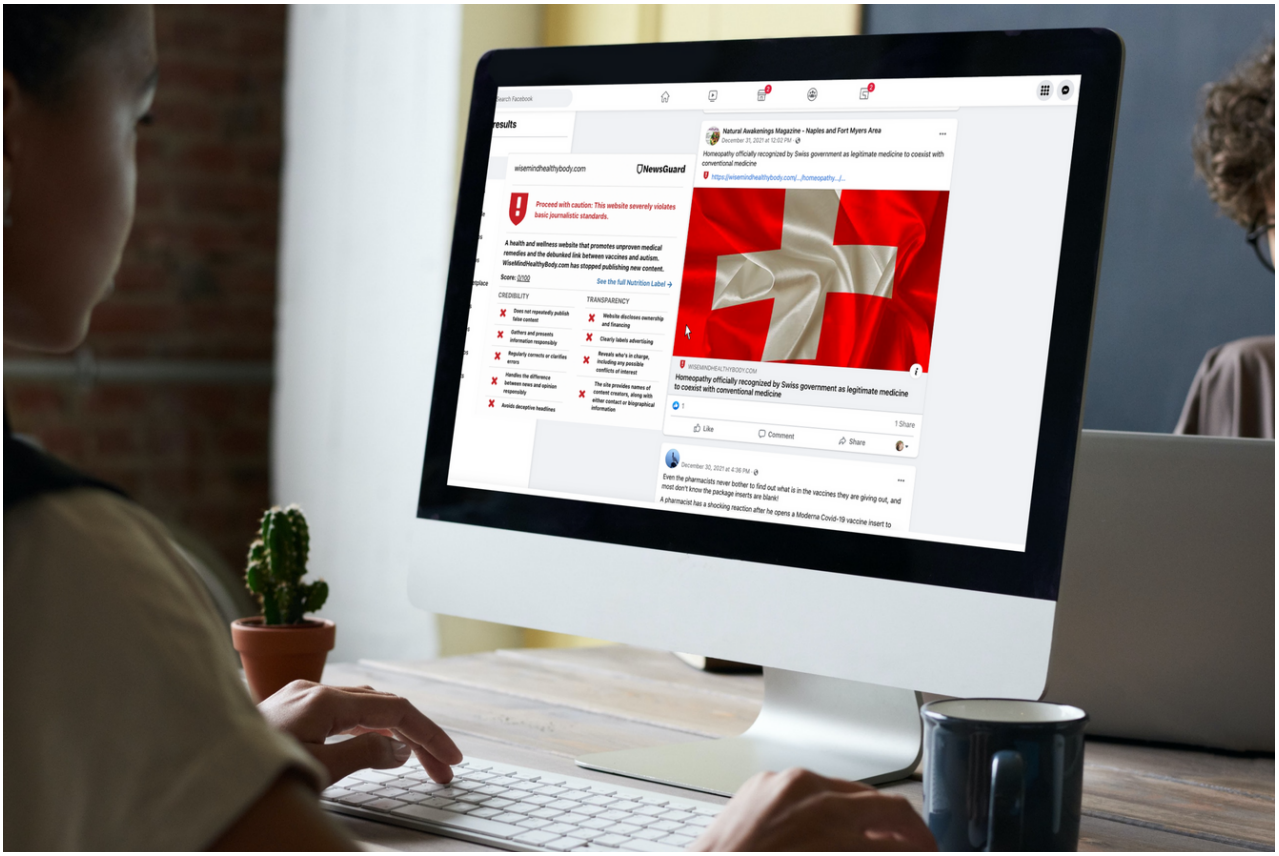
NewsGuard

SOCIAL IMPACT REPORT



Protecting readers, brands, and democracies from misinformation

January 2022

2021 AT A GLANCE

Scale: 7,466 domains covering 95% of online engagement with news sites reviewed, called for comment, rated, and updated.

The Toxic Money Spigot: $2.6 billion in advertising going to misinformation sites begins to be targeted and whittled away.

Pro Bono News Literacy: 7 million public library patrons get guidance from the Red and Green icons.

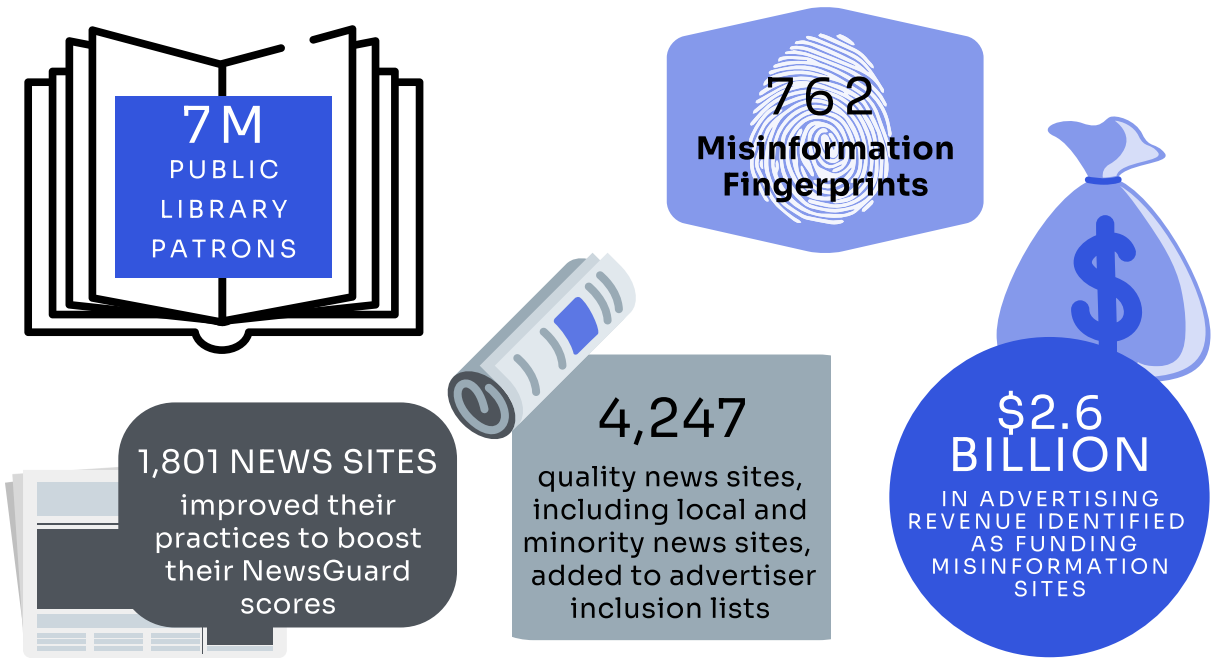
Global News Filter: 625 million monthly users of news aggregation sites around the world benefit from having NewsGuard's trust ratings as a factor in what the aggregators curate.

Money For Quality and Equity: 4,247 quality news sites, including local startups and those serving disadvantaged communities, vetted and added to NewsGuard's advertiser "inclusion lists," thereby giving them a vital new revenue stream.

Trending Classroom Tool: From a teacher in Whitby, CT: "NewsGuard has now joined Google as a verb, at least in my classes. As in, 'The way I can check if my source is reliable is by NewsGuarding it.'"

Upping Their Game: 1,801 news sites took steps to improve their practices to boost their NewsGuard scores.

Tracing Propaganda: 762 false narratives entered into NewsGuard's "Misinformation Fingerprints" catalog, providing one-of-a-kind tracking seeds for the AI tools used by defense industry clients.

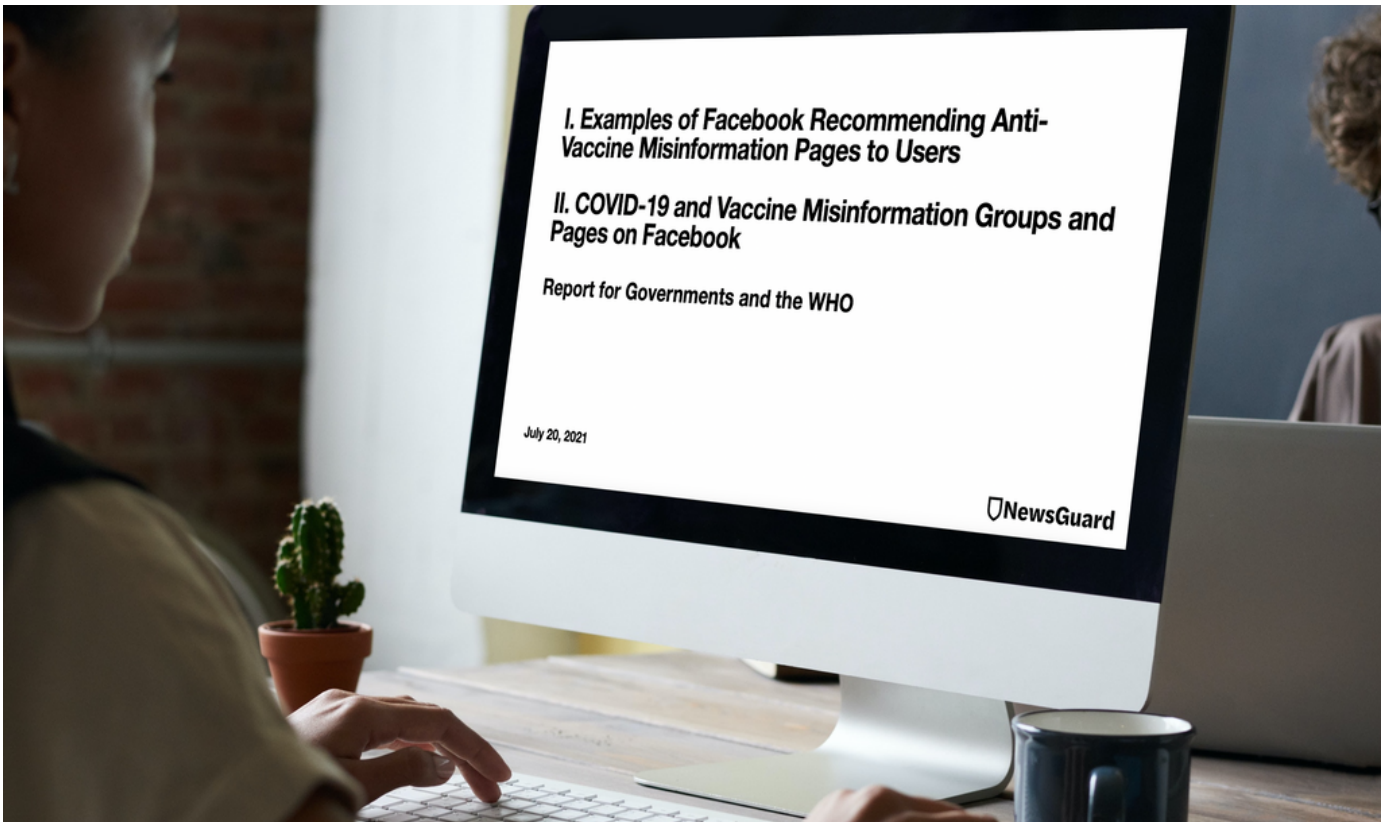


© NewsGuard Technologies, Inc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
The Numbers	4
Fighting COVID-19 Misinformation	5
Partnerships to Expand Access to NewsGuard	10
Online Safety Solutions	13
Exposing the Misinformation Economy	18
Helping Advertisers Fund Trustworthy News	20
Tracking Election Misinformation and Supporting Electoral Integrity	27
Identifying Propaganda and State-Sponsored Misinformation	31
Supporting Trustworthy Journalism	33
Scaling our Media Literacy Initiatives	34
Misinformation Fingerprints	36
Research Partnerships	38
Our Users' Verdict	41
Thank you to NewsGuard’s Partners	42

INTRODUCTION



A 9-year-old opens an app on her parents' smartphone looking for videos of cats or silly dances. Instead, the app shows her a video of a man in a white coat saying the vaccine her parents keep talking about will kill them.

