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IWA 44

Global Media Identifier (GMI) for distribution channels and brands

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO document should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

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For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

International Workshop Agreement IWA 44 was approved at a workshop hosted by the German Institute for Standardization (DIN), in association with the Global Media Registry (GMR), held in Berlin, Germany, in January 2025.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user’s national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

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Introduction

In July 2023, the Global Media Registry (GMR) and the German Institute for Standardization (DIN) submitted a proposal to the Secretariat of the ISO Technical Management Board (TMB) for the development of an ISO International Workshop Agreement (IWA).

The foundation of this IWA workshop was approved by the ISO members in November 2023. To ensure that the broadest range of interested parties worldwide participated in the workshop, an invitation letter was circulated to all ISO members and other potential stakeholders on 2023-11-16 and registration to the workshop was possible until 2024-02-23.

This document was discussed and approved at a series of workshops held between February 2024 and January 2025. This included an internal commenting phase as well as a public consultation phase.

Global Media Identifiers (GMI), as covered by this document, are a tool to enhance the integrity of the online news ecosystem. Among other things, it helps to harmonise and improve the effectiveness of respective signalling along the distribution chain to facilitate content indexation and recommendation by online platforms (e.g. search, streaming and social media). In addition, the deliverables of this document can be used by all other stakeholders that engage with mass media and content distribution online, such as providers/operators of advertising technology, and public sector actors (e.g. regulatory authorities).

The aim of the GMI is to establish source identity, for example, between channels operated by the same editorial unit across platforms, news media websites and their social media presence. Such an interoperable system of GMIs is crucial to safeguarding the integrity of news and information ecosystems, which is relevant when publishing, accessing, and managing content online. Additional parties engaged in this information ecosystem such as individuals (influencers, bloggers, or independent journalists), as well as third-party aggregators and other distributors, can be considered for GMI assignment.

GMIs are part of an open and scalable infrastructure of identifier systems and indicators that aim to safeguard the transparency, responsibility and accountability of online content and its sources. The purpose of this document is not to replace existing standards and indicators, but to add a holistic and global framework with a view of harmonising them.

The functioning of our shared information space depends on digital infrastructure and platforms. Their protocols and algorithmic-driven recommender systems determine how content can be accessed by users online. In order to function properly, these recommender systems require up-to-date criteria by which content is included, promoted or even excluded based upon inclusion lists of trustworthy sources of content, or exclusion lists of bad actors.

The unique key of the GMI is designed to provide signal transparency and integrity in a neutral way and is assigned to media outlets (which means all distribution channels and brands of a content provider), so that the industry, regulators, audiences and other stakeholders can unambiguously identify the respective source of information, for example, in order to trace back and identify its ultimate beneficial owner.

Identifiers of media are not a new idea. Most, if not all, major stakeholders concerned (such as social media platforms and search engines, the advertising sector and public actors, such as national regulators, and academic researchers) already use their own identifiers to index media companies, their outlets, brands and channels, but those lists are often incomplete and not harmonized. The GMI is an effective and transparent alternative or complement to these diffuse attempts. It mitigates related risks by facilitating harmonization both vertically (e.g. between platforms and signal providers) and horizontally (e.g. amongst platforms and ad-tech). This reduces errors, speeds up the processes, and prevents the mismatches and mix-ups that are common in this space.

Many countries and transnational entities are currently in the process of updating their regulatory frameworks to better reflect the realities of the online environment, safeguard transparency and protect the rights of users. Assigning news sources with GMIs can enable key players to more effectively comply with this kind of regulation. Some examples from the European Union (EU) context are the Digital Services Act that requires online services to take effective mitigation measures against online risks, and the Copyright Directive which obliges online platforms to pay rights holders for their content. The European Media Freedom Act foresees a protected status for news media publishers and their accounts on social media.

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Additionally, the co-regulatory Code of Practice on Disinformation prescribes indicators of trustworthiness of online sources, to better inform users, guide content recommendation and to make advertising placement more transparent. At the same time, compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation can affect the assigning and managing of the GMI.

