ONLINE MEDIA MONITORING IN FEBRUARY

February, 2023
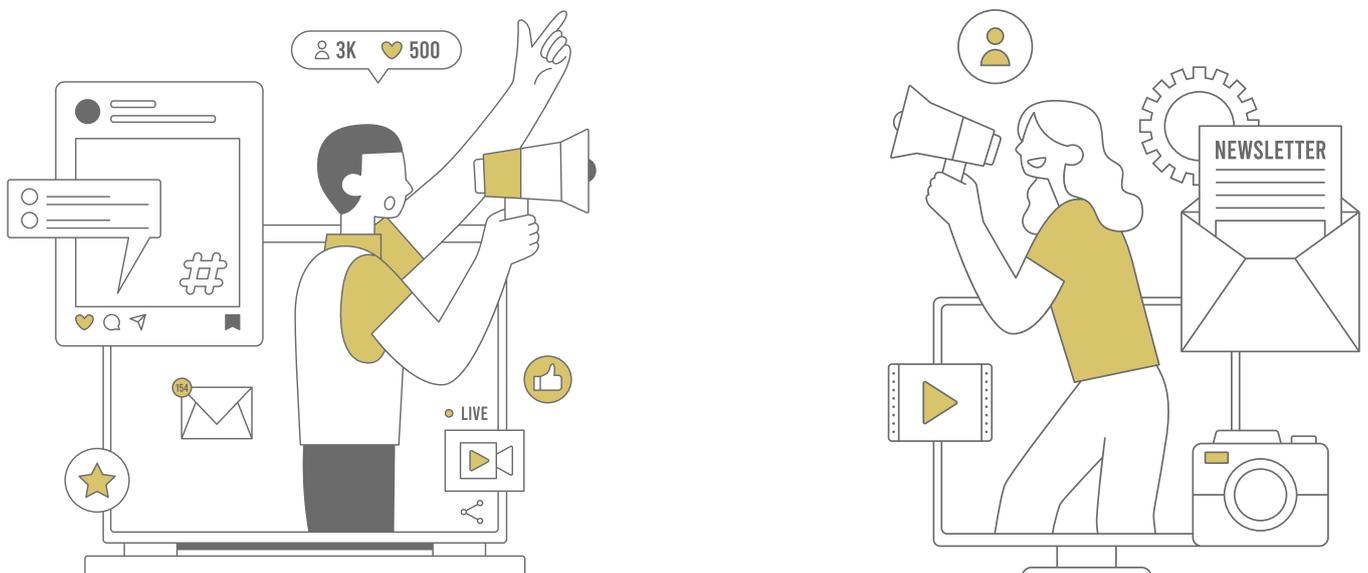
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1 Monitoring period

February 1-29, 2024

2 Scope

Scope - Information disorder online and in social networks: Websites, online news portals, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram.

3 Sample

Albanian and Serbian language.

4 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to monitor the disorders in Albanian Serbian online media regarding the developments/events that took place during the month of February in Kosovo.

2. METHODOLOGY

The aim of the Democracy for Development Institute (D4D) is to identify and combat news items with information disorder, an increasing trend of spreading inaccurate and unverified information. The D4D Institute monitors online and social media platforms to identify news articles exhibiting information disorders through a dedicated monitoring platform that classifies articles into distinct categories:developments in the North; Kosovo-Serbia dialogue; hate speech; online violence against women; political divisions; and international influence. Over 100 domestic, regional and international media were selected and monitored through the platform. Monitoring and analysis of articles with information disorder is carried out parallelly in two samples: in Albanian and Serbian.

Selection of examples from both samples is done based on the contents of the article shared: disinformation, manipulation of facts, unverified contents, inaccurate news, conspiracy theories, hate speech, offensive language, threatening or language, articles with tendentious titles, and biased reporting.

Most prevalent categories in the Albanian sample included: developments in the north, Kosovo-Serbia dialog and political polarization. The Serbian sample saw the topic of "development in the north" getting the most headlines. 1000 most articles in Albanian have been analyzed, of which 300 resulted in information disorder. Of the 1000 articles in Serbian reviewed, 500 resulted in information disorder.