An executive at a company that makes "socially responsible" clothes decides to run an ad campaign for his products to boost sales — and ends up sending money to a Russian propaganda website.

A citizen breaks into the U.S. Capitol building as part of an angry mob after reading online that the recent presidential election was fraudulent. He doesn't know that the website, titled "American Conservatives Today," is actually operated out of North Macedonia and has a history of publishing falsehoods.

These stories are real-world examples of the visceral, human impact of misinformation and disinformation on our world today — and they all happened in 2021. In the past year, we saw the tangible effects of false news — and the importance of high-quality journalism — like never before.

Targeting the $2.6 Billion Online Pollution Finance Engine

The year brought new revelations about the scale and power of online misinformation: Working with media measurement company Comscore, we estimated that top brands are inadvertently sending $2.6 billion to misinformation publishers each year through digital advertising campaigns, including more than 4,000 brands that advertised on COVID-19 misinformation publishers in the first year of the pandemic.

In short, as the world faced unprecedented challenges, misinformation thrived. NewsGuard — a company founded on the premise that online pollution requires a human intelligence solution — has worked hard to meet those challenges. With the stakes higher than ever, NewsGuard achieved unprecedented scale, expanding and accelerating its work to help readers, brands, and democracies identify trustworthy sources of information online — and to avoid dangerous misinformation.

Microsoft, The WHO, Big Ad Agencies, and Academia

In 2021, NewsGuard expanded its footprint through partnerships with more than 50 companies and organizations and more than 800 public libraries. Our partners span categories as diverse as search engines, social media platforms, global health agencies, advertisers, news aggregators, media monitoring and reputation management companies, renowned universities, defense agencies, and middle schools.

An expanded partnership with Microsoft, along with other new partnerships with platforms and technology companies, made NewsGuard's ratings available to millions of internet users.

Our extended partnerships with news aggregators such as MSN ensured there was quality news sourcing on news feeds reaching more than a half-billion users worldwide.

Through our partnership with the World Health Organization, we helped surface hundreds of examples of dangerous misinformation related to COVID-19 spreading on technology platforms, providing that data to global health officials working on the front lines.

In the advertising industry, we forged partnerships with three of the top five global agencies and five of the top 10 global ad exchanges — enabling advertisers to divest from the misinformation economy and redirect their ad spending to support high-quality journalism instead.

As researchers, journalists, media experts, and policy analysts redoubled their efforts to find and assess the impact of misinformation and outline recommendations for businesses and democracies to defend against its consequences, NewsGuard's human-powered data grew as the industry standard for evaluating online news publishers. Researchers at 25 academic, nonprofit, and corporate institutions have licensed NewsGuard's data for their work, providing critical insights about the virality of misinformation on social media — and recommending effective interventions to clean up online information pollution.

In fact, 2021 became the year that new search engines and social media companies began reimagining a safer internet by deploying NewsGuard. Two startups built around user trust — search engine Neeva and social app Bright — launched partnerships with NewsGuard to give users the context they need to separate a credible site from that of a conspiracy theorist.

7,400+ Domains, 1,800+ Improved Practices

Meantime, our editorial team passed the milestone of having rated 7,400+ news domains across our markets — all of which are reviewed and updated on a regular basis to ensure accuracy, and with any publisher who might be criticized according to even one of our nine criteria being given multiple opportunities to comment or correct their practices. More than 1,800 publishers have responded by doing something to improve their scores. (At NewsGuard, we want people to “game” our system by improving their journalistic practices.)

Credible news publishers — ranging from global publishers such as The Economist to local sources such as the Hays Post in Kansas — promote their NewsGuard Green ratings to highlight their high standards and remind readers and advertisers of their credibility.

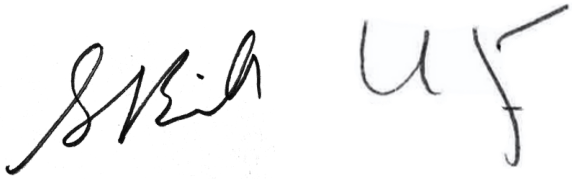
Making AI Tools — and School Kids — News Literate

In a major expansion of NewsGuard’s products, we launched our new Misinformation Fingerprints dataset, with the Pentagon and U.S. State Department as the first to use the data to counter disinformation. The dataset is a humanly curated, continuously updated, and machine-readable catalog of the top misinformation narratives online, purpose-built for artificial-intelligence tools to identify the provenance of hoaxes and track the spread of narratives in real time. Capitalizing on NewsGuard’s bird’s-eye view of the misinformation landscape, our team chronicled more than 760 common myths and myth variations on topics ranging from election fraud to QAnon to the COVID-19 vaccines.

While we began using our data to train artificial intelligence, we continued our efforts to train human intelligence through news literacy education. Our school and library partners, from Milan to Los Angeles, collectively empower more than seven million patrons and students with crucial context as they navigate news online. For younger students who are learning media literacy, NewsGuard provides comprehensive support for online research. As one educator from the Whitby School in Connecticut put it: "When I asked my class how they can tell if a source is reliable... the answer that about five called out at the same time was ‘NewsGuard!’ NewsGuard has now joined Google as a verb, at least in my classes. As in, 'The way I can check if my source is reliable is by NewsGuarding it.’ "

Expanding Globally

Looking ahead, in 2022 NewsGuard plans to launch in new countries as we grow our teams of trained journalists around the world to scale our operations and keep on top of the ever-evolving threats of misinformation on behalf of our partners, clients, and users. As pressure builds to require the leading digital platforms to be bound by a duty of care to protect their users from known online harms, such as misinformation, we’re confident that the adoption of NewsGuard’s solutions will accelerate as the industry standard for protecting against misinformation.



Steven Brill Gordon Crovitz

Co-CEOs, NewsGuard

THE NUMBERS

In 2021, NewsGuard launched major partnerships around the world with companies across various sectors, amplifying the reach of our data to empower millions of new users and customers.

7,466 WEBSITES RATED

1,092 NEW SITES RATED

Across the U.S., U.K., Italy, France, Germany, and Canada.

95% COVERAGE

of online engagement with the news

760+ FALSE NARRATIVES Catalogued as Misinformation Fingerprints by NewsGuard

2,733 RED-RATED SITES

accounting for **137M** ENGAGEMENTS IN THE LAST 90 DAYS

186 IN EU

538 NEW COVID-19 MISINFORMATION SITES FLAGGED

$2.6 BILLION IN PROGRAMMATIC ADVERTISING going to misinformation sites identified by NewsGuard

1,076,927 new likes or followers gained by misinformation "super-spreader" social media pages

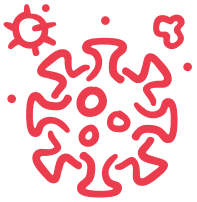
1,801 sites improved their editorial practices as a result of engaging with NewsGuard

25+ RESEARCH GROUPS using NewsGuard data to study the spread and impact of misinformation

4,315 BRANDS identified inadvertently funding COVID-19 misinformation

625M MONTHLY USERS OF NEWS AGGREGATORS THAT USE NEWSGUARD

FIGHTING COVID-19 MISINFORMATION



As the COVID-19 pandemic quickly led to what the World Health Organization has called an “infodemic” of misinformation, WHO officials asked NewsGuard to provide them with regular examples of misinformation about the virus and its vaccines and treatments that were spreading on digital platforms. Citing NewsGuard's insights, the WHO makes requests to social media and search platforms asking that they reduce their spread of life-endangering falsehoods.

“Misinformation has contributed to distrust in science and authoritative institutions over the last year and a half, making it more difficult and dangerous to fight COVID-19,” Andy Pattison, Team Lead for Digital Channels, Department of Digital Health and Innovation at the World Health Organization, said in a September 2021 NewsGuard press release. “NewsGuard’s tireless efforts to reveal sources of misinformation online have enabled WHO and the wider digital community to take real action and stop spreaders in their tracks.”

False content about COVID-19 and vaccines spread so widely in 2021 that U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy was compelled to issue an advisory about the problem. The report, titled “Confronting Health Misinformation,” stressed the dangers of the “rapidly changing information environment” dominated by social media platforms. He highlighted the need to “equip Americans with the tools to identify misinformation, make informed choices about what information they share, and address health misinformation in their communities,” and “implement product design and policy changes on technology platforms to slow the spread of misinformation.”

Analysts at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Office of the Surgeon General are now using a NewsGuard dashboard to monitor that misinformation.

Despite alarms raised by the WHO and governments around the world about the prevalence of COVID misinformation on major social media platforms, research by think tanks, scholars and journalists — often using NewsGuard data — has found that the platforms have done little to combat the problem.
A NewsGuard special report determined that, despite promises, Facebook had failed to provide warnings or fact-check messages on 63% of a sampling of posts containing false claims about the pandemic. NewsGuard research also found that more than half of the pandemic misinformation “super-spreader” accounts on Twitter and Facebook, flagged by NewsGuard’s team at the start of the pandemic, were left to grow and reach new audiences in the ensuing months, their actions unchecked by the platforms.

Facebook failed to act on

63%

of COVID-19 disinformation content

NewsGuard's editorial teams have worked to uncover the latest iterations of COVID-19 myths, identify the ever-evolving tactics employed by bad actors, and communicate these findings to top stakeholders, including the WHO.

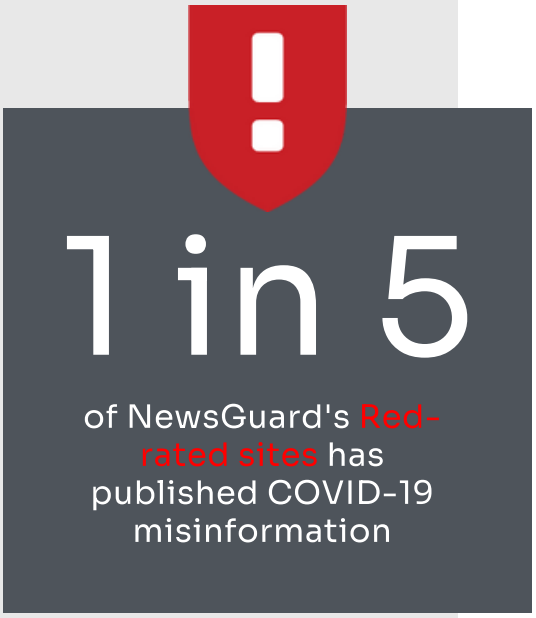
These NewsGuard research reports have been publicized by hundreds of news publishers reaching hundreds of millions of people around the world and have been cited by public officials from Washington to Brussels, putting pressure on the platforms to improve their practices — and, more important, spurring officials to force them to do so.

