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Disinformation Risk Assessment: The Online News Market in Thailand

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The Global Disinformation Index is a not-for-profit organisation 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.

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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 disinformative narratives surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic are a recent – and deadly – example. By disrupting society’s shared sense of accepted facts, these narratives undermine public health, safety and government responses.

GDI defines disinformation in terms of ‘adversarial narratives that create real world harm,’ and the GDI risk rating is based on 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 the Thailand media market and its overall levels of disinformation risk, along with the strengths and challenges the sites face in mitigating disinformation risks.

The following report presents the findings pertaining to disinformation risks for the media market in Thailand, based on a study of 33 news domains. To allow for engagement, feedback and improvement, all sites included in the study which had publicly disclosed email addresses were sent their individual scores and risk ratings. These findings are the result of the research led by the GDI with the Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, from December 2022 to May 2023. However, the goal of this report is to present an overview of the media market as a whole and its strengths and vulnerabilities. Individual site ratings contribute to GDI’s various aggregate data products, and in most cases, are not released publicly to avoid naming and shaming media outlets facing high levels of risk.

The need for a trustworthy, independent rating of disinformation risk is pressing. This risk-rating framework for Thailand will provide crucial information to policymakers, news websites and civil society, enabling key decision-makers to stem the tide of money that incentivises and sustains disinformation. Moreover, the results of the current study will contribute to GDI’s mission to disrupt the business model of disinformation, by being earmarked for sharing with ad tech industry stakeholders and other parties acting to defund disinformation.

Key findings: Thailand

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

Nearly half of the domains in the sample had a high-to-maximum risk of disinforming their online users.

- Fourteen sites presented a high-risk rating, while two sites were classified as maximum-risk. Many of these sites rarely used clear bylines or identified news sources, while also providing vague attribution policies.
- Only two sites were assessed as low-risk. These sites scored well overall for publishing neutral and non-sensational content. However, publicly available details about their pre-publication fact-checking and post-publication correction policies, which help ensure accurate stories, were limited.
- Domains included in the study had an average risk rating of 57 out of 100.

Sites in the Thailand media market performed well in most Content Pillar indicators, resulting in an average pillar score of 79 out of 100.

- Content on the assessed sites was largely free from *Negative targeting* or references to *Out- and in-group dynamics*, with average scores for both indicators reaching above 90 out of 100.
- Despite overall high scores in this pillar, Thailand's media sites performed poorly in the *Byline information*, *Sources* and *Attribution* indicators, which received average scores of 20, 35 and 54, respectively.
- The average scores in this pillar had a narrow distribution, ranging from 72 to 85.

Relatively low scores across the board in the Operations pillar increased the disinformation risk for Thailand's media market.

- The average score on the **Operations pillar** was 35 out of 100, with pillar scores ranging from 10 to 68.
- Overall, Thailand's media sites performed very poorly on the *Ensuring accuracy*, *Sources and byline policies*, *Funding* and *Editorial guidelines* indicators.
- Thai media sites performed strongest on *Comment policies*, with an average indicator score of 85 out of 100.

Transparency regarding operational policies is a major shortfall for Thai media sites.

- To improve their disinformation risk ratings, sites can prioritise the establishment and disclosure of their operational policies and practices.
- Pre-publication fact-checking and post-publication error correction processes, as well as sources and byline policies, were areas where sites showed notable room for improvement.
- Adopting and publicly disclosing these journalistic best practices could help ensure the editorial integrity of news sites and reduce their disinformation risk.

The Thai media market: Key features and scope

The Thai media landscape is brimming with diverse players of disparate operation models, news genres and target audiences.

Similar to most media markets elsewhere in the world, the popularity and prevalence of the internet and digital devices among Thai users has enabled the Thai media landscape to rapidly expand. In contrast to the limited number of media owners and producers who dominated the market during the country's traditional media era, the digital era has allowed a myriad of stakeholders with various operational models, news styles and target audiences.

Commercial media range from national-level news brands which have become household names, to local news outlets, to emerging small and medium-size online content production companies, to individual online content creators or "influencers." Thailand also has state-owned television and radio stations which have been in operation for several decades, as well as a public service broadcaster which recently celebrated its 15-year milestone in 2023. Non-profit operations include alternative journalism, media outlets run by the civil society sector and citizen journalists. Most media organisations using traditional platforms also generate content for online and popular social media platforms, while new and small-size news producers opt to use Facebook or YouTube as their primary channels. Therefore, the online media market in Thailand has been saturated with a wide array of content.

Since 2020, the number of internet users in Thailand has continued to grow every year, with 61.21 million internet users in early 2023. Of Thailand's internet users, 85.4% have used at least one social media platform. The gradual increase in internet connection speeds (both mobile and fixed) and low data charges put the country's estimated internet penetration rate at 85.3% of the total population at the beginning of

2023.² While Facebook and YouTube have the highest number of users in the Thai social media market,³ Twitter saw a sharp rise in platform usage since the second half of 2022.⁴ Recently, the country has also seen a growing number of TikTok users.⁵

In terms of news consumption, online and social media are among Thailand's top news sources (91% and 78%, respectively), followed by television (50%), while consumption of printed news is the lowest (15%).⁶ People mostly use smartphones to access media content, and Thailand is also among countries with the highest news consumption via YouTube.⁷ Affordable internet fees and a relatively less regulated online media environment have also contributed to the expansion and popularity of "TV-style" content by independent producers online.⁸

