



Follow the Money: How the Online Advertising Ecosystem Funds COVID-19 Junk News and Disinformation

Online Supplement

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DATA AND METHOD

For this study, we performed a domain-level analysis of 830 individual domains publishing news and information about COVID-19. Of these, our team classified 555 professional news sources and 275 junk news & disinformation sources based on a peer-reviewed, grounded typology developed by the Project on Computational Propaganda. A total of 7 domains from our set of professional news sources were flagged by fact-checkers for

publishing at least one false story about COVID-19. Because professional news domains typically publish credible content, remove, retract and correct false information, sources that were withdrawn from these domains were removed from our data sets. A full account of the method for collecting these sources of news and information is available in the main memo [here](#).

Table 1: Provenance of Sources of News and Information Publishing on COVID-19

Sources	Count (ID)
Total	830
Fact Checker	110
Junk News & Anti-Vaccine including fact-checked pages	183
Professional News including fact-checked pages	562

Source: Authors' calculations based on data collected on 16/04/2020 and on 23/05/2020.

Table 2: Top 20 Professional versus Junk News and Disinformation Domains by Domain Authority Score

Domain Name		Domain Authority, Professional News	Domain Authority, Junk News
reuters.com	rt.com	89	82
bbc.co.uk	sputniknews.com	88	79
cnn.com	alternet.org	87	79
nytimes.com	breitbart.com	87	79
theguardian.com	zerohedge.com	86	78
wsj.com	globalresearch.ca	86	77
bloomberg.com	mercola.com	85	76
cbsnews.com	dailycaller.com	85	76
foxnews.com	wnd.com	85	75
washingtonpost.com	naturalnews.com	85	75
ft.com	truth-out.org	85	75
elpais.com	thepochtimes.com	84	74
nbcnews.com	theblaze.com	83	74
cnbc.com	americanthinker.com	83	73
spiegel.de	infowars.com	83	73
politico.com	jihadwatch.org	82	73
repubblica.it	pjmedia.com	82	73
lefigaro.fr	rawstory.com	82	73
welt.de	cnsnews.com	82	72
wyborcza.pl	counterpunch.org	82	72

Source: Authors' calculations based on data collected on 16/04/2020 and on 23/05/2020.

Table 3: Top 20 Professional Domains by Number of Backlinks

Domain Name	Analysis Set	Content Detected Adverts	Backlinks
bbc.co.uk	Control	No	3,406,889,989
reuters.com	Control	Google Ads	2,140,640,878
cnn.com	Control	Google Ads, Amazon Ads	839,404,378
theguardian.com	Control	Google Ads	823,320,740
gazeta.pl	Control	Google Ads	671,334,669
nytimes.com	Control	No	548,025,554
foxnews.com	Control	No	412,146,259
washingtonpost.com	Control	No	362,909,229
ansa.it	Control	Google Ads	334,976,224
ft.com	Control	Google Ads	281,712,300
elpais.com	Control	Google Ads	237,327,974
wsj.com	Control	Other Source	223,119,448
sueddeutsche.de	Control	Google Ads	171,509,008
nbcnews.com	Control	Other Source	162,186,393
bloomberg.com	Control	Other Source	161,816,717
cnbc.com	Control	Other Source	154,079,057
cbsnews.com	Control	Google Ads, Amazon Ads	150,025,526
repubblica.it	Control	Google Ads	147,136,857

Source: Authors' calculations based on data collected on 16/04/2020 and on 23/05/2020.