This section contains a more detailed summary of these efforts.

TRACKING COVID MISINFORMATION

In September, NewsGuard announced that it had identified more than 500 news and information websites that have published misinformation about COVID-19, its vaccines, and other treatments — featuring 50 specific hoaxes related to the vaccines.

Of the 6,730 domains that NewsGuard had rated as of September 2021, 519 had published COVID misinformation, meaning that 7% of the most popular news and information sites had published this harmful content. False health information is common among misinformation sources: Of all the sites NewsGuard has rated Red for being generally unreliable, **one in five** has published COVID-19 misinformation.



The top 50 COVID-19 vaccine myths NewsGuard found online are detailed in its Misinformation Fingerprints product — a catalog of all the top current hoaxes on the internet — including those listed below.

MYTH: Vaccines increase the number of new variants of the virus.

MYTH: The COVID vaccine causes infertility in 97% of women and men.

MYTH: COVID-19 vaccines contain luciferase, a substance named after the fallen angel Lucifer.

MYTH: Airlines have advised people who have received the vaccine to avoid flying because of a risk of developing blood clots.

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION COLLABORATION

Since August 2020, at the request of the World Health Organization, NewsGuard has provided WHO officials with regular reports — 18 reports in 2021 — and data on the latest trends on COVID-19 and health misinformation online, provided on a pro bono basis.

The WHO uses these reports when requesting that digital platforms take steps to protect the safety of their users by mitigating the health care hoaxes they publish. Our reports are described and linked to on a page of the WHO's website titled "Leveraging data insights to keep communities informed."

Recent reports to the WHO have looked at how the German federal election fueled COVID-19 misinformation online, and how Facebook recommends, in a matter of minutes, dozens of pages publishing vaccine and COVID-19 misinformation, some with thousands of followers. NewsGuard's October 2021 report for the WHO showed that 20 of the misinformation accounts flagged in previous reports had continued to thrive on Facebook and Instagram, gaining a combined 370,000 followers. Officials at the European Commission, and government and health authorities in the U.K., France, Germany, and Italy, have asked to receive the reports sent to the WHO.

18 reports
produced by NewsGuard for the WHO

20 flagged misinformation accounts continued to grow on Facebook and Instagram, gaining a combined

370,000

followers

"Misinformation has contributed to distrust in science and authoritative institutions over the last year and a half, making it more difficult and dangerous to fight COVID-19. NewsGuard's tireless efforts to reveal sources of misinformation online have enabled WHO and the wider digital community to take real action and stop spreaders in their tracks."

Andy Pattison, Team Lead for Digital Channels, World Health Organization

EXPOSING COVID-19 MISINFORMATION ON TIKTOK

In September 2021, NewsGuard published an investigation that found that children as young as nine were being fed COVID-19 misinformation on TikTok. The investigation showed that within 35 minutes of signing up for the app, all but one of NewsGuard's nine participants — aged 9 to 17 — were shown COVID-19 misinformation. Two thirds were shown misinformation about the COVID-19 vaccine.

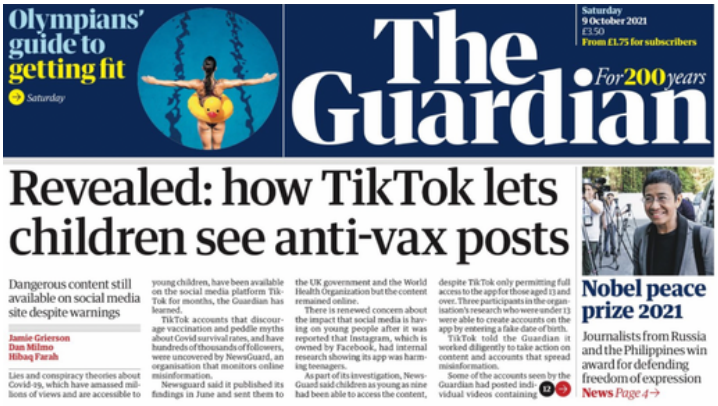
The investigation received extensive coverage by the BBC, the Times of London, La Repubblica, Newsweek, Business Insider, the Irish Examiner, HuffPost, and others. It was the top story on the front page of The Guardian's print edition.

within
35 min
of signing up for the app, eight of the nine participants — aged 9 to 17 — were shown COVID-19 misinformation

Toxic TikTok: Popular social-media video app feeds vaccine misinformation to kids within minutes after they sign up

Read It Now

EXTENSIVE PRESS COVERAGE


Olympians' guide to getting fit
Saturday
The Guardian
Saturday 9 October 2021
£3.50
From £1.75 for subscribers
For 200 years
Revealed: how TikTok lets children see anti-vax posts
Dangerous content still available on social media site despite warnings
Jamie Grierson
Dan Milmo
Hibaq Farah
Nobel peace prize 2021
Journalists from Russia and the Philippines win award for defending freedom of expression
News Page 4 →

BBC Newsweek
THE TIMES
Irish Examiner
Les Echos
BUSINESS INSIDER
la Repubblica

VAXFACTS CAMPAIGN TO ADVANCE HEALTH MEDIA LITERACY

In February 2021, after nearly a year of COVID-19, NewsGuard launched a global campaign to counter hoaxes about the virus and other health care misinformation. The "VaxFacts" campaign made NewsGuard's health-specific media literacy tool, HealthGuard, free for all users for a limited time, thanks to generous support from Microsoft, the Knight Foundation, the Mount Sinai Health System, and Publicis Health Media.

At a time when the "infodemic" of misinformation increased COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy, the VaxFacts campaign aimed to help people avoid misinformation and make informed decisions about vaccinations. Consumers were empowered with free access to educational resources and HealthGuard's credibility ratings for the thousands of websites that publish news and information about health care topics, flagging those spreading hoaxes about the COVID-19 vaccine and guiding families to sources that offer authoritative information.

As part of the campaign, NewsGuard also worked with Microsoft to create an interactive media literacy quiz to test users' abilities to distinguish between fact and fiction when it comes to the COVID-19 vaccination. The quiz is available as a free media literacy resource at newsguardtech.com/vaxfactsquiz

more than

13.7

million

people reached from Publicis Health Media's promotion of the VaxFacts campaign

EXAMPLE VAXFACTS MEDIA PARTNERS

ITALY

LA STAMPA · la Repubblica · ifg istituto per la formazione al giornalismo Urbino · blastingnews · CORRIERE DELLA SERA · LUISS Scuola di Giornalismo · FACT. scegli a chi non credere. · SCIRE scienzainrete il gruppo 2003 per la ricerca scientifica

FRANCE

euronews. · actu.fr · 20 minutes · SciencesPo JOURNALISM SCHOOL

PARTNERSHIPS TO EXPAND ACCESS TO NEWSGUARD

NewsGuard has now partnered with some of the world's largest companies, organizations, and government bodies to expand the reach and impact of our work to millions of people globally. From our 800+ public library partners to long-term partnerships with technology companies such as Microsoft, NewsGuard helps protect people, brands, and democracies from misinformation online.

"DEMOCRACY FORWARD": THE MICROSOFT PARTNERSHIP EXPANSION

This year, Microsoft expanded its partnership with NewsGuard with a three-year agreement under which numerous divisions of Microsoft have access to NewsGuard ratings, including Bing, Microsoft News (MSN), the Edge browser, Microsoft's education and research departments, and Microsoft's Democracy Forward program. All users of Microsoft Edge's desktop browser, for example, have free access to NewsGuard's extension, which displays reliability ratings in search results and social media fees — enabling Edge users to avoid paying NewsGuard's $2.95 monthly subscription fee that users of other browsers must pay.

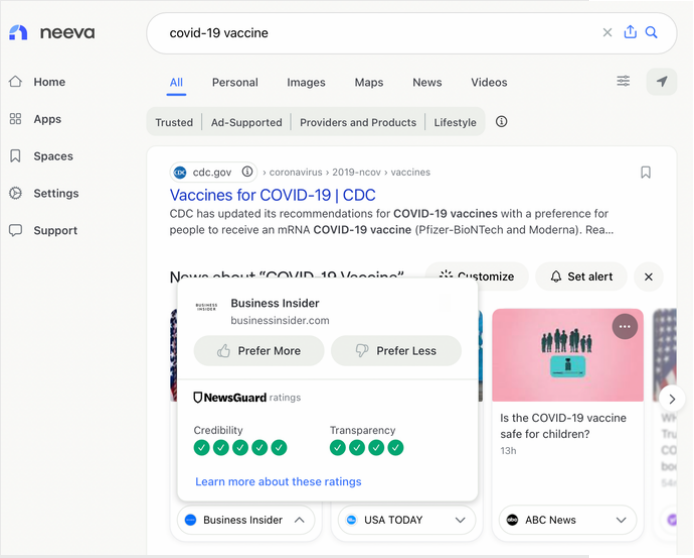
"We believe that this agreement will help us to contribute with impact and scale to efforts to increase societal resilience against disinformation," said Kate O'Sullivan, General Manager of Digital Diplomacy, Microsoft, and a member of NewsGuard's global advisory board. "Countering disinformation through technology is a key pillar of Microsoft's Democracy Forward Program. NewsGuard offers important tools to help evaluate online news sources before relying on the credibility of their contents. We are looking forward to helping consumers in this way and the work we will do together under the extension of our agreement with NewsGuard."

"NewsGuard offers important tools to help evaluate online news sources before relying on the credibility of their contents. We are looking forward to helping consumers in this way and the work we will do together under the extension of our agreement with NewsGuard."

Kate O'Sullivan, General Manager, Digital Diplomacy, Microsoft

NEEVA: THE SEARCH ENGINE FOR TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

Neeva, the first ads-free, private subscription search engine, founded by former Google and YouTube executives, integrated NewsGuard's credibility and transparency ratings into its search results starting in November, providing users with free access to NewsGuard's explanatory Nutrition Labels for news sources. Users can click on the name of a news source in their search results to see how the site fared on NewsGuard's nine criteria and to read its Nutrition Label review.



"Neeva is the alternative for search built on trust and transparency. NewsGuard labels are critical to helping us provide the best answer to a consumer's query — which means information from trustworthy news sources, not the thousands of misinformation and hoax sites that too often dominate traditional search results."

Sridhar Ramaswamy, Founder & CEO, Neeva

BRIGHT: A SOCIAL PLATFORM PUTTING USERS FIRST

Bright, a new social media network focused on trust, privacy, and meaningful connections, announced its integration of NewsGuard ratings into its platform this October. Its partnership with NewsGuard aims to help its members avoid misinformation and engage with credible news on the platform when it publicly launches in 2022 in the U.S., U.K., and Canada.