Consumers' reliance on digital devices for online content consumption resulted in the exponential growth of online media spending by state and private sectors. Between 2017 and 2022, online media spending has risen from around 12 billion Baht (approx. 349 million US dollars) to more than 26 billion Baht (approx. 757 million US dollars). On the other hand, advertising expenditure for print media has plunged by nearly 70% compared to that of 2017. Despite growth in online media, annual advertising budgets for television have remained the largest share, accounting for over 60 billion Baht in 2022 (approx. 1.75 billion US dollars).⁹

Nonetheless, most news organisations still depend primarily on ad revenue, both from advertisers and online programmatic advertising. Along with the changes in consumer preference, which have contributed to falling advertising revenue, a number of print and television outlets have attempted to reduce hefty operation costs by streamlining workforces of traditional platforms and expanding their online units. Many long-time newspaper and magazine brands have ceased their print operations and migrated

online entirely. Some have developed other revenue-generating strategies, such as organising exclusive paid seminars and activities, offering subscriptions or memberships, and selling merchandise – measures which have yet to show significant results.¹⁰ Therefore, a majority of news coverage, particularly on online platforms, has tended to be brief, event-oriented, episodic, and presented with sensational story angles and language, in order to draw audience and online engagement.¹¹ However, there has been little space for in-depth or investigative reporting, which requires substantial investment in production resources and time, as well as risk management.¹²

Despite heavy content consumption via online and social media, Thai consumers have still believed that news brands, mostly those with roots in traditional media platforms, are the most reliable. The overall news trust score in Thailand in 2022 was 53% – the highest in the Asia-Pacific region. Nonetheless, Thailand was also ranked among countries with a high level of perceived news outlet polarisation – the highest in Asia, corresponding with the country’s divisive political climate.¹³

Contrary to the growth in internet penetration and usage, the country’s levels of freedom of expression, as well as internet freedom, have been fluctuating between the not-free and partially free labels in the past 5 years per Freedom House assessments. This trend is likely related to the country’s 2014 military coup and subsequent junta-associated administrations.¹⁴ As youth-led pro-democracy demonstrations become prevalent from late 2020 to 2022, the Thai government cited “national security and public order” as a basis to enforce legal measures which, in turn, negatively affected freedom of expression. Among the prominent laws that emerged related to press freedom was the criminal code 112 (also known as *lèse majesté* or the royal defamation law), which carried the penalty of 3 to 15 years imprisonment.¹⁵ Another key law relevant to press freedom was the Computer Crime Act, which has often been used to regulate online content along with royal defamation or libel laws in the name of public safety.¹⁶ Media professionals have faced strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) for reporting on or questioning actions of government agencies or alleged human rights abuses by business entities.¹⁷

Additionally, the state of press freedom in Thailand has been ranked among the lower half of the 180 countries surveyed by Reporters Without Borders.¹⁸ So far, journalists have not been charged under the *lèse majesté* law. However, in the polarised political environment and social divide, mainstream media has resorted to self-censorship when reporting about protests and reform-related developments. Similarly, in November 2021, after the constitutional court ruled that the protesters’ call for monarchy reform was an act to overthrow the country’s political system, Thailand’s broadcast regulator reportedly called for local media to refrain from reporting on protesters’ demands, since these actions might be considered as violations of the court’s decision.¹⁹

On the other hand, limitations to mainstream media coverage have led alternative media, civil society organisations and citizen reporters to emerge and develop their own audiences.²⁰ However, these organisations have often encountered regulatory pressures while reporting on protests, including orders to close their online channels and suspensions of their broadcast licences. Field journalists have faced arrests and injuries from chemical substances, tear gas and rubber bullets used during protests.²¹

During the peaks of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, the Thai government imposed legal measures and mechanisms to mitigate disinformation that might cause public harm and threaten national stability. This regulatory framework was critiqued as restricting the flow of information and suppressing political discussion and debate in a time of public health crisis.²² In 2021, at least 11 people (including the country’s former opposition leader) faced both royal defamation and computer crime charges after criticising the government’s public vaccination plan and budget allocation via social media.²³

Fact-checking initiatives that tackled dubious claims about COVID-19 and health-related issues have also received public attention but largely remained in operation. Among the most active ones were state enterprise broadcaster MCOT’s Sure and Share Center, civil society Co-fact which operated on a crowd-sourcing and collaborative fact-checking model, and the government-run Anti-Fake News Center that mainly rectified false information concerning announcements and policies of state agencies.²⁴

Disinformation risk ratings

Market overview

This study looks specifically at a sample of 33 news websites in Thai.

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. The majority of sample sites (13) were the online platforms of print media, or former daily newspapers that migrated their operation to online-only. This is followed by 11 sites which are digital terrestrial or satellite television stations and nine sites which are online natives.

