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NewsGuard's Online Source Rating Tool: User Experience

Introduction

In 2018, only 45% of Americans say they have a great deal or fair amount of confidence in the mass **media**. The spread of false and misleading news stories presents a challenge to individuals seeking reliable information on the internet. In an effort to restore trust and accountability in the online news environment, **NewsGuard** created an online tool that rates news sources as generally reliable (green-rating) or generally unreliable (red-rating) using nine journalistic criteria of credibility and transparency. A clickable "nutrition label" offers further information about the specific news source and why it received the rating it did.

A Gallup study supported by the Knight Foundation and NewsGuard invited a representative sample of 25,000 U.S. Gallup Panel members to install and use a NewsGuard browser extension during their daily online activities. In a Nov. 12-Nov. 25, 2018, follow-up survey, 706 panel members who used the tool evaluated its features and usefulness. Study highlights include:

- Most users rate NewsGuard positively — approximately nine in 10 generally agree with the ratings and say the nutrition labels are helpful.
- Large majorities would be less likely to read or share news from red-rated/unreliable sites and would be likelier to read or share news from green-rated/reliable sites.
- Eight in 10 would like to see social media and search companies incorporate NewsGuard, and nearly seven in 10 would trust these companies more if they include NewsGuard in their products.
- A majority trusted the ratings more because they are done by experienced journalists with varied backgrounds.
- Roughly two-thirds would be more confident in their ability to find reliable news and be better informed more broadly.

The positive results among people who accepted Gallup's invitation to download the NewsGuard browser extension suggest a desire for more information about the sources of news people see online, such as in their social media newsfeeds and in their search results. The news source rating tool offers a scalable solution to identify which news sources adhere to the basic journalistic standards of accuracy and accountability citizens expect and deserve.

Detailed Findings

Overall Perception of NewsGuard

NewsGuard received positively

Most people who downloaded NewsGuard at Gallup's request offer an overall positive assessment of the browser extension. Nearly four in five describe the news source rating tool as "excellent" (22%) or "good" (57%). Majorities of Republicans, Democrats and independents rate NewsGuard positively, although Democrats are more positive.

Eighty-seven percent of Democrats who used NewsGuard rate it as "excellent" or "good," compared with 78% of independents and 70% of Republicans. Democrats are roughly twice as likely as Republicans and independents to give NewsGuard an "excellent" rating. However, people who perceive a great deal of political bias in news coverage tend to give NewsGuard a lower rating than those who see less bias.

*What overall rating would you give NewsGuard? ***

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
% Overall	22	57	16	4
Party				
% Republicans	16	54	24	7
% Democrats	31	56	11	2
% Independents	18	60	18	5
Perceived media bias				
% A great deal	16	54	24	7
% Less than a great deal	29	60	9	2

* Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/- 1 %.

As a testament to the desire for greater transparency and accountability of online news, four in five respondents (78%) say they would recommend NewsGuard to a friend or relative.

Using experienced journalists as raters boosts trust in ratings

Several options exist for creating a news source rating system, such as Facebook's effort to **crowdsource a solution** or **computer algorithms** that seek to detect fake news. In the case of NewsGuard ratings, a team of trained journalists supervised by experienced editors use nine criteria tied to basic journalistic standards to determine whether a news source deserves a red or green rating.

Gallup's invitation letter explained that a team of experienced journalists assigned the source ratings, which 38% correctly recalled based on this single message about the NewsGuard approach.

*Do you recall who or what assigned news sources Green or Red ratings? ***

	A team of experienced journalists with varied backgrounds	A survey of user ratings	A machine learning algorithm	Do not recall
% Overall	38	2	3	56

* Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/- 1 %.

When reminded that journalists were responsible, 62% say their trust in the ratings increased, and 8% say trust decreased. These results are in line with findings from a survey experiment that assessed the effect of a **news source rating tool**.

*To confirm, NewsGuard relies on experienced journalists with varied backgrounds to assign ratings to news sources (using nine journalistic criteria of credibility and transparency). How does this approach affect your trust in the ratings? ***

	Increases trust	Does not influence trust	Decreases trust
% Overall	62	29	8

* Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/- 1 %.

An embedded experiment in the survey tested whether, in addition to reminding respondents that journalists and editors determined the ratings, inclusion of the phrase "using nine journalistic criteria of credibility and transparency" increased trust in the ratings. The additional language had a similarly positive effect as the message that the ratings are done by experienced journalists with varied backgrounds — 62% of respondents in the base version versus 63% in the extended version say the NewsGuard method for assigning ratings increased their trust in those ratings.