Table 4: Top 20 Junk and Disinformation Domains by Number of Backlinks

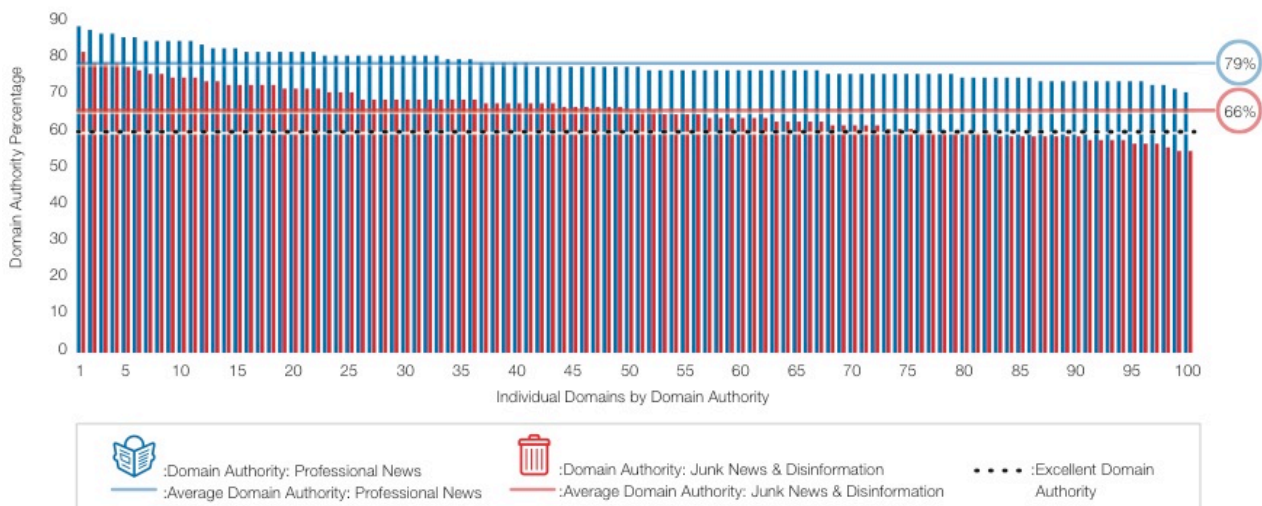
Domain Name	Analysis Set	Content Detected Adverts	Backlinks
rt.com	Junk News	Google Ads	148,791,221
breitbart.com	Junk News	Google Ads	144,379,988
globalresearch.ca	Junk News	Google Ads	126,585,198
sputniknews.com	Junk News	Google Ads	116,165,518
frontpagemag.com	Junk News	Google Ads	108,779,407
zerohedge.com	Junk News	Google Ads	80,897,234
wnd.com	Junk News	Google Ads, Amazon ads	72,822,227
americanthinker.com	Junk News	Google Ads	65,708,128
dailycaller.com	Junk News	Google Ads, Amazon Ads	45,303,311
lifeneews.com	Junk News	Google Ads	38,628,912
theblaze.com	Junk News	Google Ads	37,737,451
counterpunch.org	Junk News	No	35,135,955
naturalnews.com	Junk News	Other Source	32,383,810
pjmedia.com	Junk News	Amazon Ads, Other Source	31,572,866
infowars.com	Junk News	Other Source	25,535,530
theepochtimes.com	Junk News	Amazon Ads	24,950,741
hotair.com	Junk News	Google Ads, Amazon Ads	24,436,507
patriotpost.us	Junk News	No	21,821,906
thegatewaypundit.com	Junk News	Google Ads	19,052,451
mercola.com	Junk News	Other Source	18,876,707

Source: Authors' calculations based on data collected on 16/04/2020 and on 23/05/2020.

Glossary of terms

Term	Explanation
Backlink	An inward hyperlink from another webpage to a domain. A backlink from a reputable third party can help to improve a site's domain authority.
Domain authority	A comparative, multi-factor metric to describe the online reputation of a website that is common in the SEO industry. The higher the score (1-100), the higher a website's search rank is likely to be.
Follow links	A follow link is a type of backlink that instructs search engine crawlers to follow a link to its target URL, and therefore influences the target website's domain authority.
Mark-up	A standard set of instructions which can be inserted into a webpage, which affects the way the webpage should look and work. This includes hints for search results and formatting on social media.
No follow link	A type of backlink that expressly instructs search engine crawlers not to follow a link. It therefore does not influence a website's domain authority. They were introduced to prevent SEO manipulation through link spamming.

Figure 1: Domain Authority Score of Top 100 Professional News versus Junk News & Disinformation Domains



Source: Authors' calculations based on data collected on 16/04/2020 and on 23/05/2020.