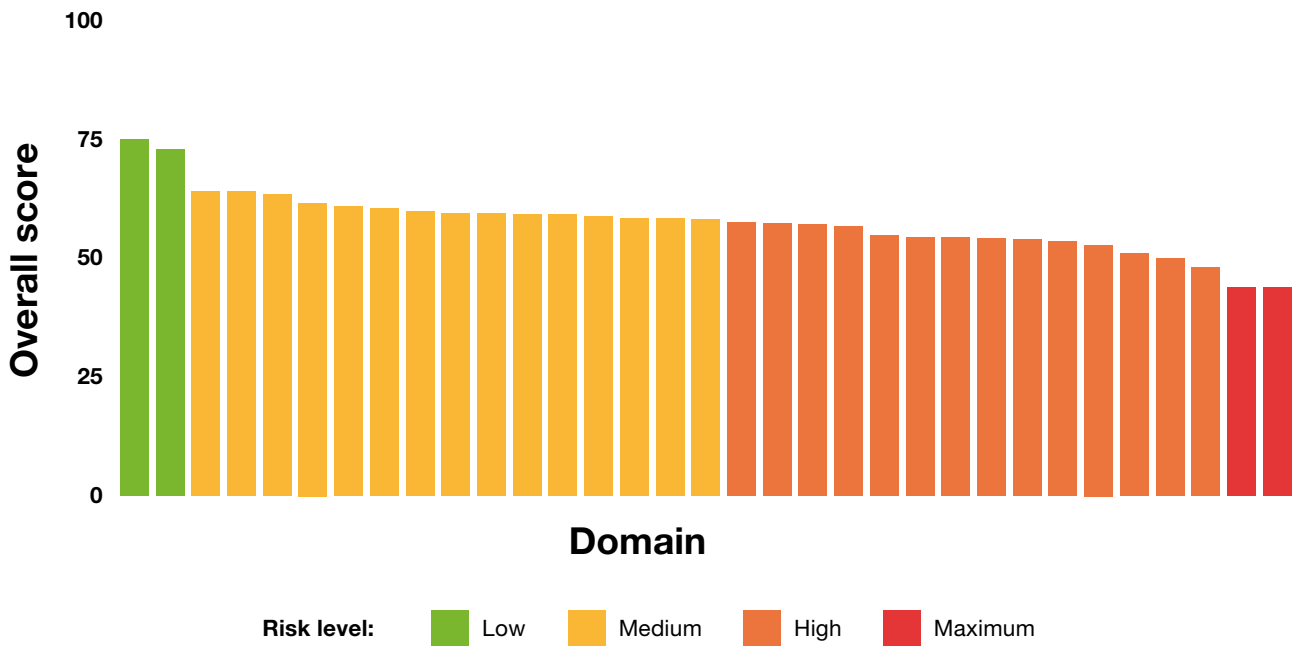
In terms of ownership, 15 sites were part of listed companies – three were in news and media production business, one belonged to a major agricultural products and telecommunications conglomerate, and another’s parent company was a key player in the healthcare and aviation services. Fourteen were privately owned by large, medium, and small-sized businesses – mostly market veterans, aside from two online newcomers. Two state-owned broadcasters were included; one operates as a for-profit station, while the other is the country’s first and only public-service broadcaster. There was also one site that was a non-profit organisation and another site whose parent company was a transnational online platform.

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

News outlet	Domain	News outlet	Domain
Amarin TV	www.amarintv.com	Post Today	www.posttoday.com
Bangkok Business News	www.bangkokbiznews.com	PPTV36	www.pptvhd36.com
Banmuang	www.banmuang.co.th	Prachatai	www.prachatai.com
Bright TV / Bright Today	www.brighttv.co.th	Sanook	www.sanook.com
Channel 3+ news	www.ch3plus.com	Siam Rath	www.siamrath.co.th
Channel 7 News	www.news.ch7.com	Springnews	www.springnews.co.th
Chiangmai News	www.chiangmainews.co.th	T News	www.tnews.co.th
Daily News	www.dailynews.co.th	Thai News Online	www.thainewsonline.co
E jan	www.ejan.co	Thai PBS	www.thaipbs.or.th
Independent News Network	www.innnews.co.th	Thai Post	www.thaipost.net
Khao Sod	www.khaosod.co.th	Thai Rath	www.thairath.co.th
Komchad Luek	www.komchadluek.net	Than Settakij	www.thansettakij.com
Manager Online	www.mgronline.com	The Standard	www.thestandard.co
Matichon	www.matichon.co.th	Tnn Thailand	www.tnnthailand.com
MCOT	www.tna.mcot.net	Top News	www.topnews.co.th
Muslim Thai Post	www.muslimthaipost.com	Workpoint TODAY	www.workpointtoday.com
Nation TV 22	www.nationtv.tv		

Source: Global Disinformation Index

Figure 1. Disinformation risk ratings by site



Source: Global Disinformation Index

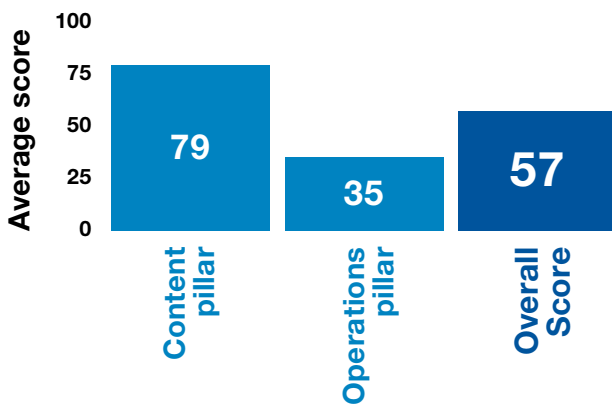
The findings for Thailand’s media sites show that the level of disinformation risk is moderate, with an average overall score of 57 out of 100. As shown in Figure 1, approximately two-thirds of the assessed sites (25 out of 33) held average overall scores below 60 out of 100. Two media sites scored a maximum-risk rating, and 14 sites (42%) fell into the high-risk category. On the other hand, two news sites received a low-risk rating. The rest of the media sites (15 out of 33) received a medium-risk rating.

The moderate disinformation risk for Thailand’s media sites is the result of a high average score in the **Content pillar** (79 points) offset by a low average score on the **Operations pillar** (35 points), as visualised in Figure 2. The findings point out

the vulnerabilities within Thai media organisations’ operations regarding disinformation risk. Overall, many of the risk factors in Thailand come from weak journalistic and editorial checks and balances in their newsrooms. To improve the overall risk rating on the **Operations pillar**, domains should ensure that editorial guidelines, accuracy policies, sources and byline policies as well as the disclosure of funding is publicly available on their sites.