"We built Bright to be a platform that prioritizes trust, transparency, accuracy, and real human connections. NewsGuard uses real humans to produce rigorous, transparent ratings and reviews of news source credibility. Based on these shared values, it was clear that NewsGuard was the perfect partner to promote news literacy and highlight reliable information on our platform."

Taryn Ward, Founder and CEO, Bright

NEWS AGGREGATION PLATFORMS

NewsGuard serves as a guide to curated news sites and global news aggregation services that, combined, reach more than 625 million monthly users. These platforms rely on NewsGuard data to ensure they do not serve unreliable news content to their readers — and to help them expand their list of publisher partners to include new, trusted organizations.

625M MONTHLY USERS OF NEWS AGGREGATORS THAT USE NEWSGUARD'S DATA

MEDIA MONITORING COMPANIES

PRESSRELATIONS

Pressrelations, a global company that provides digital media monitoring and media analysis services, integrates NewsGuard data into the NewsRadar platform it offers to clients ranging from large international enterprises to public sector organizations to political parties. In September 2021, Pressrelations launched an additional dashboard that integrates NewsGuard data: Plotlights, which it describes as the “first fully-integrated media intelligence and threat intelligence platform.”

The group behind Plotlights conducted research in late 2021 that used NewsGuard data to analyze climate change misinformation in the U.K. The authors concluded: “...today’s communicators need to complement standard digital PR metrics with newer data points such as the NewsGuard rating and look at all of these not isolated but in an integrated fashion. Only a combination of media intelligence metrics, backlink and other SEO/VSO data, NewsGuard and more will give communicators the insights they need to communicate effectively whilst protecting their brands.”

INFOJUICE

Italian media monitoring company Infojuice now uses NewsGuard data for media analysis by incorporating the data into its Brand Analysis and Brand Reputation products. NewsGuard’s information on the reliability of a site provides Infojuice clients with additional context about the news sources covering a client’s brand, adding a new form of information to aid in brand reputation management.

"As a Media Intelligence company, we feel the responsibility to contribute to the dissemination of reliable information by stemming disinformation. This partnership with NewsGuard allows us to embrace this challenge with a strong, expert, and reliable partner. Disinformation must be fought with the technology we have at our disposal but above all with human intelligence."

Omar Signori, CEO, Infojuice

ONLINE SAFETY SOLUTIONS
INFORMING, NOT CENSORING

Working with other organizations and regulators to promote online safety, empower internet users, and create sustainable advertising revenue streams for quality news publications is a crucial element of NewsGuard's work.

As potential legislation and regulatory efforts related to online harms and safety advance in the U.K., Europe and elsewhere, NewsGuard has worked to ensure that the harms from misinformation online are a high priority for new duties on the part of digital platforms to protect their users.

We believe the answer to misinformation is not blocking content or censoring speech, but instead arming people with information that provides the context and digital literacy skills they need to differentiate between generally reliable sources of news and untrustworthy sources. The digital platforms have generally been immune from liability for the known harms they cause with the misinformation they publish and the recommendations their algorithms make — which are coded to maximize engagement, not the accuracy of information.

In 2021, those dynamics began to change, as officials from Washington to London to Brussels began to consider alternatives to that immunity. We expect continued pressure on the platforms to provide their users with "middleware" tools such as NewsGuard ratings to give the users of digital platforms choice about how they interact with the algorithms — in our case, providing ratings of news outlets at the source level, with a transparently reported and fully disclosed editorial process.

This section describes the ways NewsGuard is contributing to the fight for online safety in both regulatory and business contexts.

EUROPEAN UNION CODE OF PRACTICE ON DISINFORMATION

At the request of officials of the European Commission, NewsGuard became a prospective signatory to the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation, joining about 40 other companies and organizations in helping to revise the code.

In July 2021, the European Commission determined that the code must be "strengthened to provide a firm response to disinformation" and that "substantial additional efforts are needed to reduce the flow of harmful disinformation." Throughout the revision process, NewsGuard aims to contribute to enhancing the provisions related to empowering users with tools to protect them from misinformation and ensuring data is available to academic researchers.

Several of NewsGuard's partners are among the prospective signatories, such as Publicis, Neeva, Bright, and Avaaz. As a potential signatory, NewsGuard will commit to be fully transparent, apolitical, and accountable in its rating process, and to give the publishers it rates the right to be heard.

ITALIAN DIGITAL MEDIA OBSERVATORY

In 2021, NewsGuard was a founding member of the Italian Digital Media Observatory (IDMO), one of eight national hubs awarded funding from the European Commission to help fight disinformation and fake news in Europe.

NewsGuard joined the consortium alongside seven other members, including Luiss University, the University of Rome Tor Vergata, the national public broadcaster RAI, fact-checking organization Pagella Politica, research and consulting company T6 Ecosystems, and media and telecommunications operators TELECOM and GEDI.

The consortium, led by Luiss University, uses NewsGuard's data on misinformation websites to detect, analyze, and expose harmful disinformation campaigns at the country, national, multinational, and EU level.

MIDDLEWARE AND FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

In 2021, a new approach to the problem of online misinformation began to get traction. Led by lead researcher and renowned political philosopher Francis Fukuyama, the Stanford Working Group on Platform Scale coined the term “middleware” as a concept that envisions “software and services that would add an editorial layer between the dominant internet platforms and consumers.” This term was used to describe how online platforms might integrate a service like NewsGuard. In 2021, Fukuyama endorsed NewsGuard as one form of middleware in subsequent reports promoting this approach.

> We view middleware as an opportunity to introduce competition and innovation into markets currently dominated by the principal internet platforms. There is enormous pressure on the platforms to filter from their domains not just illegal content, but also material that is deemed politically harmful, such as conspiracy theories, fake news, and abusive content.
>
> A competitive middleware sector would help solve this problem by outsourcing content curation to other organizations that enable consumers to tailor their feeds to their own explicit preferences. At the same time, middleware, in our view, could be a superior alternative to structural remedies imposed by either courts or regulators, in that it would directly respond to consumer preferences and market actors.

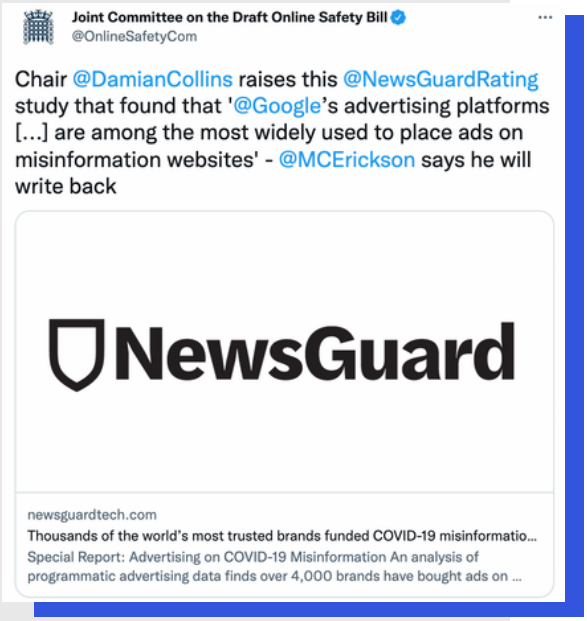
PENTAGON STUDY RECOMMENDS ALL MEMBERS OF ARMED FORCES BE GIVEN NEWSGUARD

In a 2021 report on how to defend the United States military forces from misinformation threats, author and Georgetown University professor Nicholas D. Wright recommended that all members of the armed forces be given access to NewsGuard. The report describes how adversaries and other destabilizing forces use online misinformation to sow discord and undermine defense forces, highlights the impact of new technologies, including AI and deep fakes, and advocates for a more balanced commercial spending approach on offensive and defensive intelligence technology.

U.K. MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT CITE NEWSGUARD'S WORK

NewsGuard's work has been cited by British parliamentarians on several occasions. Taking evidence for the U.K.'s Online Safety Bill, Damian Collins, MP, chair of the Joint Committee on the Draft Online Safety Bill, pressed Markham Erickson, a Google Vice President, about why Google's Ad platforms are the most widely used to place ads on misinformation websites — a finding based on NewsGuard's research.

John Nicholson, MP, a member of the same committee, later pressed TikTok's Theo Bertram about concerns raised by NewsGuard's investigation revealing that TikTok was feeding COVID-19 misinformation to children as young as nine within minutes of their signing up to the app.



U.S. CONGRESS CITES TIKTOK REPORT

In a letter to TikTok's CEO, Raja Krishnamoorthi, the Chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives' Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy, cited NewsGuard's investigation into how COVID-19 misinformation is funneled to children on TikTok.

AMERIGO AWARD FOR JOURNALISM

NewsGuard Managing Editor & Vice President Partnerships for Europe Virginia Padovese was awarded the 2021 Amerigo Award for journalism, which recognizes the journalists and editorial teams that report on the U.S. for the Italian public, in the category "websites." NewsGuard's reporting on misinformation in the U.S. and abroad has been recognized as a valuable source of information for audiences in Italy.

GERMAN STATE MEDIA AUTHORITIES

In 2021, NewsGuard began partnering with German state media authorities in charge of regulating private radio and television stations, providing them with data and expertise to evaluate online sources.

NewsGuard also conducts regular training for the agency's oversight teams, describing NewsGuard's apolitical criteria and how they constitute the basic standards of journalistic work. One such partner is the North Rhine Westphalia State media agency, which began partnering with NewsGuard in June 2021.

LANDESANSTALT FÜR MEDIEN NRW

FNOMCeO SUPPORT FOR NEWSGUARD

The Italian National Medical Association regularly supports NewsGuard's work by amplifying NewsGuard reports across the association's website and social media accounts. For example, FNOMCeO supported NewsGuard's VaxFacts campaign and posted our Super-Spreaders reports and TikTok report.

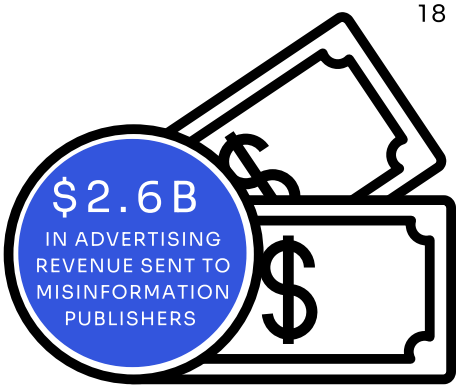
NGO REPORTS & RESEARCH PARTNERS

NewsGuard's reporting has been cited in several reports by NGOs, think tanks, and research institutions. These include the Aspen Institute Commission on Information Disorder, which cited NewsGuard findings about how major brands unintentionally supported known misinformation publishers through opaque ad placement, and the Carter Center, which used NewsGuard ratings for research into how "repeat offenders" — media outlets that repeatedly publish false information — spread false narratives about election fraud during the 2020 election.

PRESIDENT MACRON-APPOINTED COMMISSION

In October 2021, an expert commission named by French President Emmmanuel Macron (called "Les Lumières à l'ère numérique") asked NewsGuard for a written contribution on ways to defund misinformation, based on our expertise in working with brands and their agencies.