How NewsGuard Affects Online Behavior

Green-rated sources increase, and red-rated sources decrease self-reported likelihood to read, share

The clear demarcation between sources that adhere to journalistic standards from those that do not is a key objective of the NewsGuard ratings. The expectation is that most consumers of information online will seek out information from reliable/green-rated sources and pay less attention to and be less likely to share news from unreliable/red-rated sources. According to users' self-reported behaviors, the NewsGuard ratings largely function as intended.

A majority (54%) who saw a red-rated source say the red rating made them *less* likely to read the content, while 39% say it made no difference. Among those who saw a red-rated source and actively share news stories online, six in 10 (63%) say the red rating made them less likely to share the article with friends and family, and 32% say it made no difference.

Conversely, 56% who saw a green-rated source say the green rating made them *more* likely to read the content, while 43% say it made no difference. Among those who saw a green-rated source and actively share news stories online, 56% say the green rating made them more likely to share the article with friends and family, and 44% say it made no difference.

Did seeing a source with a red (green) rating make you —

	Read			Share		
	More likely	Made no difference	Less likely	More likely	Made no difference	Less likely
% Red-rated	7	39	54	5	32	63
% Green-rated	56	43	1	56	44	0

† **Based on those who saw a green or red label.**

A majority used and saw utility in the nutrition labels

NewsGuard nutrition labels supplement the red/green rating system by providing a link to a detailed summary of a news source's ownership and financing, history, credibility and transparency. Almost half of respondents say they clicked on these nutrition labels frequently (12%) or occasionally (34%), while three in 10 (29%) clicked on none. Of those who clicked, six in 10 (62%) viewed nutrition labels for both red- and green-rated sources, 27% for only green-rated sources and 11% for only red-rated sources.

The overall reaction to the nutrition labels is positive. Most respondents who clicked on nutrition labels find them "very helpful" (33%) or "somewhat helpful" (58%), while 9% find them "not at all helpful." Even among those who disagree with one or more source ratings, over eight in 10 describe the nutrition labels as at least somewhat helpful.

How helpful did you find the nutrition labels? *

	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not at all helpful
% Overall	33	58	9
Source rating agreement			
% Agreed on every rating	38	56	5
% Disagreed with at least one	23	60	18

* Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/- 1 %.
† Based on those who clicked on a label

Fifty-two percent who saw a nutrition label say the desire to learn more about that news organization is "a major reason" for clicking on the nutrition label, and 33% "a minor reason." Far fewer respondents say disagreement with the rating and wanting to see why NewsGuard assigned the news source that rating was "a major reason" (20%) or "a minor reason" (28%) for clicking on the nutrition label.

Among those who disagree with at least one NewsGuard rating, slightly more cite the desire to see why NewsGuard gave a rating with which they disagreed (42%) than to learn more about the news organization in general (35%) as a "major reason" for clicking on the nutrition label.

When deciding to click on a source to see the nutrition label, how important were the following reasons?

	You wanted to learn more about that news organization.	You disagreed with the rating and wanted to see why NewsGuard gave it that rating.
All respondents		
% Major reason	52	20
% Minor reason	33	28
% Not a reason	15	52
Disagreed with at least one rating		
% Major reason	35	42
% Minor reason	42	38
% Not a reason	23	20

† Based on those who clicked on a label

Perceptions of NewsGuard as an Effective Online Tool

NewsGuard makes navigation of online news easier

According to the Knight Foundation/Gallup report "**Trust, Media and Democracy**," more U.S. adults say the increased availability of information today makes it harder (58%), rather than easier (38%), to be well-informed, and only half feel confident in their ability to sort out the facts. Part of the confidence gap in determining what news is credible is tied to the proliferation of online news outlets that fail to adhere to basic journalistic standards.

NewsGuard can alleviate the sense of uncertainty that accompanies the consumption of news online. Seven in 10 respondents say the source rating tool makes it "much easier" (25%) or "somewhat easier" (46%) to be well-informed about news from online sources, while two in three say NewsGuard makes them "much more" (24%) or "somewhat more" (41%) confident in their ability to identify reliable online news.

Does NewsGuard make it easy or hard to be well-informed about news you get from online sources?

	Much easier	Somewhat easier	Neither easier nor harder	Somewhat harder	Much harder
% Overall	25	46	27	1	1
More available information…					
% Easier to be well-informed	28	44	27	1	0
% Harder to be well-informed	23	47	28	1	1

Does NewsGuard make you more or less confident in your ability to identify reliable online news?