Additionally, to lower the risk of disinforming their readers, Thailand’s media sites must pay more attention to the clear identification of news sources, the number of sources to ensure the accuracy of content and the inclusion of full information regarding the author of the news content.

Figure 2. Overall market scores, by pillar



Source: Global Disinformation Index

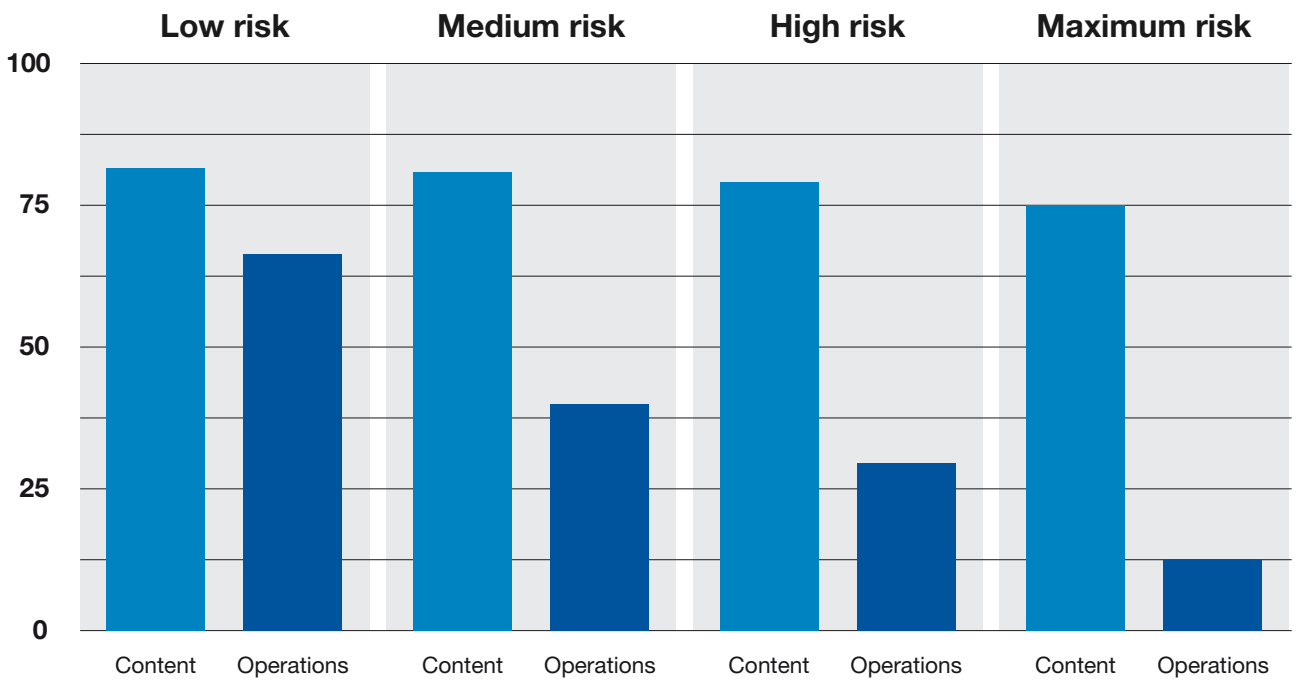
In Thailand, no media site was rated in the minimum-risk category. However, two sites received a low-risk rating. These sites perform well on almost all of the **Content** indicators; their average score for the **Content pillar** was 81 out of 100. The articles assessed were neutral and unbiased, and their visual presentation was largely free from sensationalism. They also did not negatively target groups or individuals. However, there was also sizable room for improvements for these two sites in terms of clearly identifying news sources and utilising bylines. Meanwhile, the low-risk sites achieved an average **Operations pillar** score of 66 points. These sites had key policies in place and published on their websites, including ownership structure and a statement of editorial independence. To decrease their disinformation risk, these two sites should publicly

provide more details about their accuracy policies, including pre-publication fact-checking policies and error-correction guidelines.

Fifteen sites were assessed with a medium-risk rating. Although their average score for the **Content pillar** was 80 points, their average score on the **Operations pillar** was 40 points. While these sites generally performed well on providing reliable and unbiased content, they did not perform well on the **Content pillar's Source, Attribution, and Byline information** indicators. Regarding the **Operations pillar**, most sites lacked or did not disclose key operational policies which are associated with strong universal journalistic standards. Transparency around accuracy policies, source and byline policies as well as editorial guidelines could be improved in this group.

The 16 remaining sites – almost half of the sample – received a high or maximum-risk rating. Media sites in these two categories tended to perform poorly on the **Content pillar** as they rarely used clear bylines or identified sources. They also scored very poorly on the **Operations pillar**. Sites in the high-risk category received an average **Operations pillar** score of 29; maximum-risk sites received an average **Operations pillar** score of only 13 points. Though information on ownership was provided by some media sites, their source and byline policies, fact-checking and error correction policies and sources of funding were largely absent. The data suggests that these sites struggled to meet universal standards for editorial and operational policies.

Figure 3. Average pillar scores by site risk rating



Source: Global Disinformation Index

Pillar overview

Content pillar

The **Content pillar** focuses on the reliability of the content provided on the site. Analysis for this pillar is based on an assessment of twenty anonymised articles for each domain. These articles are drawn from the most frequently shared pieces of content during the data collection period and a sample of content pertaining to topics which present a disinformation risk, such as politics and health. All article scores are based on a scale of zero (worst) to 100 (best).

