscape in terms of the disinformation risks the 35 sites present.

The findings show a group of sites with minimum or low risks (18 sites) at one extreme, and another group with high to maximum risk levels (10 sites) at the other end, which will continue to have problems without significant changes. In the middle is a group of media sites with medium risk levels (7 sites), which could lower their risks levels by addressing their operational shortfalls, especially regarding the lack of transparent information about their true or beneficial owners, funding sources, and other operational and editorial policies.

News sites could address these shortcomings by taking actions that:

- Focus on adopting journalistic and operational standards like those set by the Journalism Trust Initiative, which make information about overall policies of the site transparent;
- Membership in the South African Press Council and adherence to its Press Code should be announced visibly on the news site in order to increase levels of accountability. This means a reader would view this information without having to click through to further sites or leave the app;
- Encourage sites to clearly publish their sources of funding on their pages rather than multiple clicks away on a parent company site. This information helps to build trust in the site and dispel doubts about how it is funded;
- Publishing a statement of editorial independence, guidelines for issuing corrections, and policies for user- and algorithmically-generated content;[33]
- Improve and make more visible a site's practices for correcting errors. It is important that such site corrections are clearly seen and understood, rather than being hidden on a web page 'below the fold'. This seems a glaring omission in a media environment characterised by multiple and constant active attempts to erode trust in media by purveyors of misinformation and disinformation;
- Ensure operational and editorial information is easy to access on mobile interfaces, as more South Africans access news this way. Operational standards should include mobile-friendly, easily found, transparent information as a way to rebuild trust among readers.

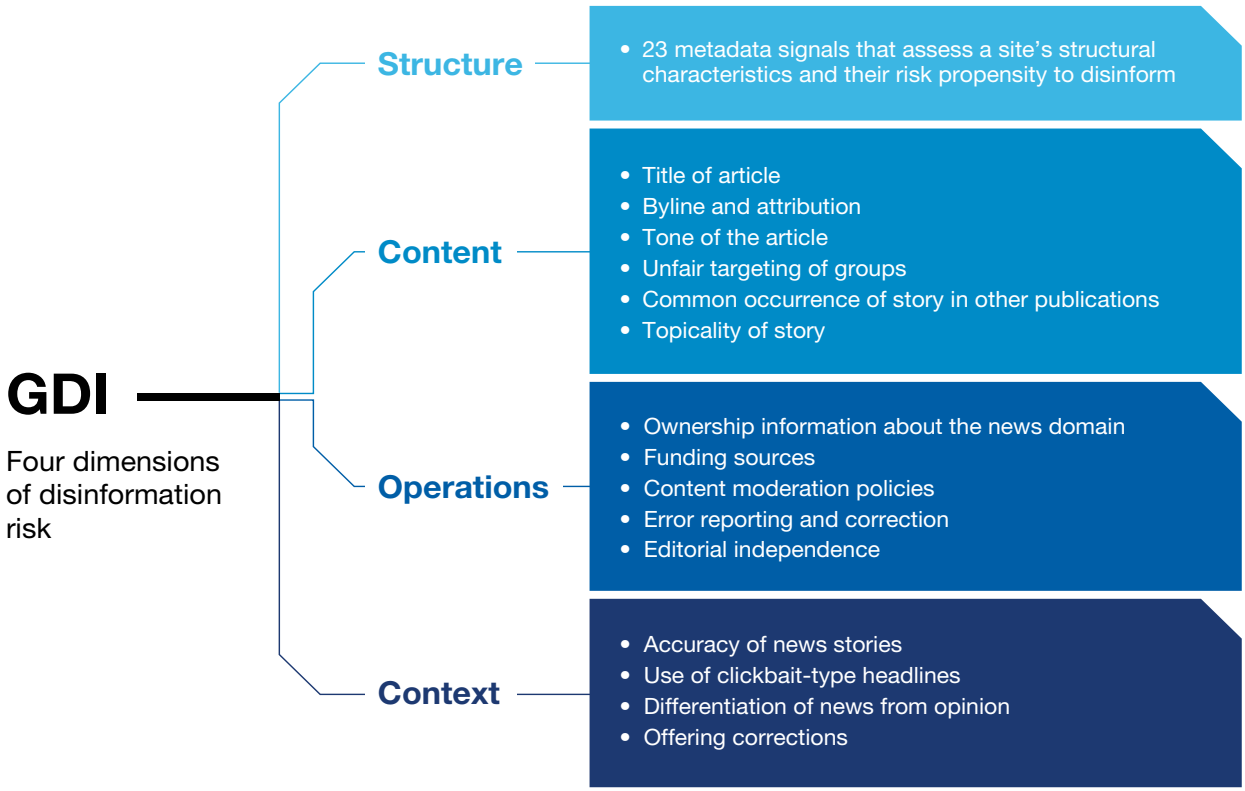
The need for a trustworthy, independent rating of disinformation risk is pressing. The launch of this risk-rating framework will provide crucial information to policy-makers, news websites, and the ad tech industry, enabling key decision-makers to stem the tide of money that incentivises and sustains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

Annex: Methodology

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 contextualizes our findings. Table 2 gives the GDI indicators by pillar.