EXPOSING THE MISINFORMATION ECONOMY



As journalists, NewsGuard's analysts are trained to "follow the money" to determine how misinformation sites are financed. This year, we looked at the question more broadly, producing groundbreaking research that captured the scale at which misinformation sites cash in from programmatic advertising — thanks to unintentional ad placements from top-tier companies.

In August, we published the first comprehensive estimate of the size of this phenomenon, teaming up with data analytics firm Comscore to calculate the amount of ad revenue being sent to unreliable publishers each year. We concluded that misinformation sites rake in billions each year — $2.6 billion in annual programmatic revenue — from thousands of top brands. This includes hundreds of millions in revenue supporting false health claims, anti-vaccine myths, election misinformation, partisan propaganda, and other forms of false news.

In just the United States, the revenue going to misinformation sites is equivalent to nearly 30% of all the online advertising revenue received by the nation's newspapers, meaning that directing it to these credible journalism organizations would have an enormous impact on the fortunes of this struggling industry.

The findings received considerable attention from the media, with the Conscious Ad Network (CAN) citing NewsGuard and Comscore's research in an open letter to the Conference of the Parties (COP26) Presidency Programme, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the CEOs of Facebook, Instagram, Google, Twitter, TikTok, Pinterest, and Reddit, which demanded global action to tackle climate misinformation.

In a NiemanLab article on journalism predictions for 2022, NewsGuard Co-CEO Gordon Crovitz said 2022 would be "the year advertisers stop boycotting news."

NiemanLab PREDICTIONS FOR JOURNALISM 2022

The year advertisers stop boycotting news

— Gordon Crovitz

"Restoring digital advertising to quality news publishers is a rare case where companies can do good and do well."

Further research from NewsGuard in 2021 assessed the scope of this problem among major companies, finding that more than 1,600 brands had advertised on sites spreading falsehoods about the 2020 U.S. election, and that more than 4,000 brands had run ads on sites spreading false information about COVID-19 — including major brands like Pepsi, Comcast, Marriott, and even the U.S. government's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

These advertisements were inadvertent, placed by algorithms on programmatic ad-buying platforms such as Google's DV360, rather than intentionally by the brands involved. But the data demonstrate the vast scale at which programmatic advertising supports the online misinformation ecosystem — and how only action from top companies will reduce the reach of online misinformation.

NewsGuard's findings have prompted many brands to re-examine their media spend and invest in tools to protect against misinformation. Questions have also been asked about why the dominant ad tech platforms have allowed unintentional support of misinformation sites by brands. In October, British member of parliament, Damian Collins, MP, chair of the Joint Committee on the Draft Online Safety Bill, pressed Markham Erickson, a Google Vice President, about why Google's Ad platforms are the most widely used to place ads on misinformation websites — based on NewsGuard's research into the phenomenon.

As the next section of this report indicates, NewsGuard did more in 2021 than highlight and quantify the problem: We began to implement effective solutions.

AXIOS

Exclusive: Over 1,000 brands ran ads alongside election misinformation

BUSINESS INSIDER

Big brands are funneling as much as $2.6 billion into misinformation websites per year

HELPING ADVERTISERS FUND TRUSTWORTHY NEWS

WHILE LOWERING CPMS AND INCREASING ENGAGEMENT

In 2021, NewsGuard's work with brands, advertising agencies, advertising platforms, and ad exchanges accelerated rapidly, beginning the process of helping brands keep their ads off inappropriate sites and restore ad revenue to quality journalism.

Over the course of this year, NewsGuard signed partnerships with three of the top six advertising holding companies, representing more than a hundred agencies. NewsGuard's Reliability Rating data influenced thousands of ad buys through our dozens of partners, helping brands advertise responsibly on quality news websites while reaping the benefits of targeting the highly engaged news consumer. And 2021 was only the beginning. The pace of our engagement with advertisers snowballed in the last quarter of the year and continues to do so as of this writing.

A key factor in this trend was the launch of a new offering — the Responsible Advertising for News Segments (RANS) — which helps brands and agencies advertise on high-quality news sources while avoiding misinformation. A comprehensive case study carried out by one leading advertising agency found that this new product not only enabled brands to advertise safely on news content, but it also lowered costs and improved campaign performance by expanding their ad buys to high-quality, but often underpriced, inventory on trustworthy news sites.

In other words, RANS enables advertisers to do good and do well.

AGENCY PARTNERS

We also expanded our work to offer our transparent, journalist-powered ratings to video news, announcing a partnership with Zefr to enable advertisers to responsibly advertise on trusted YouTube news channels.

Moreover, under an agreement reached in late 2021, NewsGuard's work in brand safety will expand beyond online advertising to include protections for brands as they advertise on news broadcasts on TV, in addition to cable and satellite services. The effort will involve NewsGuard providing ratings for both TV networks and individual TV news shows.

IPG Mediabrands announced it will be the first to provide NewsGuard's ratings of TV news, which will be timed for the spring of 2022. Thus, clients of IPG Mediabrands will soon be protected whether they are advertising on news digitally or through broadcasting.

Finally, in December 2021, Kelsey Chickering, the highly respected Forrester research analyst who monitors media for global chief marketing officers, wrote a report recommending that: "B2C marketers ... should partner with companies, like NewsGuard, that license tools to combat misinformation."

Read on for more about these and other efforts to clean up the digital ad economy.

"The independent verification of a reputable solution such as NewsGuard will allow us to be nuanced and ethically minded in our approach to buying media. Thus, we'll be continuing to protect our clients whilst allowing us to work with our partners to adhere to our mutual values of inclusivity."

Azad Ali, Head of Performance Insight, Spark Foundry

RANS: RESPONSIBLE ADVERTISING FOR NEWS SEGMENTS

NewsGuard launched its Responsible Advertising for News Segments service in March, which helps agencies and brands advertise on high-quality news sources — including sources serving minority communities and independent local news outlets — while avoiding placing ads on sites spreading misinformation. Using NewsGuard's Reliability Ratings as a basis, the RANS can be used by clients to either exclude known misinformation websites from their campaigns, solving the urgent brand safety problem of ads supporting hoax sites, or to expand allow lists for quality news websites by adding thousands of trusted sources vetted by the NewsGuard team and certified as credible.

NewsGuard's constantly updated Responsible Advertising for News inclusion list contains thousands of humanly vetted, highly trustworthy news sources that adhere strongly to journalistic standards by presenting credible information fairly and accurately. The list includes a wide range of local news outlets, digital-only publishers, sites serving minority communities, and other categories of trustworthy news while also providing advertisers maximum protection in terms of brand safety.

As of December 2021, NewsGuard's standard inclusion lists featured 4,247 distinct websites — including 2,388 trusted local news sites and 73 trusted minority news sites.

4,247 websites in NewsGuard's inclusion list

- 2,388 trusted local news sites
- 73 trusted minority news sites

"Relying on the platforms and DSPs is not enough. You really do need to have a third party like NewsGuard to come in and tell us that two of the three news sources cited are being funded by state-sponsored elements."

Yale Cohen, EVP Global Digital Standards, Publicis Media Exchange

RANS CASE STUDY: DOING THE RIGHT THING WHILE IMPROVING EFFICIENCY

In May, IPG Mediabrands published findings from a joint study conducted with a Fortune 500 company, which demonstrated that advertising on quality news sources improves campaign performance. Working with the client, NewsGuard identified 1,034 highly trusted U.S.-based news sites that were not yet on the client's advertising "allow list."

The sources that were added performed significantly better, on average, than other sites on the client's allow list. The study's findings included:

Increased reach:
The sites added by NewsGuard accounted for 19% of impressions served, yielding incremental reach.

Lower costs:
The effective cost per thousand clicks for these sites were 9% lower compared to the overall allow list.

Improved efficiency:
Cost per reach improved; ads on the sites added by NewsGuard were 81% more efficient than the overall allow list.

Better performance:
Viewability of new sites was comparable to the broader allow list at 84%, and click-through rates were 143% higher among the sites added by NewsGuard.

SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR

MediaPost named NewsGuard "Supplier of the Year" in November 2021, an award that "recognizes suppliers of media inventory, data or technology." The recognition was made as part of MediaPost's annual "Agency of the Year" awards. Previous winners in the supplier category include Google, Amazon, and the Media Rating Council.

"With NewsGuard, you're evaluating inventory based on quality metrics as opposed to arbitrary classifications of websites."

Joshua Lowcock, Chief Digital Officer, UM Worldwide

OUR RANS WEBINAR

In September 2021, NewsGuard hosted its very first brand safety webinar entitled "Advertising responsibly on news and avoiding misinformation." More than 60 industry executives, media professionals, and advertising agency account leaders from 34 companies met to learn how advertisers can responsibly advertise on news without sending ad revenue to misinformation outlets.

Some highlights from the conversation include the following:

What can we do as ad tech platforms, agencies, and as an industry to stop funding misinformation and promote quality news?

"Trusted news is somewhere where consumers engage with ... trusted journalism that resonates with them ... the converse side is you could actually lose trust with that consumer through some of those engagements that happen in untrustworthy environments, which is why we are very vigilant to protect that."

Yale Cohen, EVP Global Digital Standards, Publicis Media

How has the advertising ecosystem been challenged by misinformation, and how have we dealt with it?

"Focusing on quality news sites that actually met a high reputational threshold based on the transparent NewsGuard score, we were getting 9% lower CPMs ... we were seeing 143% higher clickthrough rates on quality news sites, versus general open web buys, which shows that quality news ... drives better outcomes for brands."

Joshua Lowcock, Chief Digital Officer, UM WorldWide

How do we reduce blocklisting keywords and how do we target quality news without added risk?

"When it comes to misinformation ... you can get some signals on publishers whether they're viable or not, but ultimately the kind of research ... that's done best by researchers and teams, like NewsGuard."

Richard Raddon, CEO and Co-founder, Zefr

ENABLING AD-TECH PLATFORMS TO PLACE ADS RESPONSIBLY ON NEWS

In 2021, NewsGuard launched numerous new partnerships and expanded existing partnerships with a wide range of advertising platforms, exchanges, and contextual tools — making it easier than ever for any advertiser to use NewsGuard's ratings to advertise responsibly on news while avoiding misinformation.

ADVERTISING PLATFORM PARTNERS

PEER39 · comscore · xandr · KARGO · MediaMath · PubMatic · AMOBEE · verizon media DSP · gumgum · centro · Undertone · OpenSlate · MEETRICS · OpenWeb · INDEX EXCHANGE · ZEFR · triplelift · Teads · Connatix

Over 100 brands use NewsGuard's data to avoid misinformation

HELPING BRANDS FUND CREDIBLE NEWS AND AVOID MISINFORMATION ON YOUTUBE

In 2021, we launched new partnerships to expand the use of NewsGuard's ratings beyond programmatic display advertising on news sites to also cover advertising on YouTube news channels. In October, we announced a partnership with Zefr, a leading provider of brand safety technology on YouTube that enables brands to target their YouTube ads to highly trusted news sources on the platform.