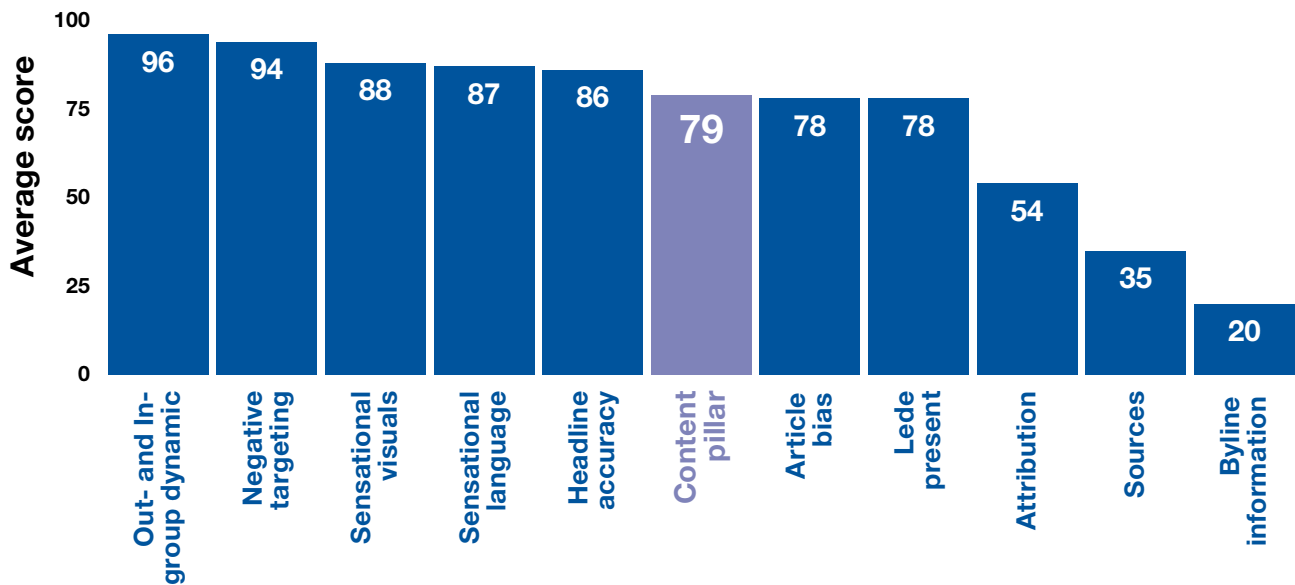
The average pillar score for the 33 sites included in the sample was 79 out of 100. The findings indicate the low disinformation risk in relation to content among Thai media sites. Generally, most of the articles reviewed featured relatively unbiased, neutral, and non-adversarial reporting. However, about half of the media sites assessed (14 out of 33, or 42%) had Content pillar scores lower than the mean. The scores in this pillar had a narrow distribution, ranging from 72 to 85.

The *Out- and in-group dynamic* indicator scored an average of 96 out of 100. This means that most of the content assessed contained minimal hate speech, bias or adversarial narratives. Sites performed relatively well on the *Negative targeting* indicator with an average score of 94 out of 100. The high average score on the **Content pillar** can partly be attributed to neutral *Visual presentation* (88 out of 100), absence of *Sensational language* (87 out of 100) and *Headline accuracy* (86 out of 100). It is notable that most of the assessed content did not include elements of adversarial narratives in their reporting despite being

published within a polarised political environment. The sampled content included a number of press releases, sponsored content, and even stories about “lucky lottery numbers” and daily astrological predictions — types of articles which typically generate substantial ad revenue via direct sponsorship and page views. Such articles commonly presented positive elements of an event, highlighted dramatic aspects of a story or used sensational writing to draw readers’ attention, but they did not attack other parties by using derogatory language or biased representation.

Within the **Content pillar**, Thailand’s news sites received scores below the pillar average on the *Byline information* indicator (20 out of 100). This indicates that Thailand’s media sites typically did not provide clear bylines to establish accountability to their audience. Furthermore, sites performed poorly on the *Source* and *Attribution* indicators, with average scores of 35 and 54 out of 100, respectively. These findings suggest that the assessed sites often did not pay enough attention to the quantity and quality of the sources from which they derived their content or the practices they used to ensure content is accurately and transparently sourced and attributed. In addition, having byline information attached to news content could help the assessed media outlets increase their credibility, show that they recognize their reporters’ contribution and gain more trust from their audiences. In places where hostility towards media figures is high and poses a risk to the safety of the author, however, it is understandable that this practice may not be followed for every piece of content published. However, news sites should clearly state and make public the policies and procedures under which a byline is not published.

Figure 4. Average Content pillar scores by indicator



Source: Global Disinformation Index

Figure 5. Content pillar scores by site



Source: Global Disinformation Index

Operations pillar

The **Operations pillar** assesses the operational and editorial integrity of a news site, in terms of both its published policies and adherence to those policies. All scores were based on a scale of zero (worst) to 100 (best), as scored by the country reviewers according to the information available on the site and elsewhere online at the time of the study.

Most media sites in the sample received relatively low scores on the indicators that measured their operational transparency and accountability. While the average score for the **Content pillar** was 79, the average score on the **Operations pillar** was 35 out of 100. Across the 33 sites assessed, around 55% of the media sites (18 out of 33) had **Operations pillar** scores higher than the mean. The two sites with the best **Operations pillar** performances scored 68 and 64 in this pillar due to the extensive information they made publicly available, especially on their editorial guidelines and sources and byline policies, as well as their ownership structure.