Table 1. Global Disinformation Index Indicators



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 of 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 3 shows each category and its cut-offs.

Table 3 visualises the relationships between each of the GDI indicators. The blue squares indicate statistically significant direct correlations, while the red squares indicate statistically significant inverse correlations.

Table 2. Overview of risk bands

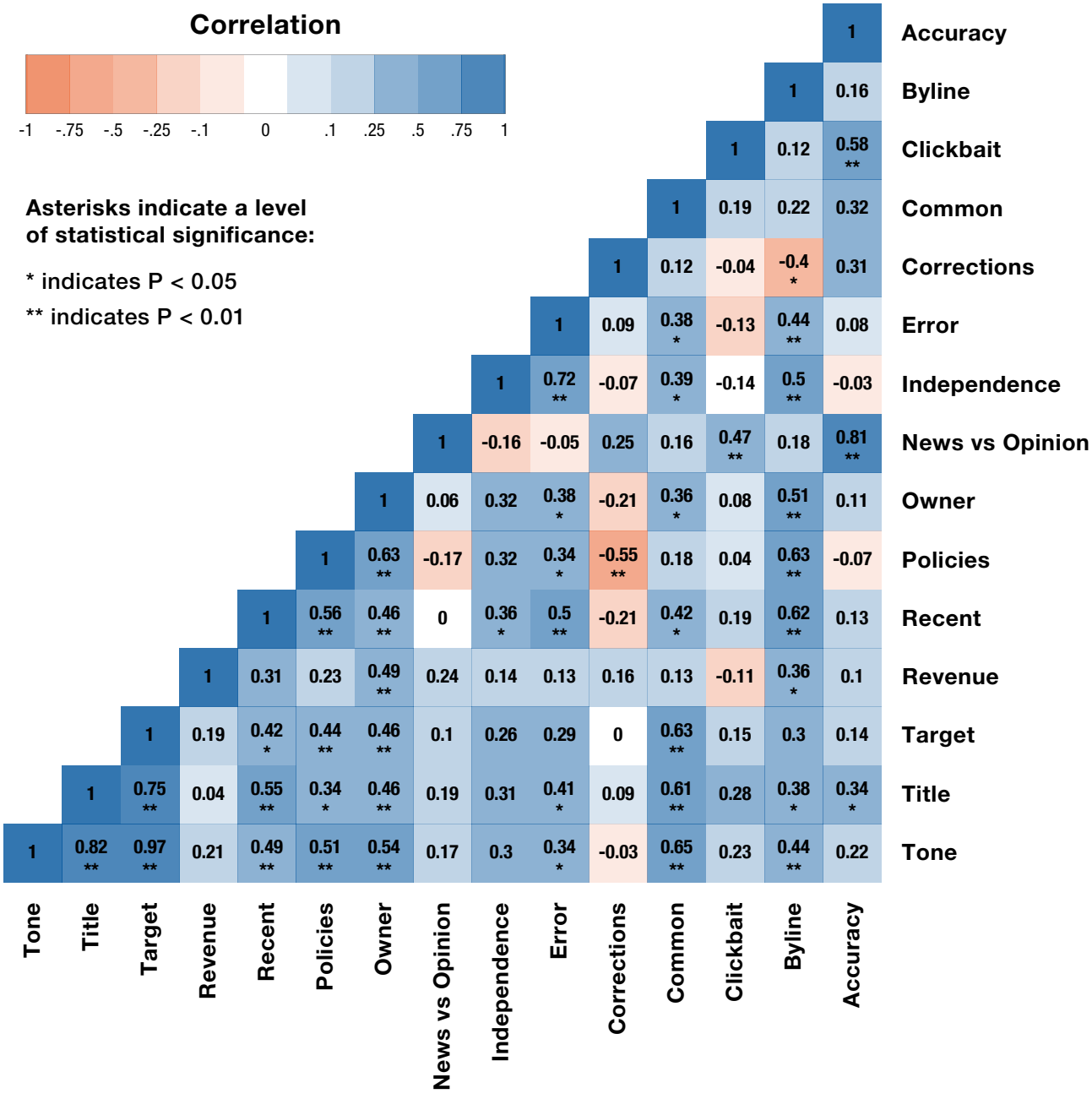
TOTAL DOMAIN SCORE	DISINFORMATION RISK LEVEL	DISINFORMATION RISK CATEGORY
< -1.5 SD from mean	5	Maximum risk
≥ -1.5 and ≤ -0.5 SD from mean	4	High risk
> -0.5 and ≤ 0.5 SD from mean	3	Medium risk
> 0.5 and ≤ 1.5 SD from mean	2	Low risk
> 1.5 SD from mean	1	Minimum risk

Data collection

Each of the South Africa domains was assessed by two Code for Africa analysts who were trained on the GDI framework according to a codebook that provides detailed instructions for assessing each indicator. Code for Africa reviewed the Content and Operations pillars, while the Context pillar scores were calculated based on an independent survey of informed online readers.