"After careful research it became clear that NewsGuard's human intelligence process offers by far the most comprehensive, most transparent, most up to date, and most reliable standards for advertisers looking to support legitimate journalism. By combining NewsGuard's scale and rigor with Zefr's patented video technology, we're now able to offer brands additional brand suitable investment opportunities for video."

Kelsey Garigan, EVP North American Sales, Zefr

BEYOND BRAND SAFETY ON THE INTERNET: PROVIDING TRUST RATINGS FOR BROADCAST NEWS PROGRAMS AND NETWORKS

In November, IPG Mediabrands announced it had expanded its partnership with NewsGuard to include the development of a new offering. For the first time, NewsGuard will produce trust ratings for 117 top broadcast news programs and 27 networks. The ratings, which will follow NewsGuard's rigorous, apolitical rating process and be based on basic journalistic criteria, will enable advertisers to advertise responsibly on quality broadcast news while avoiding ad placements on programs or networks that convey misinformation or egregiously distort facts.

"In this age of misinformation and disinformation, one of the most important things we can offer our clients is greater assurances that their media dollars are not supporting misleading content. NewsGuard is rapidly earning trust among viewers as an unbiased evaluator of news networks and sites."

Dani Benowitz, US President, MAGNA

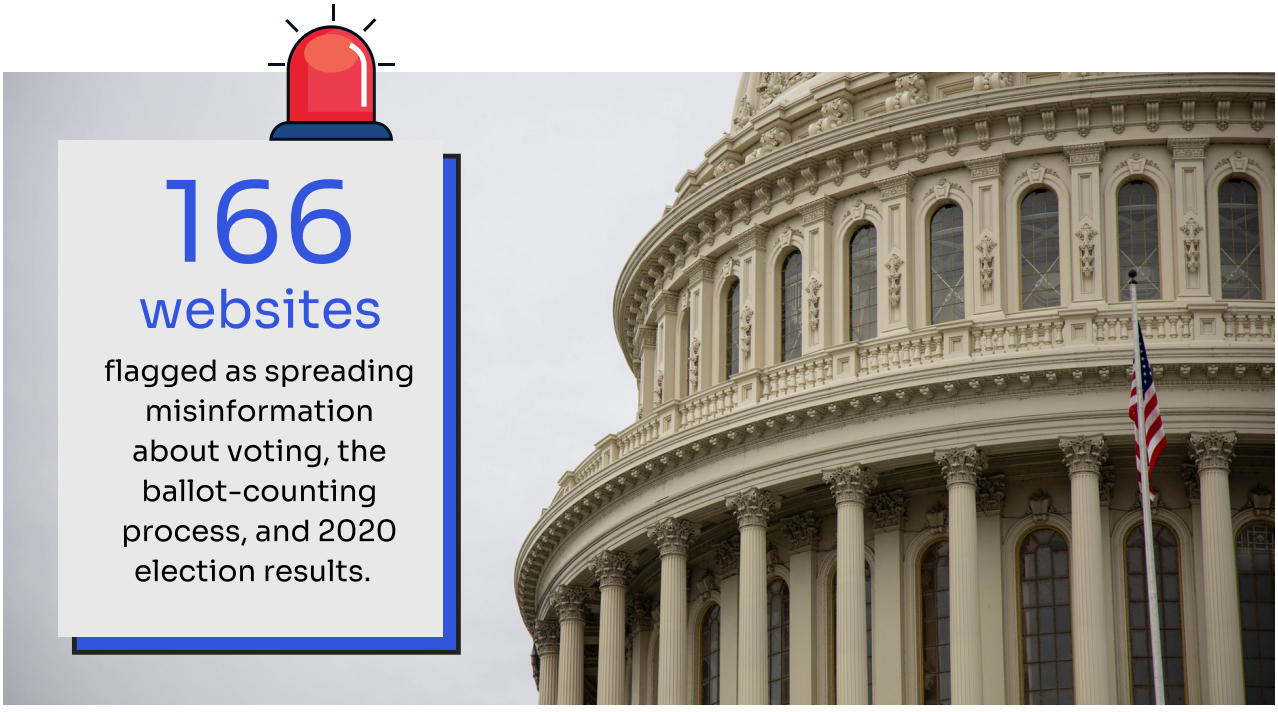
TRACKING ELECTION MISINFORMATION AND SUPPORTING ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

In the run up to the 2020 U.S. presidential election and the ensuing weeks, NewsGuard's rapid response teams of experienced journalists reported from the virtual front lines of an increasingly polarized political landscape. As election myths spread by misinformation outlets culminated in the unprecedented events of January 6, 2021, at the United States Capitol, it became clear that bad actors and those who profit from false news had redoubled their efforts to destabilize global democracies.

To keep up with this spread of political misinformation, our editorial teams focused their efforts on investigating the narratives being spread and the platforms and publishers enabling their diffusion. We documented top election myths in Germany, delved into platforms ranging from Facebook to Parler, and issued frequent reports to regulators such as the WHO describing the link between election myths and health misinformation online.

The narratives identified by our editorial teams in turn became material for our unique catalog of online hoaxes, the Misinformation Fingerprints, which can be used to seed machine learning tools deployed by government agencies tasked with tracking foreign sources of disinformation.

Here's a closer look at the 2021 work of our politics team:



U.S. ELECTION

ELECTION MISINFORMATION TRACKER AND TOP ELECTION MYTHS

Between Nov. 3, 2020 — Election Day in the U.S. — and Jan. 20, 2021 — Inauguration Day — NewsGuard identified 166 websites spreading misinformation about voting, the ballot-counting process, and the results of the 2020 U.S. Election. The myths NewsGuard found ranged from false claims about alleged voter fraud to conspiracy theories about voting machine companies and rigged ballots.

Here are a few of the other myths NewsGuard debunked, spread by misinformation sources on both the right and the left:

> MYTH: A supercomputer called "Hammer" and an accompanying software called "Scorecard" enabled Democrats to switch votes from Donald Trump to Joe Biden, altering the outcome of the presidential election.
>
> DEBUNK: There is no evidence that the "Hammer" computer system or the "Scorecard" software exist, let alone that they were used to alter votes. The director of the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Chris Krebs, a Trump appointee, called such claims "nonsense" in a Nov. 7, 2020 tweet.

> MYTH: The removal of U.S. Postal Service mailboxes in August 2020 is part of a plot by President Donald Trump and his appointee Postmaster General Louis DeJoy to make it more difficult for people to vote by mail.
>
> DEBUNK: The USPS routinely removes mailboxes when they are not needed in a certain area. Doing so is not a political tactic but a long-held USPS policy. Following the release of an August 2020 photo of a USPS mailbox in Oregon being removed, post office spokesperson Ernie Swanson told the Willamette Week, a Portland newspaper, that "The reason we're doing it is because of declining mail volume."

REPORT SHOWING PARLER MISINFORMATION BEFORE JAN. 6, 2021, CAPITOL INSURRECTION

NewsGuard and media monitoring firm PeakMetrics analyzed more than 17,000 public posts from the social media app Parler during the first week of January 2021, finding that 87% of the news links shared during that period came from websites with Red ("unreliable") ratings from NewsGuard. The most-linked news source on the platform during the time period was a North Macedonian website called "American Conservatives Today," which was linked to 2,917 times and has a credibility score of 0 out of 100 from NewsGuard. QAnon conspiracy sites also featured prominently among the links in the dataset, suggesting that Parler was a hotbed for misinformation publishers in the lead up to the January 6, 2021, Capitol insurrection.

87%

of news shared on Parler before January 6, 2021, came from misinformation sites

THE BIG LIE AND BIG TECH: MISINFORMATION REPEAT OFFENDERS AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE 2020 U.S. ELECTION

Published by the Carter Center in October 2021

This report by the Carter Center details the role played by "repeat offenders" — media outlets known to repeatedly publish false and misleading information — in spreading election fraud narratives in online echo chambers during the 2020 election. The Carter Center used NewsGuard data to compile a list of "repeat offender" sources that frequently amplify misinformation. The Center analyzed 2.93 million posts in 883 Facebook groups engaged in partisan political discourse and found repeat-offender content in 76% of all groups — and in 97% of right-leaning groups — between August 17, 2020, and January 20, 2021.

THE CARTER CENTER

repeat-offender content appeard in

76%

of all Facebook groups analyzed by the Carter Center

GERMAN ELECTION

TRACKING MISINFORMATION ABOUT THE GERMAN NATIONAL ELECTION

In the lead-up to the German national election in September 2021, NewsGuard's team catalogued false claims about the election process — and the websites spreading those myths — in our German Election Misinformation Tracker.

In August, NewsGuard's team reported that a series of floods in Germany had sparked a wave of election-related misinformation. Just days before the election, NewsGuard issued a summary of election misinformation trends, including an increased spread of false claims about mail-in ballots. As of the last update of the tracker in September 2021, NewsGuard had identified a total of 76 false claims about the election and catalogued 21 websites publishing election misinformation.

76

false claims

identified by NewsGuard about the 2021 German national election (Bundestagwahl)

HOW THE GERMAN FEDERAL ELECTION HAS FUELED COVID-19 MISINFORMATION ONLINE

Report to the World Health Organization, October 2021

This report for the WHO showed that the federal election in Germany both fueled new myths and helped perpetuate long-standing myths about the pandemic. The report called attention to Facebook pages and groups that spread misinformation about the German election and COVID-19 to large audiences. The findings showed once again that national elections are fertile ground for misinformation of all kinds, including health misinformation.

FRAUNHOFER INSTITUTE AND PRESSRELATIONS STUDY

Published in September 2021

In 2021, NewsGuard continued partnering with pressrelations and the Fraunhofer Institute for Communication, Information Processing and Ergonomics FKIE to develop a system for identifying potential false reports and disinformation campaigns. The research project studied misinformation campaigns around the 2021 German national election. The report found that Germany's Green Party was by far the biggest target of misinformation during the election, and that right-wing news sites and one Russian-owned site were the purveyors of election myths with the biggest reach.

IDENTIFYING PROPAGANDA AND STATE-SPONSORED MISINFORMATION

NewsGuard's approach of "pre-bunking" — providing the general context of a site's reliability, or lack thereof, instead of reactively fact-checking after a false claim has been made — has been effective when it comes to identifying and mitigating political propaganda and state-sponsored misinformation for national security, intelligence, and monitoring clients. Our mission to enable online safety includes protecting democracies, which we have done by warning citizens and officials about foreign and domestic propaganda efforts surfaced by our analysts.

For example, we rated ObservateurContinental.fr, a French-language website that has spread Russian propaganda and conspiracy theories, including about the COVID-19 pandemic, that is connected to InfoRos, a Russian intelligence military unit involved in cyber-hacking and psychological-warfare. We identified Presstv.ir as an Iranian government disinformation publisher, quickly rating its new URL after the FBI removed its old one, presstv.com. And many of our Red-rated sites have subsequently been required to register by the U.S. Department of Justice as foreign agents, including RT, GlobalTimes, and PressTV.