Out of the six indicators that make up this pillar, Thai media sites performed strongest on *Comment policies*, with an average score of 85 out of 100. Only five sites in the sample have user-generated comment sections, but policies to reduce disinformation and mechanisms to enforce those policies were not publicly available. On the other hand, 28 out of 33 media sites received a perfect score on this indicator, but it is important to note that sites that did not have a comments section were awarded a score of 100 on this indicator, on the basis of the absence of this source of disinformation risk on the site.

The *Ownership* indicator reached an average score of 60 out of 100, indicating that some media sites in the sample were relatively transparent about their ownership structures. A transparent ownership structure helps media outlets ensure accountability regarding possible conflicts of interest in the newsroom. However, more than half of the sites (18 out of 33) received scores below 60, with one site scoring an 8 out of 100. This shows that the Thai media market does not always reveal the information about media ownership on their websites for the public to access. Disclosure of the ownership structure reflects the transparency of the media sites, resulting in higher scores and lower risk of disinformation as well.

The sampled sites' worst performance was on the *Ensuring accuracy* indicator, with an average score of 3 out of 100. The majority of the sites (28 out of 33,

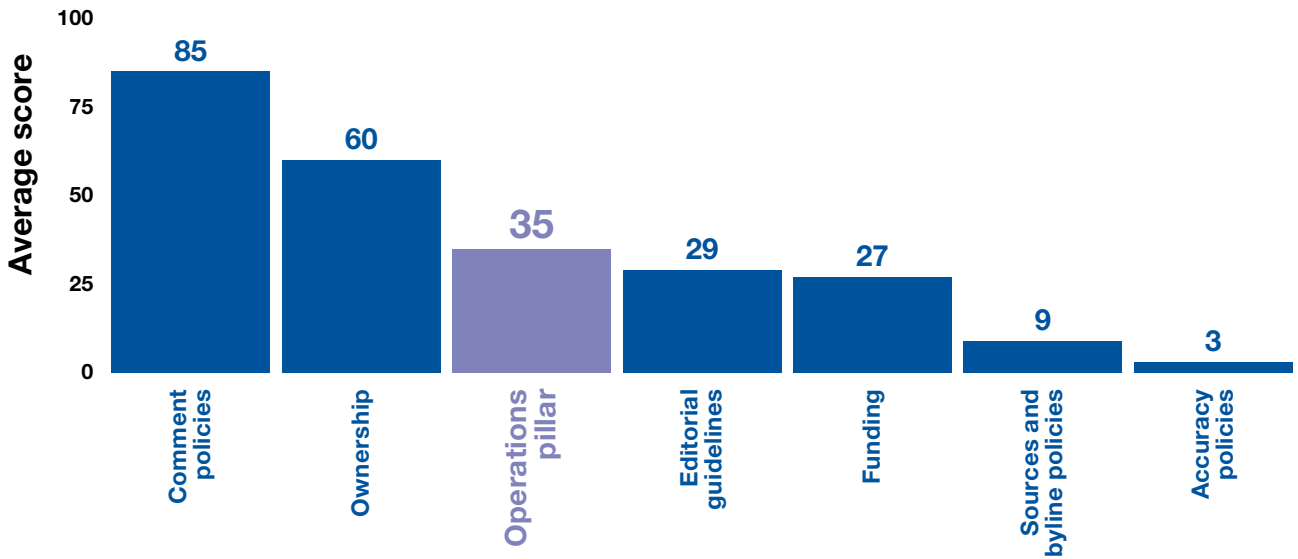
or 85%) had no clear processes or policies regarding their pre-publication fact-checking and their post-publication error correction published by the sites. Also, these sites have no clear channels for readers to report errors found in their content. The low score on this indicator raises concerns regarding accountability for the accuracy of content published and circulating online.

The *Sources and byline policies* indicator illustrated another major issue among the Thai media market. The average score for this indicator was 9 out of 100. The majority of the assessed media sites (31 out of 33, or 94%) scored below 20. The findings suggest that most of the sites are not transparent about the policies that ensure accurate facts, authentic media and accountability for stories.

When considering *Ownership* and *Funding* indicators together, the findings show that there are 7 sites out of 33 that received scores lower than 30 in both indicators. Interestingly, such sites demonstrated widely varying scores in other indicators - one of these sites is categorised as maximum-risk whereas another one of these sites received the highest **Content pillar** score in the study. Making the details of both ownership and sources of funding publicly available would help these media sites improve their disinformation risk ratings. Having this information accessible to the public helps the audience detect contents with conflict of interest, abuse of media power, or excessive media concentration. It also ensures that the media outlet is independent from financial influences and can be trusted.

