

2015 Corporate Accountability Index

Key Questions

What is Ranking Digital Rights?

Ranking Digital Rights is a non-profit research initiative working with an international network of partners to promote greater respect for freedom of expression and privacy by focusing on the policies and practices of companies in the information communications technology (ICT) sector.

What do you mean by companies respecting 'digital rights'?

Freedom of expression and privacy are human rights that extend to the digital realm. Corporate practices that affect these rights include:

- How companies handle government requests to hand over user data or restrict content;
- How companies enforce their own terms of service;
- What information companies collect about users and how long they retain it; and
- To whom they share or sell user information.

What is the Corporate Accountability Index?

The 2015 Corporate Accountability Index assesses how transparent 16 of the world's most powerful Internet and telecommunications companies are about the commitments they have made, and the policies and practices they have in place, that affect users' freedom of expression and privacy. It evaluates what companies share about these practices and offers recommendations for improvement.

Where did the idea for this project come from?

Many initiatives already exist to rank companies on critical issues such as carbon emissions, political spending, labor practices, and access to medicine, and they have spurred significant changes to corporate practices. While other organizations have been working over the past decade to establish human rights standards for Internet and telecommunications companies, so far there has been no

global ranking on these companies' respect for freedom of expression and privacy. After consulting with many people in the NGO, corporate, investment, and government sectors around the globe, we determined that such a ranking would be a powerful tool to identify best practices and push the sector to better respect digital rights.

Why is this information important?

The Index allows users, investors, and activists to compare how – and whether – Internet and telecommunications companies are making substantive efforts to respect freedom of expression and privacy. The intent is to have a constructive dialogue with companies included in the Index, as well as those not included, and to move the dialogue forward in addressing areas of concern.

Our hope is that the Index will lead to greater corporate transparency and public scrutiny of business practices, thus encouraging these companies to demonstrate greater and more consistent respect for Internet users' rights around the globe.

What companies are being ranked and where are they from?

Internet Companies

- Facebook, Inc. – USA
- Google, Inc. – USA
- Kakao Corp. – South Korea
- Mail.ru Group Ltd. – Russia
- Microsoft Corp. – USA
- Tencent Holdings Ltd. – China
- Twitter, Inc. – USA
- Yahoo! Inc. – USA

Telecommunications Companies

- América Móvil S.A.B. de CV – Mexico
- AT&T, Inc. – USA
- Axiata Group Berhad – Malaysia
- Bharti Airtel Ltd. – India
- Etisalat Group – United Arab Emirates
- MTN Group Ltd. – South Africa
- Orange – France
- Vodafone Group Plc – United Kingdom

How did you select these companies?

Our goal was to select a representative group of companies that collectively hold the power to shape the digital lives of billions of people across the globe. To do so, we selected eight publicly listed Internet companies and eight publicly listed telecommunications companies based on factors including geographic reach and diversity, user base, company size, and market share. The Index examined disclosure at the parent company level as well as disclosure related to one to three of the company's services.

What can users, activists, policymakers, investors, and others do with this research?

- Technology users can use this to inform themselves about possible risks and guide their decisions about which digital services they want to use.
- Advocates can use this information to demand more transparency and action from companies.
- Policymakers can use it to improve laws and regulations in order to ensure that they boost rather than hinder companies' ability to respect users' rights.
- Responsible investors can use the data – and the Index methodology more broadly – to factor company performance on respect for online freedom of expression and privacy into their investment decisions. Investors can also use the research to engage with companies and minimize risks.

What can companies do with the Corporate Accountability Index?

The Index provides concrete and measurable steps that Internet and telecommunications companies – as well as other companies throughout the sector – can take to improve how and what they disclose about policies and practices that impact digital rights, instead of having to come up with the answers on their own.

By disclosing information in a more easily accessible manner, companies can empower users to make informed

decisions about how they use technology. This will help build trust between users and companies in the long run.

What is your evaluation based on?

The indicators draw heavily on guidelines established in international human rights frameworks, including the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. They also draw from a broad range of human rights standards both for global business in general and within the ICT sector, such as those set out by the Global Network Initiative.

Ranking Digital Rights worked with international experts and the leading environmental, social, and governance (ESG) research firm Sustainalytics to score company performance.

Does the Index distinguish between commitments to freedom of expression and privacy and the implementation of actual policies? If so, how?

The Corporate Accountability Index evaluates companies on their commitments, policies, and practices they have publicly disclosed. Our methodology is based on the belief that measuring disclosure is a powerful starting point for activists around the world to verify whether – and how well – companies' stated policies are actually being carried out.

While Ranking Digital Rights does not track the implementation of stated policies, we look forward to hearing from researchers who are carrying out in-depth investigations, local testing, and monitoring, to verify companies' statements and track how policies and practices affect users.

Will there be repercussions for companies that don't heed recommendations?

The Index will highlight what companies are doing well and cite specific examples of how they are failing to meet basic standards, potentially jeopardizing users' freedom of expression and privacy. Our hope is that companies will face a stronger market incentive to phase out these harmful practices and deliver products and services in a manner that respects human rights.

The Index will encourage companies to consider freedom of expression and privacy in every aspect of their business operations and show they are making genuine efforts to respect users' rights. It will also serve as a tool for responsible investors to make informed decisions on the risks and opportunities around freedom of expression and privacy.

To view in-depth results, download data, and access related resources, news and updates, please visit: rankingdigitalrights.org.