The survey was conducted by YouGov and includes 503 respondents drawn from sophisticated online users. The online survey was conducted between 18 and 22 May 2020. 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 156 and the minimum 31.

Table 3. Correlations matrix



Endnotes

1 We define disinformation in terms of the verb 'to disinform': 'to deliberately mislead; opposite of inform.'

2 The human review elements of the framework were developed in collaboration with Alexandra Mousavizadeh (head of insights for Tortoise Media and co-founder of the GDI). The framework was advised by, vetted by, and finalised with the support of a technical advisory group (TAG), including Ben Nimmo (Graphika), Camille François (Graphika), Miguel Martinez (co-founder & chief data scientist, Signal AI), Nic Newman (Reuters Institute of Journalism), Olaf Steenfadt, (Reporters without Borders), Cristina Tardáguila (the Poynter Institute's International Fact-Checking Network), Amy Mitchell (Pew Research), Scott Hale (Meedan and Credibility Coalition), Finn Heinrich (OSF) and Laura Zommer (Chequeado).

3 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.

4 For more on our methodology, see the appendix and methodology at: https://disinformationindex.org/research/.

5 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 South African media market, they would not be expected to share structural features with high-risk sites.

6 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.

7 All sites included in the report were informed of their individual scores and risk ratings, as well as the overall market averages.

8 Two researchers assessed each site and indicator. The survey was conducted by YouGov between 18 and 22 May 2020. A total of 502 respondents were surveyed. All respondents answered a standard set of questions used by the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) in all countries where it conducts risk ratings. Each respondent provided their perceptions of brand trust and credibility for up to 10 sites that they said they were 'familiar' with.

9 Minimum risk is the best risk rating, followed by a low-risk rating. Both ratings suggest a news site that scores well across all of the indicators. For all countries, 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 scores are shared only for the sites assessed to have a low or minimum disinformation risk. As a result, the number of sites disclosed in the report will vary by country.

10 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.

11 The other countries assessed in 2020 and whose results were released are: Argentina, Estonia, France, Germany, Georgia and Latvia.

12 See correlations matrix in the appendix.

13 See: https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2020/overview-key-findings-2020/

14 See: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/feb/02/how-youtubes-algorithm-distorts-truth and https://www.niemanlab.org/2020/01/youtubes-algorithm-is-pushing-climate-misinformation-videos-and-their-creators-are-profiting-from-it/ and https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1386505619308743.

15 Ibid.

16 https://themediaonline.co.za/2020/07/news24-com-to-launch-freemium-paywall/.

17 https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2020/overview-key-findings-2020/.

18 Ibid.

19 https://medium.com/dfrlab/government-official-monetized-racial-tensions-on-south-african-social-media-d99b9f2b3995.

20 https://www.news24.com/fin24/Companies/Advertising/south-african-publisher-of-cosmopolitan-to-close-shop-from-1-may-20200430 and https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/39/203402.html.

21 https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/few-winners-many-losers-covid-19-pandemics-dramatic-and-unequal-impact-independent-news-media.

22 https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/south-african-print--digital-publishing-media-industry-2020---analysis-trends-and-the-impact-of-covid-19-301092106.html.

23 https://www.businesslive.co.za/redzone/news-insights/2020-03-23-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-sa-media-environment/.

24 https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/19/203267.html.

25 https://www.pwc.co.za/en/press-room/entertainment---media-report-2019.html.

26 For more information on the JTI, which has adopted an ISO standard for the industry, please see: https://jti-rsf.org/en/.

27 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.

28 See correlations matrix in the appendix.

29 For more information on the JTI, which has adopted an ISO standard for the industry, please see: https://jti-rsf.org/en/.

30 https://www.cen.eu/news/workshops/Pages/WS-2019-013.aspx.

31 The survey was conducted by YouGov between 18 and 22 May 2020. A total of 502 respondents were surveyed. All respondents answered a standard set of questions used by the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) in all countries where it conducts risk ratings. Each respondent provided their perceptions of brand trust and credibility for up to 10 sites that they said they were 'familiar' with.

32 See the correlations matrix in the appendix.

33 This last point is especially relevant for all South African sites in our sample, which lack many of these policies)

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