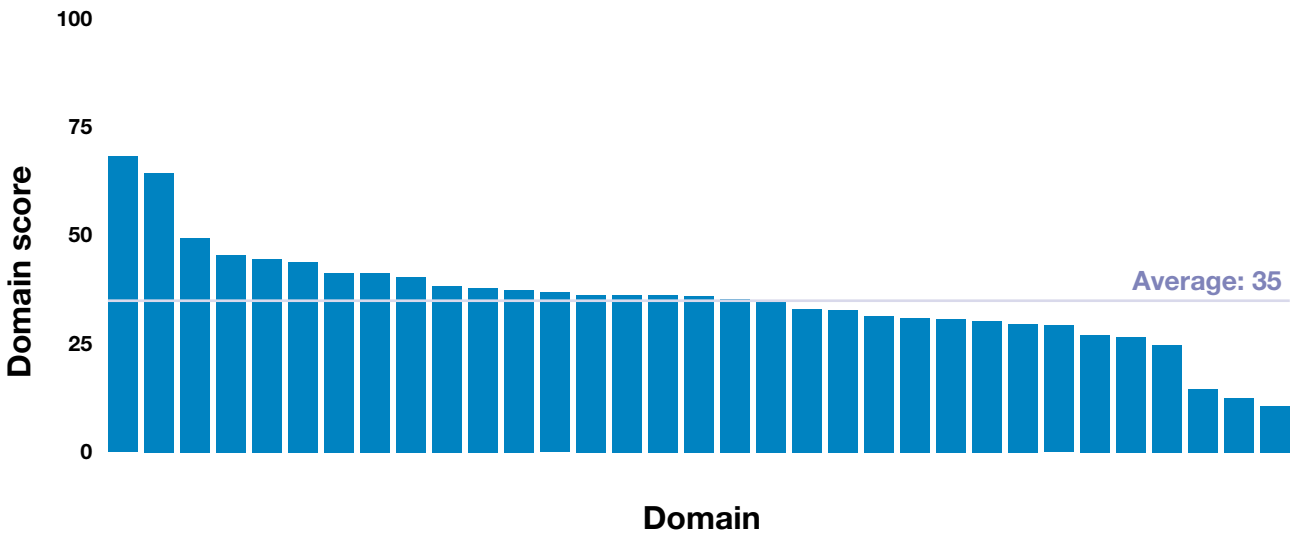
It is interesting to note that, among Thai media outlets, there were 18 sites out of 33 that received good scores on the *Ownership* indicator (more than 50 out of 100), but did poorly on the *Funding* indicator (less than 50 out of 100). Out of those 18 sites, there were six sites that received 100 in the *Ownership* indicator, but scored less than 40 in the *Funding* indicator. It is an uncommon practice in the Thai media market for outlets to disclose their sources of revenue, and they are not obliged to do so. However, more transparency on sources of funding, easily accessible by the public, could help readers identify media sites that focus on high-quality reporting over content that drives advertising revenue. Diverse sources of funding can also reduce the possibility of conflicts of interest arising for the editorial team. Greater transparency can increase domains' score in the **Operation pillar** and decrease the risk of disinformation within Thailand's media market.

Figure 6. Average Operations pillar scores by indicator



Source: Global Disinformation Index

Figure 7. Operations pillar scores by site



Source: Global Disinformation Index

Conclusion

Thai news sites in our sample had a moderate disinformation risk as assessed by the GDI methodology.

Fifteen sites received a medium-risk rating; 2 sites were in the low-risk category; 14 sites were in the high-risk range; and 2 sites were rated as maximum-risk.

This study revealed a large gap between the sites' average score on the two pillars – 79 points for the **Content pillar** and 35 points for the **Operations pillar**. Thailand's media sites performed fairly well in terms of their content, meaning that the disinformation risk from this tended to be limited. The majority of sampled and assessed content had limited amounts of derogatory language, biased representation, negative targeting of certain groups or adversarial narratives.

However, the key shortfall in Thailand's media market was regarding the **Operations pillar**. Many of the risk factors in Thailand came from the lack of accessibility to major policies of the assessed media outlets, such as ensuring accuracy, sources and bylines, funding disclosures and editorial guidelines on the domain. The data reflected this lack of transparency and a potential lack of enforcement related to such policies. A lack of publicly available information on key journalistic policies and practices can increase the risk of a site disinforming its readers.

To lower the risks of disinforming readers, news sites could address these shortcomings by taking action such as:

- Set clear and specific editorial standards and principles especially on editorial independence. If already available, publish the guidelines on the news site so that it is easily accessible to the audience.
- Set and publish policies for pre-publication fact-checking and post-publication error correction processes to ensure the accuracy of the content.
- Set clear policy on the use of bylines. Providing article's byline as much as possible establishes accountability to their audience.
- Clearly source and attribute the news sources to ensure the accuracy and transparency of the facts and contents in the articles.
- Be more transparent on ownership and management levels. Clearly publish the site's editorial board on the news site to be easily accessed by the readers.

Appendix: Methodology

The Global Disinformation Index evaluates the level of disinformation risk of a country's online media market. The country's online media market is represented by a sample of 30-35 news domains, selected on the basis of online traffic and social media followers, as well as geographical coverage and racial, ethnic and religious community representation.

The index was composed of the **Content** and **Operations pillars**. The pillars were, in turn, composed of 16 indicators. The **Content pillar** included indicators that assess elements and characteristics of each domain's content to capture its level of adversariality, credibility, sensationalism, and impartiality. The **Operations pillar's** indicators evaluated the transparency and enforcement of policies and rules that a specific domain followed to ensure the reliability and quality of the news being published.

Site selection

The market sample for the study was developed based on a mix of quantitative and qualitative criteria. GDI created a list of the 50 news websites with the greatest traffic in the media market. This list was internally vetted to gauge relevance and reach. Then the list was reduced to 35 sites, ensuring that the sample provided adequate geographical coverage and racial, ethnic and religious community representation. The final media market sample reflected the set of sites for which complete data could be collected throughout the review process. International news outlets are generally excluded, because their risk ratings are assessed in the market from which they originate.²⁵ 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 between 30 to 35 sites for which complete data could be collected throughout the review process.

Data collection

The **Content pillar** indicators were based on the review of a sample of 20 articles published by each domain. Ten of these articles were randomly selected among a domain’s most frequently shared articles on Facebook, typically within a two-month period. The remaining ten articles were randomly selected from a group of the domain’s articles covering topics that are likely to carry disinformation narratives.

The sampled articles were anonymised by removing any information that allowed the analysts to identify the publisher or the author of the articles. Each anonymised article was reviewed by three country analysts who were trained on the GDI **Content pillar** codebook. For each anonymised article, the country analysts answered a set of 13 questions designed to evaluate the elements and characteristics of the article text and its headline. After the information was recorded based on the anonymised text, the analysts subsequently reviewed how the article was presented on the domain.

