



RANKING DIGITAL RIGHTS

Rationale for expanding the Ranking Digital Rights Corporate Accountability Index to include Amazon and Alibaba

This document provides an overview of why and how Ranking Digital Rights (RDR) is expanding the RDR Corporate Accountability Index methodology to include two new companies: Amazon and Alibaba. It also introduces the accompanying *Human Rights Risk Scenarios* and *Best Practices* documents, which will form the basis for further research and adaptations to the current [RDR Index methodology](#).

All documents can be downloaded from the RDR website at:
<https://rankingdigitalrights.org/methodology-development/2021-revisions/#new-company-types>.

Background: As of May 2019, Ranking Digital Rights has produced four iterations of its RDR Corporate Accountability Index, ranking some of the world's most powerful internet, mobile, and telecommunications companies on their disclosed commitments and policies affecting freedom of expression and privacy. The [2019 RDR Index](#) ranked 24 companies on 35 [indicators](#). The RDR Index provides an effective roadmap for companies to improve policies and disclosures in order to prevent and mitigate a range of threats to users' rights to privacy and freedom of expression. Since its inaugural launch in 2015 the RDR Index has contributed to improved company disclosure of policy and practice across a number of areas, including transparency reporting, content removals, account restrictions and shutdowns, and of handling and securing user information.

As two of the world's largest digital platforms, Amazon and Alibaba's absence from the RDR Index represents a key gap in our current ranking. There have been growing concerns about both companies' privacy practices and respect for human rights in general. Amazon collects an enormous amount of information about people, notably through its e-commerce platform and through its dominance in the personal digital assistant (PDA) market.¹ Alibaba's (mis)handling of user data, including its practice of sharing user data with its credit-scoring arm and other third-party services without explicit consent, has also [raised concerns](#).

Our goal in expanding the RDR Index to include Amazon and Alibaba is to apply RDR's global accountability and transparency standards to two companies that have enormous influence over the rights of people around the world who use their products and services. In the future, RDR's work in this area can inform the work of other stakeholders: investors conducting due diligence

¹ We use the term "personal digital assistant (PDA)" to refer to the artificial intelligence interface that powers and controls smart speakers and IoT devices, and which allows users to access both native services and third-party applications using voice or other commands. Examples of PDAs include Alexa (Amazon), AliGenie (Alibaba), Siri (Apple), the Google Assistant (Google), and Cortana (Microsoft).

on portfolio risk, policymakers seeking to establish regulatory frameworks to protect the rights of internet users, and advocates looking to encourage these companies to adopt policies and practices to mitigate the human rights harms associated with their services.

The *Human Rights Risk Scenarios* and *Best Practices* documents that follow this overview have been drafted as the initial steps for our stakeholder consultation process. The *Human Rights Risk Scenarios* document contains a list of scenarios, each describing human rights harms related to privacy and expression that can result from the policies and practices of companies that provide e-commerce platforms and personal digital assistants. These documents are derived from news reports and published research. The *Best Practices* describe specific standards of disclosure that companies should implement in order to mitigate the human rights risks described in the scenarios.

Stakeholder consultation: We welcome feedback on these consultation documents. Feedback from a wide range of experts and stakeholders is essential to our methodology development process. After receiving feedback from experts, human rights advocates, and companies on these documents and conducting further case study research, the risk scenarios, and best practices will be used to adapt the current methodology.

Please send all feedback by **September 13, 2019** to methodology@rankingdigitalrights.org.