	Much easier	Somewhat easier	Neither easier nor harder	Somewhat harder	Much harder
% Overall	24	41	33	1	1
More available information…					
% Easier to be well-informed	26	38	36	0	0
% Harder to be well-informed	23	43	32	1	1

Less confident online news navigators — those who find the increase of news and information available today makes it harder to be well-informed — are as likely as confident navigators to say NewsGuard makes them "much more" or "somewhat more" confident in their ability to identify reliable online news (66% vs. 64%, respectively).

Broad support exists for integration of NewsGuard into social media and search engine results

Public trust in social media sites has declined significantly since 2016 following a series of highly public revelations over foreign disinformation campaigns and use of personal data for political purposes. A Knight Foundation/Gallup report on **Misinformation in the News** that Americans estimate 65% of the news they see on social media is misinformation, compared to 39% on traditional media outlets.

With the stated objective of increasing transparency and accountability in the online news environment, NewsGuard has a potential role in rebuilding trust in these social media companies as well as in search engines and other products online where people get their news. The browser extension used by respondents displayed NewsGuard ratings and nutrition labels in social media such as Facebook and Twitter, in search results from Google and Bing, in news aggregators such as MSN and in products such as LinkedIn.

Two in three respondents say they would be "much more trusting" (29%) or "somewhat more trusting" (40%) of social media platforms and search engines that made NewsGuard ratings and reviews more easily available to all users. This pattern holds for people who do "not at all" trust information that comes from social media sites, the majority of whom say they would be "much more trusting" (26%) or "somewhat more trusting" (32%).

If social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) and search engines (e.g., Google, Bing, YouTube) made NewsGuard's ratings and reviews easily available to all users (even those who did not install the extension), would that make you more or less trusting of these online platforms? *

	Much more	Somewhat more	Neither easier nor harder	Somewhat less	Much less
% Overall	29	40	24	3	5
Trust of information on social media sites					
% A fair amount or great deal	34	44	19	2	1
% Only a little	30	44	21	3	2
% Not at all	26	32	29	4	9

* Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/- 1 %.

In line with the generally positive opinion of NewsGuard, the vast majority (83%) would like to see social media sites and search engines make its source ratings and reviews more easily available in news feeds and search results. Frequent online users of social media sites or search engines are more likely than others to want greater availability of NewsGuard ratings and reviews (89% vs. 76%, respectively).

Would you like to see social media sites and search engines make NewsGuard ratings and reviews more easily available in news feeds and search results?

	Yes	No
% Overall	83	17
Frequent online user		
% Yes	89	11
% No	76	24

Conclusion

Americans are much more likely to consider the news they see on **social media as biased** and inaccurate than news on television, in newspapers or on the radio. Given the low barrier of entry to become an online news distributor, the perverse economic incentives to produce false and misleading news, and the tendency for **falsehoods to go viral** more often than the truth, this perception appears grounded.

Several solutions to this challenge have emerged, but each has potential unintended consequences. An especially contentious proposal is to make online platforms subject to the same rules and regulations as traditional media outlets, which detractors consider a fundamental threat to the freedom of expression. NewsGuard offers a solution to the trust deficit of online news by giving users the option to activate a rating tool that distinguishes between news sources that adhere to basic journalistic standards and those that do not.

This study found most people who downloaded, used and evaluated the browser extension at the invitation of Gallup evaluate the source rating tool positively and want to see it integrated into social media sites and search engines. Large majorities say they would be less likely to read and share stories from red-rated sources and felt more confident in their ability to identify reliable online news. In this regard, NewsGuard offers one type of solution for restoring some trust and accountability into the online news environment.

Methodology

Gallup invited a random sample of 25,000 U.S. adults, aged 18 or older, who are members of the Gallup Panel, to download and use NewsGuard's source rating tool. This initial pool of potential users was sampled in a way to make it demographically representative of the U.S. adult general population. A week later, Gallup sent all panel members a follow-up invitation to provide feedback on their experience. Interviewing took place between Nov. 12 and Nov. 25, 2018. Results are based on self-administered web surveys among the 706 U.S. adults, aged 18 and older, who downloaded the NewsGuard tool. This sample can be considered to resemble likely "NewsGuard users" and may not be reflective of attitudes of the broader U.S adult population. Since there are no known demographic data on NewsGuard users that can be used as weighting targets to correct for non-response, the sample is not weighted. Interviews were conducted in English only. Respondents who completed the survey received a $2 incentive.

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