The **Operations pillar** was based on the information gathered during the manual assessment of each domain performed by the country analysts. The country analysts answered a set of 72 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 rules and policies for the comments section. The reviewers answered a set of seven additional questions to capture documented incidents of editorial and ethical violations of the site’s stated guidelines. The analysts gathered evidence to support their assessments as they performed each Operations and Enforcement review.

Data analysis and indicator construction

The data gathered by the country analysts for the **Content pillar** were used to compute ten indicators. The **Content pillar** indicators included in the final risk rating were: *Article bias*, *Attribution*, *Byline information*, *Headline accuracy*, *Out-group and in-group dynamic*, *Lede present*, *Negative targeting*, *Sensational language*, *Sensational visuals*, and *Sources*. For each indicator, values were normalised to a scale of 0 to 100. The pillar score for each domain was the weighted average of all the scores for all of the pillar’s indicators, and ranged from 0 to 100. Table 2 gives the weights.

Table 2. Content pillar indicator weights

Indicator	Weight
Article bias	1
Negative targeting	1
Out-group and in-group dynamic	1
Sensational language	1
Sensational visuals	1
Sources	0.5
Attribution	0.5
Headline accuracy	0.5
Lede present	0.25
Byline information	0.25

Source: Global Disinformation Index

For the **Operations pillar**, the answers gathered during the Operations and Enforcement reviews by the country analysts were translated into a set of sub-indicators. The six indicators were calculated as the averages of these sub-indicator scores. The resulting **Operations pillar** indicators were: *Accuracy policies*, *Comment policies*, *Editorial guidelines*, *Funding*, *Ownership*, and *Sources and byline policies*. For each indicator, values were normalised to a scale of 0 to 100. The domain score for the **Operations pillar** was the average score across indicators. The complete list of sub-indicators and indicators for both pillars is given in Table 3.

Table 3. Global Disinformation Index pillars and indicators

Pillar	Indicator	Sub-indicators	Unit of analysis	Definition	Rationale
Content	Article bias	None	Article	Rating for the degree of bias in the article. Biased writing misrepresents facts, is based on faulty logic, and/or fails to include or unfairly engages with different views on the story.	Indicative of neutral fact-based reporting or well-rounded analysis
	Negative targeting			Rating for whether and to what degree the story negatively targets a specific individual or group	Indicative of hate speech, bias or an adversarial narrative
	Out-group and in-group dynamic			Rating for whether and to what degree the story builds upon or establish that one group is inferior and/or that one group is superior based on identity and to what degree	Indicative of hate speech, bias or an adversarial narrative
	Sensational language			Rating for the degree of sensationalism in the article text	Indicative of neutral fact-based reporting or well-rounded analysis
	Sensational visuals			Rating for the degree of sensationalism in the visual presentation of the article	Indicative of neutral fact-based reporting or well-rounded analysis
	Sources			Rating for the quantity and quality of the story's sources	Indicative of fact-based reporting and high journalistic standards
	Attribution			Rating for whether the story's statistics, quotations, and external media are clearly attributed to a source	Indicative of fact-based reporting and high journalistic standards
	Headline accuracy			Rating for how accurately the story's headline describes the content of the story	Indicative of clickbait
	Lede present			Rating for whether the article begins with a fact-based lede	Indicative of fact-based reporting and high journalistic standards
	Byline information			Rating for how much information is provided in the article's byline	Attribution of stories creates accountability for their veracity
Operations	Editorial guidelines	Editorial independence	Site	Rating for the number of policies identified on the site (adjusted if there are episodes of editorial interference or conflict of interest)	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 (adjusted if the site violates guidelines)	Assesses the policies in place to ensure that factual information is reported without bias
		News vs. analysis		Rating for the number of policies and practices identified on the site (adjusted if the site violates guidelines)	Assesses the policies in place to ensure that readers can distinguish between news and opinion content
	Accuracy policies	Pre-publication fact-checking		Rating for the number of policies and practices identified on the site (adjusted if the site violates guidelines)	Assesses policies to ensure that only accurate information is reported
		Post-publication corrections		Rating for the number of policies and practices identified on the site (adjusted if the site practices stealth editing)	Assesses policies to ensure that needed corrections are adequately and transparently disseminated
	Sources and byline policies	None		Rating for the number of policies and practices identified on the site (adjusted if the site violates guidelines)	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
	Funding	Diversified incentive structure		Rating for the number of revenue sources identified on the site (adjusted if there are episodes of editorial interference or conflict of interests)	Indicative of possible conflicts of interest stemming for 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
		Transparent funding		Rating based on the degree of transparency the site provides 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
	Ownership	Owner-operator division		Rating based on the number of distinct executive or board level financial and editorial decision makers listed on the site (adjusted if there are episodes of editorial interference or conflict of interest)	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
	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

Source: Global Disinformation Index

Risk ratings

The overall index score for each domain was the average of the pillar scores. The domains were then classified on the basis of a five-category risk scale based on the overall index score. The risk categories were defined based on a reference dataset that 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 4.

Table 4. Disinformation risk levels

Risk level	Lower bound	Upper bound	Standard deviation from mean
Minimum risk	80.28	100	> 1.5
Low risk	68.84	80.27	> 0.5 and ≤ 1.5
Medium risk	57.41	68.83	> -0.5 and ≤ 0.5
High risk	45.97	57.40	> -1.5 and ≤ -0.5
Maximum risk	0	45.96	≤ -1.5

Source: Global Disinformation Index

Endnotes

- 1 The GDI assessment framework is outlined in the annex of this report.
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