As highlighted above, current efforts to assign identifiers to online media have some shortcomings. A problem occurs when different lists categorise accounts according to different criteria. This might be the case with brands of the same name (e.g. there are several dozen media outlets called "Phoenix"), or with affiliates, syndicated channels or sister-brands of the same origin, that might follow different editorial lines (e.g. Al Jazeera, Phoenix or Fox). Even when a web-domain or social media account is always distinct, it might not be immediately clear to which media outlet or company it belongs. This can lead to conflicting or wrong signals, misleading algorithmic indexation and negatively impacting site integrity and user experience. Bad actors can capitalise on this deficiency and try to game the recommender systems with similar sounding names of channels, accounts, or brands.

Industry standard setting is a useful tool to solve the outlined problem in a fully self-regulatory and consensual, but still authoritative way. Examples of such conventions are the two- or three-letter country codes, the three letter codes for airports, or the international bank account number (IBAN). Specific to the content creation process, the international standard name identifier (ISNI) is an identifier for the public identity of parties.

The GMI project was proposed by the Global Media Registry, a Germany-based non-profit social enterprise that supports transparency, accountability, and pluralism in the digital information space. The GMR is a member of the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), a consortium member of the Global Media and Internet Concentration Project (GMICP) and a member of the Media Freedom Cohort of the Summit for Democracy. The proposer of the workshop has, in advance, taken into account the work of existing ISO/TCs such as:

— ISO/TC 46, Information and documentation, Subcommittee SC 9, Identification and description;

— ISO/TC 204, Intelligent transport systems;

— ISO/TC 289, Brand evaluation;

— ISO/IEC JTC 1, Information technology;

— IEC/TC 100, Audio, video and multimedia systems and equipment.

Members or officials of the aforementioned ISO/TCs have actively participated in the preparation or elaboration of this document. The IWA 44 workshop members have organized themselves in dedicated subgroups on certain aspects of this document:

— subgroup on syntax and taxonomy to identify a possible format and the elements that are most suitable for the GMI, based on use cases. This work includes the definitions of terminology, the entity relationships and the scope of applicability, e.g. with regards to individuals;

— subgroup on operations and governance to identify the aspects relevant for assigning and managing the GMI, including recommendations for possible entities involved in the process and their roles in the governance, possible methods of assigning GMI keys (e.g. automated, curated or mixed) and business model considerations;

— subgroup on integrity, transparency and security to assess relevant aspects of security, to identify mechanisms to prevent misuse and to ensure that the GMI serves as a trusted resource for the industry and audiences.

See Annex B for information about the governance and operation of the GMI.

See Annex F for information regarding workshop participants for this document.

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Global Media Identifier (GMI) for distribution channels and brands

1 Scope

This document provides requirements and recommendations for the structure and associated metadata to be included and the governance of the Global Media Identifier (GMI) that can be assigned to all media outlets that publish content online. The identification of material or physical objects is out of scope of this document.

This document also considers the GMI's technical infrastructure and its practical implementation. It is a neutral, non-judgemental numbering or naming convention, not a certification scheme. This document does not include any provisions for the assessment of online content, e.g. as regards its trustworthiness, quality, or an outlet's conformance with journalistic standards.

2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 639, *Code individual languages and language groups*

ISO 3166-1, *Codes for the representation of names of countries and their subdivisions — Part 1: Country code*

ISO 3166-3, *Codes for the representation of names of countries and their subdivisions — Part 3: Code for formerly used names of countries*

ISO 8601-1:2019, *Date and time — Representations for information interchange — Part 1: Basic rules*

ISO 17442-1, *Financial services — Legal entity identifier (LEI) — Part 1: Assignment*

ISO 26324, *Information and documentation — Digital object identifier system*

ISO/IEC 7064:2003, *Information technology — Security techniques — Check character systems*

ISO/IEC 18004, *Information technology — Automatic identification and data capture techniques — QR code bar code symbology specification*

IETF RFC 4648, *The Base16, Base32, and Base64 Data Encodings*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminology databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

— ISO Online browsing platform: available at https://www.iso.org/obp

— IEC Electropedia: available at https://www.electropedia.org/

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