

## **German Marshall Fund and NewsGuard Partner to Study Misinformation and Inform Solutions**

*GMF licensing NewsGuard's News Website Reliability Index in study seeking to inform social media content policies*

(Washington, D.C. — February 12, 2020) The 21st century news landscape continues to change shape, demanding a continually evolving understanding of how news — as well as false news — spreads online. To that end, NewsGuard and the [Digital Innovation and Democracy Initiative](#) at the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) are joining forces to study the proliferation of misinformation sources and recommend solutions.

To kick off the collaboration, GMF has licensed NewsGuard's data for use in a research project called "Analyzing Engagement Trends for False, Misleading, and Hyper-partisan Websites." The study seeks to evaluate how social media engagement with sites that regularly publish fake content, use misleading practices, and promote hyper-partisan content have been affected by changes to social media platforms' algorithms from 2016 to 2019.

"Through our own analysis, and using engagement data from social media analytics platform NewsWhip, we've observed a recent increase in the proliferation of articles from dubious sources being shared on social media," said Sarah Brandt, Vice President of News Literacy Programs at NewsGuard. "If we can better understand how misinformation sites are adapting to changes in social media platform policies, we can devise effective solutions to make misinformation subside, rather than thrive."

This research collaboration between GMF and NewsGuard will use NewsGuard's robust rating methodology to track how engagement metrics have changed over the past few years for outlets that regularly publish fake content, outlets that use a variety of tactics to mislead audiences, and outlets that blur the lines between news and opinion. The goal of the project is to offer insights to policymakers and social media platforms to inform more tailored policies towards a variety of types of misleading content online.

"Much of the current policy debate around misinformation lumps false and misleading content together as a single policy problem," added GMF's Laura Schwartz-Henderson. "This one-size-fits-all approach to disinformation fails to adequately define and examine the variety of strategies that are used by dubious news outlets to mislead or influence audiences and the differential effects that these strategies have on information integrity."

Launched in 2018, the Digital Innovation and Democracy Initiative harnesses the German Marshall Fund's extensive networks across the US and Europe to produce original research and policy recommendations, build transatlantic networks, and convene policy debates in an effort to

identify vulnerabilities in today's information and data ecosystems and incubate solutions that support democratic values—including openness and security.

NewsGuard's News Website Reliability Index provides an independent benchmark for differentiating between generally reliable and generally unreliable news and information sites. The Index is currently also being used by the University of Michigan's Center for Social Media Responsibility, in its [Iffy Quotient](#), as well as in [a project to develop improved content recommendation algorithms for social media platforms](#), led by Brendan Nyhan from Dartmouth College, Giovanni Luca Ciampaglia from the University of South Florida, and Filippo Menczer and Alessandro Flammini from Indiana University.

“NewsGuard's core purpose is to provide online news consumers around the world with guidance on the reliability of who is feeding them the news,” said Steven Brill, co-CEO of NewsGuard. “But we always knew that our human intelligence solution – having journalists of varied backgrounds study and assess the news and information sites responsible for ninety-plus percent of the news consumed in each country where we operate – would become a valuable data tool for researchers working on all aspects of the misinformation and disinformation crisis, and now that we've rated 4,000 news and information sites here and in Europe responsible for 95% of the news and information that consumer engage in online, it clearly has.”

“Through our partnership with the researchers at the University of Michigan's CSMR, the team behind the Iffy Quotient is tracking changes in the spread of questionable content on Facebook and Twitter,” said Gordon Crovitz, co-CEO of NewsGuard. “The German Marshall Fund's project will offer an important complement to that work, eventually yielding a deeper understanding of what those changes in engagement have meant for some of those so-called ‘iffy’ sites.”

NewsGuard and GMF intend to collaborate on future projects and events throughout the course of the year, with 2020 being such a politically important year in the U.S. and abroad.

“We have seen the sharing of misinformation on social media spike during heated political events,” said Gabby Deutch, NewsGuard's Washington correspondent. “We also know that political polarization will only get worse in 2020. During an election year, independent research that provides a clear-headed analysis of these trends is crucial.”

