Seeking Expressions of Interest: Implementation Partners for the Global Disinformation Index's Media Market Risk Assessments

Introduction

The Global Disinformation Index (GDI) is a nonprofit organisation that operates on the three principles of neutrality, independence and transparency. GDI defines disinformation in terms of adversarial narratives that create harm. Our vision is a world free of disinformation and its harms, which undermine the trusted information ecosystems that are the foundation of democratic processes. GDI provides disinformation risk ratings of the world's news media domains, with a mission to catalyse industry and government to defund disinformation.

Today's internet business models reward engagement above all else. These models monetise attention regardless of the quality of the content garnering that attention, or the harm that may result. There is a robust and growing community of industry, policy, and civil society advocates pressing for reform of this ecosystem, and they all need data to inform their actions. To this end, GDI is seeking prospective country partners to implement its methodology for assessing disinformation risk and develop a country-specific Media Market Review (MMR).

The Purpose of the Media Market Risk Assessment

The media market risk assessment reviews the level of disinformation risk on the most influential and widely-read news websites in a particular media market, or country.

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. Disinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic is a recent – and deadly – example. These narratives undermine public health, safety, and government responses by disrupting society's shared sense of accepted facts.

To combat ad-funded disinformation, GDI has developed a research methodology to assess the disinformation risk of news domains in an effort to construct a global gold standard for independent, data-driven disinformation risk assessments. GDI deploys its assessment framework to rate news domains' risk of disinforming their readers. The GDI risk rating methodology is not an attempt to identify and label disinformation sites or trustworthy news sites. Rather, our approach is based on the idea that a combined set of indicators can reflect a site's overall risk of carrying disinformation.

These independent, trusted and neutral ratings are then 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.

Project Background

The first pilot of the GDI risk ratings was in 2019, and it assessed news domains in the UK and South Africa. This led to the production of national media market reports for each country. The GDI risk rating has since expanded to cover over 20 countries. Examples of previous risk assessment reports can be found on GDI's website.

In each media market, the new domains included in GDI's studies are reviewed by local experts working in civil society or academia. GDI provides local researchers with training and tools to collect data on each news domain according to its methodology. The local team then drafts a report summarising the results of the study and hosts the launch of the publication in order to present the findings to key journalism, policy and civil society stakeholders.

Following a successful 'broadcast news' pilot with a global media group this year, we know that our risk ratings can be applied effectively beyond the open web. Therefore, this year, we will expand our methodologies and our capabilities into new "surfaces" starting in 2023, including video (e.g., YouTube, broadcast or cable television news), audio (e.g., radio broadcasts, podcasts), and apps (e.g., mobile, connected TV). Some of the projects resulting from this Call for Partners will also include reviews of these other news surfaces.

What Partners Gain

The selected country partners will have an opportunity to:

- Contribute to defunding and downranking news websites that are at high risk of spreading disinformation by conducting the data collection that is used to estimate disinformation risk in their media market.
- Receive training in content review and open source investigation according to GDI's methodology.
- Author the report presenting the study's findings and launch the findings of the research to key stakeholders in their countries.
- Potentially become part of GDI's regional intelligence hubs for tracking and monitoring disinformation on an ongoing basis.

Regions of Interest

GDI is particularly interested in partnering with organisations based in the following regions/countries, however, organisations/institutions with strong capacity in countries not listed here are also encouraged to apply:

- **Africa,** preferably Tanzania, Ghana, Zambia, Senegal, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Djibouti, Malawi, Western Sahara, Sierra Leone or South Sudan
- **Europe,** preferably The United Kingdom, Poland, Hungary, Georgia, Serbia or Moldova
- **Middle East and Eurasia,** preferably Armenia
- **Asia and Oceania,** preferably, Vietnam, Cambodia, or New Zealand
- **Latin America,** preferably Cuba, Nicaragua, or Venezuela

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Desired Partners

We are seeking partnership with institutions/organisations that are:

- An academic institution or a non-profit organisation that works in the following areas:
    - Digital rights,
    - Online disinformation,
    - Freedom of speech or expression,
    - Journalistic integrity and ethics,
    - Or similar fields.
- Able to commit at least six months to the research project that will entail:
    - Compilation of media lists and associated contact information for news outlets.
    - Development of a topic list as an input to identifying and tracking adversarial narratives in the media market.
    - Cleaning and anonymisation of all content for review.
    - Data collection for the risk rating of at least 30 news outlets.
    - Authorship of a study report in English, and translation to the/a local language if relevant.
    - Organisation of an event and co-production of associated collateral activities for the public launch of the study.

Partner institutions/organisations should:

- Have in-house research, communications and event organisation capacity.
- Have good relationships with media outlets/press in their respective countries, as well as other organisations working in this space.
- Have a good understanding of the media landscape in their respective countries.
- **Be** neutral, independent and transparent.
- **Not be** attached to any form of local or national government.
- **Not be** affiliated with any political party.
- **Not produce** news content or run a news site.
- **Not have had** recent controversies with our partners & funders, media, and local government.

Essential Experience and Qualifications for Partner Teams

For Researchers:

- Tertiary education (at least Master's degree-level) – or at least secondary education (Bachelor's degree) and three years research experience – on a relevant topic (disinformation, journalism, political science, media studies, sociology or humanities).
- Strong critical thinking skills and familiarity with the nuances of the local media market, especially the background to recognize coded language (aka "dog whistles").
- Demonstrated experience conducting desk research.
- Demonstrated experience applying codebooks and collecting structured primary data.
- Fluent in English and relevant study languages.
- Strong attention to detail and time-management skills.
- Does not pose a conflict of interest, i.e., is not affiliated or actively involved with any of the media outlets reviewed in the study.

For Communications and Event Coordination:

- Minimum of 2-5 years relevant experience in a communications role.
- Excellent verbal, written, and interpersonal skills.
- A proven track record of organising successful events.
- Good time management and organisational skills.

Proposed Budget

A research honorarium of approximately USD20,000, plus additional funds for incidental costs, will be provided to each partner.

Proposed Timeline

Approximately 7 months from project commencement to launch, organisational capacity depending.

Expressions of Interest

If you are interested in partnering with us, please fill out this [redacted] and upload a brief letter of interest outlining the capacity and qualifications of your team and your organisation's previous work in relation to media and disinformation.

Expressions of interest will be reviewed on a rolling basis.

For any questions regarding the application process, reach out to [redacted]
Please indicate **MMR Partnership** in the subject line.

Application Deadline

1st March 2023