3.MAIN FINDINGS

- **Sensational headlines:** In the case of the assassination attempt against Prime Minister Kurti, there were sensational headlines even though there was no confirmation from security institutions. Sensational headlines are used to dramatize the news, prioritizing attention-grabbing tactics over factual reporting.

- **Biased Political Statements Promoting Personal Beliefs in the Media:** In the Serbian language sample, the influence of Serbian politicians' statements on news posts from online portals is clearly visible. Unverified and biased narratives are transmitted by Serbian politicians. Political figures use media platforms to promote their personal beliefs, blurring the line between professional responsibilities and personal agendas.

- **The influence of religion on the media through biased articles:** One article included in this report clearly supports Mrs. Duda Balje, calling the civil society which demanded the removal of MP Ms. Balje, as immoral. Biased articles act as tools for imposing religious beliefs on the audience, undermining the integrity of information and objective reporting, while diminishing the importance of basic human rights, which include all marginalized groups in society.

- **Vague headlines that leave room for misinformation**. Vague headlines without specifics or factual evidence enable the manipulation of perceptions without providing the necessary context, contributing to the spread of unverified information.

- **Characterization of Kosovo-Turkey relations:** Portraying Kosovo-Turkey ties as an illegal and dangerous influence, creating suspicion among Serbs and reinforcing divisive notions. Incorrect information is similarly created as clickbait.

- **Unverified information and unclear headlines**: Vague headlines coupled with unverified information keep readers in a state of uncertainty, facilitating the spread of misinformation without concrete evidence or context.

4. ALBANIAN-LANGUAGE EXAMPLES

In an age where disinformation spreads quickly on digital platforms, distinguishing truth from lies becomes increasingly challenging. Recently, a series of news articles claimed there was an assassination attempt on Albin Kurti, during the conference on "Progressive policies - in response to the challenges of the Western Balkan countries" on February 9, in North Macedonia. However, following a closer examination, it became clear that this news item was a mere unverified allegation and information.

A major flaw in the narrative of the alleged assassination plot is the lack of credible sources. Both the original article and subsequent reproductions fail to cite any reliable source to substantiate their claims. Instead, they rely on vague assertions and sensational attention-grabbing headlines. The absence of concrete evidence from credible authorities casts doubt on the entire narrative's authenticity. Moreover, the government of North Macedonia immediately rejected the accusations, asserting that there was no assassination attempt on Prime Minister Kurti during his visit to Skopje.

This official denial undermines the credibility of news reports and underscores the importance of verifying information from authoritative sources. Despite the government's denial of claims, around 25 media outlets reported on the assassination, perpetuating the cycle of disinformation. Given the lack of verified evidence and the government's denial, it is imperative to classify these reports as unverified news and disinformation. The dissemination of such information not only damages the reputations of ndividuals and nations but also undermines public trust in the media. Furthermore, the spread of unverified narratives can have far-reaching consequences, exacerbating tensions between neighboring countries and intensifying disputes within communities.

This discrepancy highlights the importance of media accountability and responsible reporting practices. In the digital age, where information spreads rapidly across various platforms, journalists bear the responsibility of fact-checking and maintaining journalistic integrity. 25 articles, around 1590 engagements, 630 comments, 211 shares.
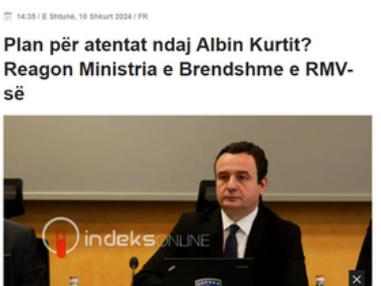
PThe Assisted Fertilization (IVF) Draft Law has sparked considerable debate and controversy within the country. Supporters argue that the legislation represents a step forward in reproductive rights and medical advances, while opponents express concerns about potential societal implications, including the risk of incest, ambiguity regarding the nationality of donors, and the spread of hate speech aimed at women requiring IVF treatment. More than 20 media outlets have covered the story, with the debate on TV Dukagjini emphasizing such narratives. Incest, marriage within families, and the mixing of nationalities through foreign donors are some of the arguments that provoked public reaction and incited hateful comments.