Individuals and organizations interested in partnering with NewsGuard to study misinformation, electoral integrity, media literacy, and other aspects of online news consumption habits may contact [sarah.brandt@newsguardtech.com](mailto:sarah.brandt@newsguardtech.com).

## **About the Digital Democracy Initiative and the German Marshall Fund**

**The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF)** strengthens transatlantic cooperation on regional, national, and global challenges and opportunities in the spirit of the Marshall Plan.

GMF contributes research and analysis and convenes leaders on transatlantic issues relevant to policymakers. GMF offers rising leaders opportunities to develop their skills and networks through transatlantic exchange, and supports civil society in the Balkans and Black Sea regions by fostering democratic initiatives, rule of law, and regional cooperation.

Founded in 1972 as a non-partisan, nonprofit organization through a gift from Germany as a permanent memorial to Marshall Plan assistance, GMF maintains a strong presence on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition to its headquarters in Washington, DC, GMF has offices in Berlin, Paris, Brussels, Belgrade, Ankara, Bucharest, and Warsaw.

**The Digital Innovation and Democracy Initiative** harnesses GMF's extensive networks across the US and Europe to help capture societal benefits from new technologies -- through best practices that support transatlantic democratic values. DDI will be uniquely positioned to lead the effort to connect Silicon Valley with the transatlantic policy community, building multi-stakeholder networks to catalyze inclusive innovation.

Western societies are confronting populist responses to globalization and immigration, just as new technologies are poised to cause further disruptions. DIDI will lead the effort to connect Silicon Valley with the transatlantic policy community to catalyze inclusive innovation that strengthens democracy, with a focus on:

- **Digital Platforms, Data, and Democracy.** Identify vulnerabilities in today's information and data ecosystems and incubate solutions that support democratic values, including openness and security.
- **Impact of Artificial Intelligence and Frontier Technologies:** As democratic countries compete with authoritarian rivals, and consider how best to safeguard democratic values, we will help develop a best practices framework.
- **Reimagining Work, Entrepreneurship, and the Social Contract.** Create an ongoing dialogue on best models for creating economic security in the 21st century.

The US and Europe will need to work together, with allies around the world, and through the international rules-based system to develop policies that both enhance innovation and economic

growth and support democracy. This will entail closing the gap between 20th century governance mechanisms and 21st century technology challenges. There are important roles to play for policymakers, civil society, technologists, entrepreneurs, and investors from both sides of the Atlantic.

Democracies have a history of being at the forefront of technological innovation and of reinventing societal rules when disruptions arise. As the opportunities and challenges posed by tech grow, we will help democracies create a new social contract for a new era.

### **About NewsGuard**

Launched in March 2018 by media entrepreneur Steven Brill and former Wall Street Journal publisher Gordon Crovitz, NewsGuard provides credibility ratings and detailed “Nutrition Labels” for thousands of news and information websites.

NewsGuard rates all the news and information websites that account for 96% of online engagement in the U.S. and also operates in the U.K., Germany, France, and Italy.

NewsGuard rates each site based on nine apolitical criteria of journalistic practice, including whether a site repeatedly publishes false content, whether it regularly corrects or clarifies errors, and whether it avoids deceptive headlines. It awards weighted points for each criterion and sums them up; a score of less than 60 earns a “red” rating, while 60 and above earns a “green” rating, which indicates it is generally reliable.

NewsGuard’s ratings and Nutrition Labels can be licensed by internet service providers, browsers, news aggregators, and social media and search platforms in order to make NewsGuard’s information about news websites available to their users. These ratings are made available to consumers through its browser extension, which is available on Chrome, Safari, Edge, and Firefox browsers, and on mobile devices through the Edge mobile browser for iOS and Android devices. Hundreds of libraries globally use NewsGuard’s free media literacy browser extension on their public-access computers to give their patrons more context for the news they encounter online.

For more information, including to download the browser extension and review the ratings process: visit [newsguardtech.com](http://newsguardtech.com).

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