On November 15, 2021, Chine Labbe, Managing Editor and Vice President of Partnerships, Europe, was invited to speak at a hearing of the European Parliament Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the European Union, including Disinformation. Asked to address ways in which disinformation stemming from abroad enters the public debate, and what can be done about it, she said:

> "Because disinformation knows no borders, because it rapidly moves across countries, languages, formats, and inevitably slips from the grasp of those that have started specific campaigns, fighting foreign disinformation requires monitoring the full ecosystem of online misinformation, including seemingly homegrown trends and narratives."
>
> - Chine Labbe, NewsGuard Managing Editor and Vice President of Partnerships, Europe, testimony before the European Parliament's Special Committee

EXPOSING POLITICAL PROPAGANDA

UNCOVERING PROPAGANDA MASQUERADING AS LOCAL NEWS

NewsGuard tracked several large networks of websites that appear to be local news sites but are actually funded by political actors intending to influence elections or public sentiment. These sites exist on both sides of the aisle, through right-leaning operations such as Metric Media and left-leaning groups such as Acronym.

PENNSYLVANIA NEWS TRUST REPORT

The Pennsylvania News Trust Report, produced in partnership with The Lenfest Institute for Journalism, examined the issues of trust and integrity in media coverage in and about Pennsylvania.

It found that a large proportion of what appear to be local news sites in Pennsylvania — 30% — actually publish propaganda masquerading as news. Moreover, while the vast majority of news coverage about the state — both from local outlets and national outlets — comes from credible sources, unreliable sources have attracted proportionally higher engagement on social media.

CALIFORNIA NEWS TRUST REPORT

In order to understand the impact of partisan local news sites, NewsGuard also conducted an independent study of California news sources, in collaboration with the Ward Creek Foundation and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Its findings mirrored those of the Pennsylvania News Trust Report finding that dozens of highly partisan sites are masquerading as traditional local news sites, exploiting and undermining readers' trust in local journalism.

NewsGuard's team of journalists assessed 202 California-based news outlets against our nine basic, apolitical journalistic criteria. Out of the California news sites reviewed, a high percentage — 38% — were designed to look and feel like local newspapers, but were actually partisan operations with undisclosed, politically motivated funding sources, serious conflicts of interest, and highly slanted coverage.

SUPPORTING TRUSTWORTHY JOURNALISM

1,800+ websites
improved their practices to boost their NewsGuard scores

IMPROVING PRACTICES

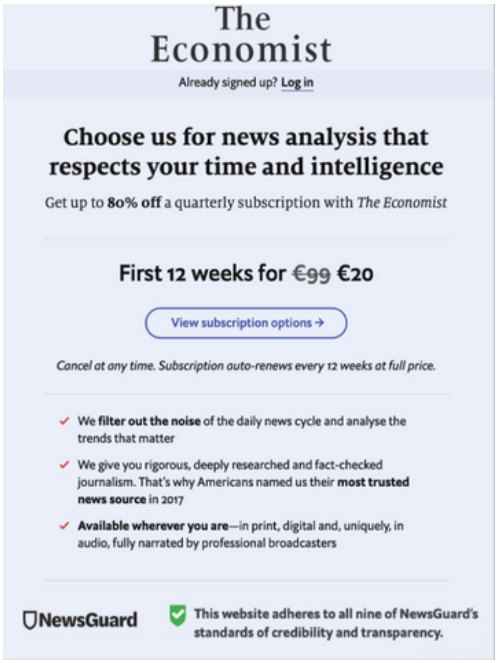
One of NewsGuard's founding missions is to "restore trust in the media." To that end, as of this writing, 1,801 news websites that have engaged with NewsGuard analysts have improved their practices to meet one or more of NewsGuard's nine criteria. Unlike the digital platforms with their secretive algorithms, NewsGuard makes its assessment criteria clear to publishers, encouraging them to "game our system" by improving their credibility and transparency practices.

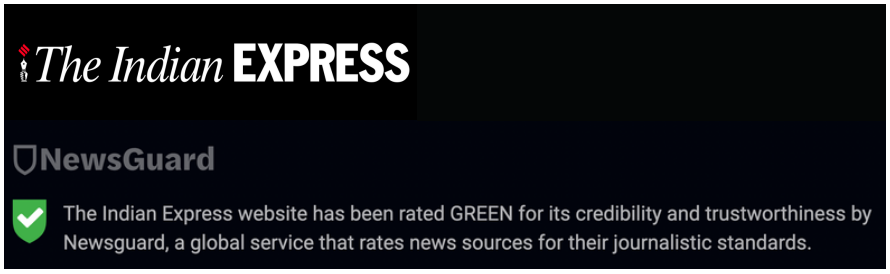
More than a dozen sites listed in NewsGuard's Top 10 "trustworthy and trending" end-of-year lists published articles featuring their recognition by NewsGuard as a stamp of quality for their audiences.

HELPING RESPONSIBLE PUBLISHERS EARN THE REVENUE THEY DESERVE

NewsGuard helps legitimate news publishers contend with the economic challenges they face in two ways. First, our Green ratings allow them to demonstrate to prospective subscribers that they deserve support.

Second, NewsGuard's Responsible Advertising for News Segments helps agencies and brands redirect ad spend towards quality news publishers, restoring investment to local news publishers and websites that serve minority and underrepresented audiences. NewsGuard's current RANS are composed of 3,771 trustworthy news websites — including 2,544 trusted local news sites and 128 trusted minority news sites (as of January 2022).





SCALING OUR MEDIA LITERACY INITIATIVES

Since NewsGuard's founding in 2018, we have forged relationships with educational institutions, research communities, universities, and public libraries around the world to make our data accessible to consumers, students, and professionals working in media literacy. From empowering middle schoolers as they embark on their first research projects to providing the patrons of more than 800 public libraries with free access to NewsGuard's browser extension, NewsGuard serves as a crucial media literacy teaching tool for students and adults alike.

800+ LIBRARIES AND GROWING

NewsGuard continued its pro bono partnership program with public libraries this year, through which hundreds of libraries globally can install NewsGuard's browser extension on staff and patron computers at no cost.

We continued to grow our list of global library partners this year, welcoming new partners such as the North-East Milan Library System (Italy), the Library of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Regional Council Livio Paladin (Italy), Oil Creek Library District (Pennsylvania), Pella Public Library (Iowa), Elmhurst Public Library (Illinois), Green Hills Public Library District (Illinois), and more.

OFFERING FREE MEDIA LITERACY WORKSHOPS

NewsGuard regularly works with nonprofits, community groups, schools, and libraries to offer free workshops that teach how to spot and avoid misinformation, and how to evaluate the reliability of content.

In 2021, our team provided 14 free workshops to libraries, state media authorities, elementary schoolers, middle schoolers, and journalism schools in the U.S., U.K., Italy, France, and Germany, with more than 430 attendees in total. Some of the groups NewsGuard partnered with to offer workshops included the Urbino School of Journalism (Italy), the Hessian Office for Public Libraries (Germany), the Unis-Cite French association (France), and the Achievement First Iluminar Middle School (U.S.).

"NEWSGUARDING IT": SUPPORTING MEDIA LITERACY IN SCHOOLS

Despite no formal marketing to schools, new groups of middle school and high school educators began using NewsGuard's resources with their students after learning about our tools. These educators saw strong results, with one teacher in Connecticut describing how NewsGuard made such an impact on students that the word "NewsGuard" became a verb in the classroom — as in, "NewsGuarding" a source to determine its credibility. We also expanded our school partnerships beyond K-12 this year, welcoming Princeton University as our first partner to license access to the NewsGuard extension for its staff and students as well as using the tool with students in its journalism program.

"I was reminded yesterday that I dropped the ball on our NewsGuard subscription. You'll be happy to know the reminder came from our students. They really want it! When I asked my class how they can tell if a source is reliable (hoping they will say the 5 W's), the answer about 5 called out at the same time was 'NewsGuard!' NewsGuard has now joined Google as a verb, at least in my classes. As in, 'The way I can check if my source is reliable is by NewsGuarding it.' "

Whitby School (CT)

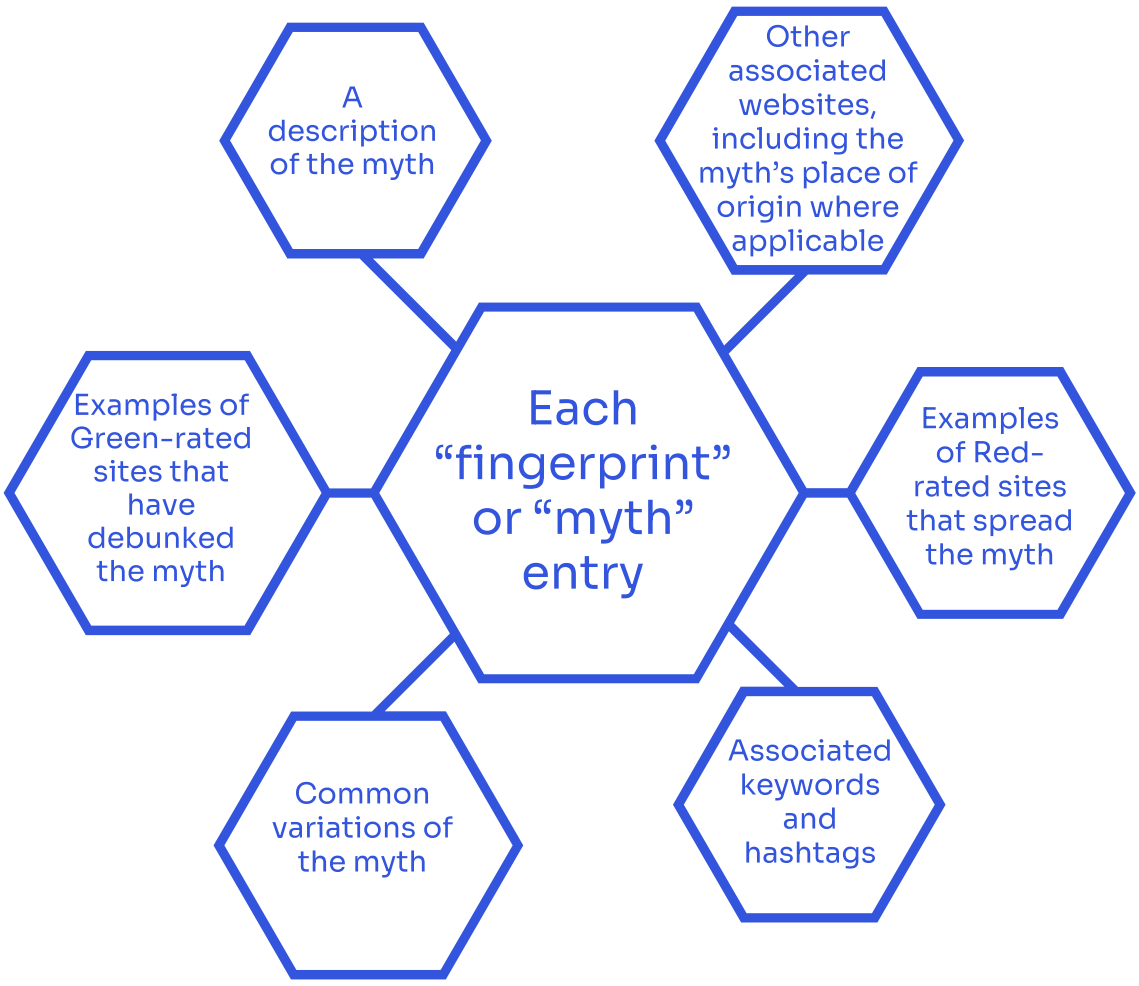
"I've been teaching News Literacy for five years now and I have found few tools as immediately useful to my students as the NewsGuard extension. In an era when our information ecosystem has grown both more cluttered and less reliable, having a tool like the NewsGuard extension goes a long way to help separate the wheat from the chaff."