One of the main objections to the new IVF law is the fear of potential incest or marriages between siblings. MPs argued that the anonymity of donor information can lead to unknown kin relationships, posing ethical and legal dilemmas for individuals and families involved. Another point of contention surrounding the IVF Draft Law is the uncertainty regarding the nationality of donors contributing genetic material for the procedure. This lack of transparency can create legal confusion and complexity, particularly concerning citizenship issues.

A particularly troubling consequence of the debate surrounding the IVF draft law in Kosovo is the emergence of hate speech directed at women seeking IVF treatment. These narratives have contributed to the spread of degrading stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards these individuals.

Moreover, such rhetoric may perpetuate misunderstandings and misinformation about IVF procedures, undermining public understanding and exacerbating social divisions, as evidenced by social media comments.
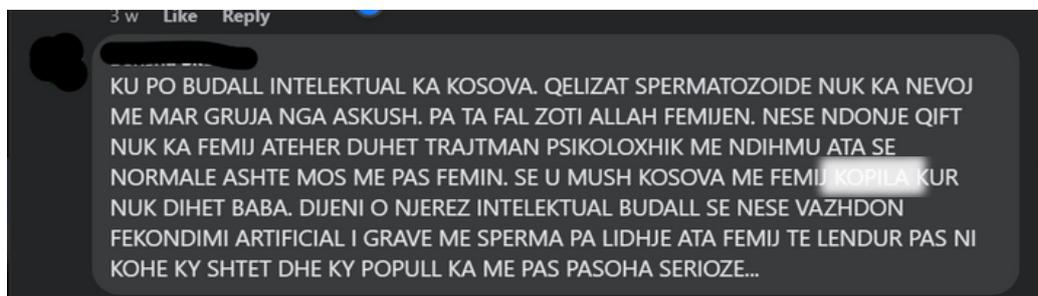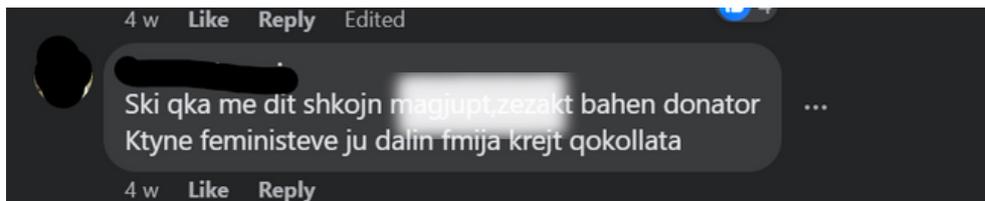
Posts from TV Dukagjini regarding the IVF Draft Law had a total of 1,982 interactions, including 1,168 likes, 757 comments, and 57 shares.

An article from Radio Kosova e Lire titled **"A number of amoral mercenary NGOs demand the dismissal of the Bosnian MP, Duda Balje, because she does not support the ugly LGBTIQ+"** highlights the issue of Duda Balje, the Chair of the Human Rights Committee, and her stance against LGBTQ+ rights. The title reflects the portal's bias, using words like "mercenary" and "amoral" to describe the NGOs demanding the MP's dismissal. Moreover, the religious influence in the article and among political figures who convey the same beliefs to citizens reduces the importance of human rights in our country. It is essential that personal beliefs do not interfere with professional duties, especially in positions as crucial as Human Rights Committee Chair. As a member of such committee, Balje's role requires impartiality and a commitment to supporting the rights of all citizens, regardless of personal beliefs.

Balje's stance against LGBTQ+ rights raises questions about potential bias in the committee's decision- making processes. Human rights committees are expected to protect the rights and freedoms of all individuals, especially LGBTQ+ communities, who are often disadvantaged and discriminated against. As a result, the perception of bias or lack of support for these communities by the Committee Chair affects the institution's credibility and efficiency.