Solebury School (PA)

MISINFORMATION FINGERPRINTS

In 2021, NewsGuard expanded its work beyond rating news websites after the launch of its second flagship data set: the Misinformation Fingerprints. Since that launch, our editorial team has compiled entries for more than 735 popular myths and myth variations on topics ranging from COVID-19 and its vaccines to election fraud to QAnon.

NewsGuard's Misinformation Fingerprints data — available in machine- and human-readable format — have empowered our partners to seed artificial intelligence tools and pursue a more targeted approach to combatting misinformation, quickly identifying commonly circulated false claims, locating other examples of the myths on the internet, tracing the provenance of the hoax, and tracking which websites, social media accounts, or bots are spreading it.



EXAMPLE FINGERPRINT ENTRIES

MYTH: Undercover federal agents planned the U.S. Capitol attack

THE FACTS: There is no evidence that federal agents helped plan or participated in the attack on the U.S. Capitol, or that the "unindicted co-conspirators" described in charges were undercover operatives. In fact, according to a court ruling and legal experts, it is not legally permissible for government agents, and informants cannot be considered co-conspirators.

MYTH: According to the Medicare Tracking System, 48,465 people died within 14 days of receiving a COVID-19 vaccine

THE FACTS: A spokesperson for the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicare Services (CMS) told Reuters in an October 2021 fact-checking article: "This is not an accurate claim. CMS does not have a 'Medicare Tracking System,' and the agency has not conducted an analysis to track beneficiary deaths in relationship to the timing of COVID-19 vaccination." Additionally, as of October 13, 2021, NewsGuard found that only four deaths — not 48,465 — had been attributed to COVID-19 vaccines.

SBIR AWARD FROM DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Disinformation has become a top defense concern in the U.S. and elsewhere, and information warfare poses a substantial national security threat in the modern era. Mis- and disinformation efforts from foreign adversaries can sow division, confusion, and extremism in the ranks; increase the risk of domestic terrorism; and disrupt democratic processes.

In September 2021, NewsGuard was awarded a grant through the Small Business Innovation and Research program, which funds early-stage companies to develop products and technologies that can be helpful for government. Under the grant, NewsGuard plans to further develop the Misinformation Fingerprints tool and test the effectiveness of the Fingerprints in detecting state-sponsored disinformation campaigns.

With the cybersecurity industry populated largely by AI and machine-learning tools, NewsGuard's human intelligence approach has proven to be a unique and valuable offering. "We were surprised to see that a solution like NewsGuard's using human intelligence could work so well," said Dan Madden, Director for the Mid-Atlantic Region of the National Security Innovation Network.

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

Researchers around the globe have relied on NewsGuard's ratings and Nutrition Labels as critical pieces of data in investigating engagement with online news sources, how misinformation narratives spread, and other misinformation trends. Currently, over 25 research groups partner with NewsGuard.

Here are a few examples of how researchers used NewsGuard in their work in 2021:

UNDERSTANDING ENGAGEMENT WITH U.S. (MIS)INFORMATION NEWS SOURCES ON FACEBOOK

Published by researchers at New York University and Université Grenoble Alpes in November 2021

This research studied how often Facebook users engage with (mis)information from U.S. news providers on Facebook, using NewsGuard data and data from Media Bias/Fact Check to generate a list of news publishers' official Facebook pages and categorize them based on reliability and political leaning. Researchers found that in absolute terms, Far-Right misinformation sources accumulate more engagement than non-misinformation sources of the same partisanship (68.1 % of overall Far Right engagement, followed by 37.7 % on the Far Left).

"THOUGHT I'D SHARE FIRST" AND OTHER CONSPIRACY THEORY TWEETS FROM THE COVID-19 INFODEMIC

An exploratory study conducted by researchers at Los Alamos National Laboratory published in April 2021

Researchers used Twitter data to explore methods to characterize and classify four COVID-19 conspiracy theories and to provide context for each of these conspiracy theories through the first 5 months of the pandemic. They used NewsGuard data on domain credibility and websites related to COVID-19 myths as features in classification models. Research showed that misinformation tweets demonstrate more negative sentiment when compared with non-misinformation tweets, and that theories evolve over time, incorporating details from unrelated conspiracy theories, as well as real-world events.

CRACKING OPEN THE NEWS FEED: EXPLORING WHAT U.S. FACEBOOK USERS SEE AND SHARE WITH LARGE-SCALE PLATFORM DATA

Published by researchers at Princeton University and the New York University Center for Social Media and Politics in January 2021

Researchers analyzed engagement data covering millions of links shared on Facebook to describe how, and by which categories of U.S. users, different types of news are seen and shared on Facebook. The research focused on articles from low-credibility news publishers, credible news sources, purveyors of clickbait, and news specifically about politics, which was identified using NewsGuard data as a signal. Results showed that more fake news is shared by older users and conservatives, and that both viewing and sharing patterns suggest a preference for ideologically congenial misinformation.

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

CSMaP

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT WITH DECEPTIVE SITES REACHED RECORD HIGHS IN 2020

A policy insights post by the German Marshall Fund (GMF) of the United States, published in January 2021

The GMF's "Digital New Deal" project partnered with NewsGuard to monitor two kinds of deceptive sites: those that repeatedly publish provably false content and those that fail to gather and present information responsibly. Research found that on Twitter, shares by verified accounts of content from deceptive sites reached an all-time high in the fourth quarter of 2020. Such content received 47 million verified account shares, nearly one-third of the total 155 million verified account shares of links to U.S.-based sites.

G | M | F

The German Marshall Fund of the United States

STRENGTHENING TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION

EU JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE

In January 2022, NewsGuard announced an agreement with the Joint Research Centre — the European Commission's science and knowledge service — to provide the EU institution with its Reliability Ratings and Misinformation Fingerprints data to help the JRC track online misinformation. NewsGuard's data will enable the JRC's Disinformation team to detect new unverified sources, track related misinformation narratives, and analyze the spread of these narratives across countries and languages. Having this data in use by the Commission will magnify NewsGuard's impact in Europe.

European Commission

Joint Research Centre

CA' FOSCARI UNIVERSITY, ITALY

Ca' Foscari University of Venice has been working on various research projects in 2021, using NewsGuard data to analyze the infodemic around vaccines on social media, investigate the circulation of anti-EU misinformation on social media, and analyze the misinformation around climate change. "NewsGuard's criteria of credibility and transparency are crucial to our research into information spreading and the infodemic online," said Fabiana Zollo, Assistant Professor of Computer Science at Ca' Foscari.

Università Ca'Foscari Venezia

COORNET, A TOOL TO DETECT COORDINATED LINK SHARING BEHAVIOR (CLSB)

The University of Urbino has been working on the implementation of NewsGuard in CooRnet, a tool for journalists and researchers to detect "coordinated link sharing behavior" (CLSB). CLSB refers to networks of pages and groups on Facebook and Twitter that rapidly share each other's links, indicating potentially coordinated behavior, including misinformation campaigns. The internal version of CooRnet already includes NewsGuard's integration, which will be launched to the public in March 2022.

1506 UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI URBINO CARLO BO

FLOW OF ONLINE MISINFORMATION DURING THE PEAK OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN ITALY

Published by researchers at IMT Lucca in Italy in July 2021

IMT Lucca's study used NewsGuard data to examine the impact of misinformation in Italian societal discourse on Twitter during the pandemic. Researchers observed that, despite COVID-19 being a scientific subject, the discussion showed a clear division along political party lines. The impact of unreliable posts reached 22.1% of readers in the right and center-right wing communities, with an even stronger impact in absolute numbers due to the activity of this group: 96% of all nonreputable URLs shared by political groups came from these communities.

"Our partnership with NewsGuard has allowed us to explore a new direction for research, empowering us to directly address the problem of disinformation on Twitter and quantify the extent to which various communities are affected by disinformation."

Fabio Saracco, IMT Lucca researcher

OUR USERS' VERDICT:
THE FEEDBACK SURVEY

In August 2021, NewsGuard conducted a user feedback survey and held focus groups with users of its browser extension. The survey received 320 responses, with users reporting overwhelmingly positive experiences with NewsGuard.

96%	of surveyed users agree that NewsGuard's tool makes it easier to understand the reliability of online news.
90%	of surveyed users would recommend NewsGuard to a friend.
97%	of surveyed users said they believe NewsGuard's ratings are accurate.

Respondents reported that NewsGuard helped them feel "protected from junk news," educated on unfamiliar news sources in a fact-based and neutral manner, and more able to quickly vet the reliability of websites without having to conduct independent research.

BROWSER EXTENSION USER TESTIMONIALS:

"It is simultaneously easy to get a 'quick' rating but also go in depth to understand how NewsGuard got that rating in the first place."

"NewsGuard does a really good job of neutrality. I feel I can post a Nutrition Label in response to a dubious claim and it doesn't generate the 'Oh, they're biased!' responses that you often get."

"I have a few relatives that reference political sites I don't recognize most of the time. Practically always, NewsGuard has evaluated them, and when they are untrustworthy, I feel confident ignoring the viewpoint as far as truth value."

"I've never had a solid and consistent source for evaluating news sources before. NewsGuard is a game changer for research and everyday 'well-informed living.' "

"My time (and patience) is limited. NewsGuard helps me cut through the smoke and mirrors of partisanship and get to what's relevant."

"Clear non-partisan site ratings help me find good information for those who may not hold the same political views as me."

THANK YOU
TO NEWSGUARD'S PARTNERS

Microsoft
World Health Organization
IPG
PUBLICIS MEDIA
neeva
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
GIPHY
PubMatic
pressrelations knowledge discovery
Los Alamos NATIONAL LABORATORY
comscore
Teads
PEER39
centro
JWPLAYER
NYU
MediaMath
ZEFR
OpenSlate
verizon media DSP
gumgum
MEETRICS
Undertone
KARGO
PLOTLIGHTS
triplelift
AMOBEE
OMG
OpenWeb
xandr
INFOJUICE By Euregio
Bright
1506 UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI URBINO CARLO BO
INDEX EXCHANGE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Università Ca'Foscari Venezia
THE CARTER CENTER
IMT SCHOOL FOR ADVANCED STUDIES LUCCA
Dartmouth
G|M|F The German Marshall Fund of the United States STRENGTHENING TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION
Connatix
Fraunhofer
European Commission Joint Research Centre

Fighting misinformation with journalism, not algorithms.

Transparent, accountable trust ratings for thousands of news outlets.

Online safety for readers, brands and democracies.

newsguardtech.com