DISA OJQ MERCENARE E ZËRA AMORALË KËRKOJNË SHKARKIMIN E DEPUTETES BOSHNJAKE, DUDA BALJE SEPSE NUK PËRKRAH SHËMTITË LGBTIQ+

Furthermore, calls of NGOs for Balje's dismissal reflect the broader community expectation for the behavior of public officials in line with human rights values. Advocacy organizations play an important role in holding public authorities accountable and ensuring their actions represent the values of equality, non-discrimination, and inclusion.
However, it is important to approach this topic with care and respect for different perspectives. While individuals are free to hold their own opinions, those in positions of power within human rights organizations or committees must emphasize the larger objective of protecting and promoting human rights for all, regardless of personal beliefs.

The issue of Duda Balje's stance against LGBTQ+ rights underscores the necessity of distinguishing personal beliefs from professional responsibilities, especially in roles related to human rights activism. The call for her dismissal stems from concerns about potential damage to the efficiency of the Committee in protecting the rights of marginalized groups. Moving forward, it is crucial to build a culture of inclusiveness, respect, and impartiality within human rights institutions. Radio Kosova e Lirë received 394 clicks on their online page.

6. SERBIAN-LANGUAGE EXAMPLES

The title of the article posted by Kosova Online and shared by HappyTV, **"KOSOVO IS UNDER A STRONG INFLUENCE OF TURKEY: Rajiq - 'Ankara does not support only one side'**, illustrates a narrative that portrays Kosovo as dependent on Turkish influence. Furthermore, the claim that Turkey's involvement in Kosovo in military, economic, and cultural aspects signifies strong influence is mistaken, as international relations can encompass multiple commitments motivated by a variety of interests and goals.

The spreading of this narrative, especially to a Serbian audience, has a strategic objective: to shape the public opinion and perceptions of Kosovo-Turkey ties. Characterizing Kosovo's ties with Turkey as influence or improper assistance seeks to increase suspicion among Serbs. This title not only distorts the realities of Kosovo's diplomatic contacts but also exacerbates regional geopolitical tensions. Such headlines underscore the media's power in shaping narratives and influencing public opinion, highlighting the importance of critical media literacy in distinguishing truth from deception in the complex circumstances between the two states. Happy TV's online page has received around 26,000 clicks, with 61% of the readership from Serbia and the rest from the Western Balkans.

NAROD SRBIJE OVO MORA DA ZNA:
Vučić STOPIRAO bedni plan Prištine

Aleksandar Vučić, President of Serbia, is portrayed in the article of Happytv.rs, "**THE PEOPLE OF SERBI MUST KNOW: Vučić STOPPED Pristina's wretched plan,**" as a strong, determined leader protecting Serbia from threats from Kosovo. However, further reading reveals that this story contains unverified information. Regarding Pristina's purported "wretched plan", the title is vague, leaving readers in uncertainty about the nature of the threat or the specifics of the plan.

This uncertainty makes it easier to manipulate perceptions without providing specific evidence or context, encouraging the spread of unverified information. The article's emphasis on President Vučić's action in preventing the proposal serves a propaganda purpose, portraying him as a strong and determined leader defending Serbian interests.

However, the lack of precise information about Pristina's plan calls into question the veracity and integrity of the narrative. This headline perpetuates a narrative of fear and distrust in the Kosovo administration using vague language and sensationalism, adding to tensions and divisions between the two countries. Finally, this headline demonstrates the use of misinformation as bait, influencing public emotions without providing context or facts to support its claims. The article has accumulated over 26,000 clicks, with 66% readership from Serbia and the rest from neighboring countries.

The Democracy for Development (D4D) Institute was established in April 2010 by a group of analysts were increasingly worried that the statebuilding exercise had neglected democracy. D4D's vision is to promote an active and educated citizenry that participates fully in the public space and utilizes the public arena of representation and decision-making to deliberate and build consensus over resource allocation that is efficient, smart, long-term, and that brings about equitable development. D4D influences specific policy, promotes a cross-sectorial approach to problem solving, and tackles the institutional routine of decision making by recommending incremental improvements and operates with maximum effectiveness in order to fully promote Kosovo's stabilization and democratic development. For more information about D4D's activities please visit our website: **www.d4d-ks.org**

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