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Bridging the Gap

A Media Comparison of Real Time Reporting and Fact Checking: Kosovo vs European Standards

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Purpose of the Gap Analysis

The purpose of this gap analysis is to systematically identify and evaluate the discrepancies in real-time reporting and fact-checking practices employed by media outlets in Kosovo, compared to established fact-checking standards. Specifically, the analysis will benchmark current media practices against recognized frameworks such as the European Fact-Checking Standards Network By conducting this comparative assessment, the analysis aims to uncover specific areas where Kosovo's media landscape falls short in adhering to best practices for accuracy, transparency, and timely verification of information. Understanding these gaps will provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges and weaknesses that may contribute to the persistence and spread of disinformation within the country's media environment.

Ultimately, this gap analysis will serve as a foundational resource to inform the development of tailored tools, training programs, and suggest recommendations to empower Kosovo's media professionals. These targeted measures will enhance their capacity to effectively prevent identification, production and dissemination of disinformation and the development of fact-checking practices within editorial rooms.

Methodology

This gap analysis was conducted through desk research, aiming to assess the state of journalistic practices and transparency in Kosovo's media landscape, with a particular focus on real-time reporting and fact-checking.

Review of Existing Literature and Reports-The first step involved analyzing secondary sources, including research papers, journalistic reports, and NGO publications on freedom of the media in Kosovo. Reports from international media watchdogs and institutions such as Reporters Without Borders (RSF), OSCE, and IREX were reviewed to provide context on historical and current media challenges, political and economic pressures, and legal protections and shortcomings regarding press freedom.

Website audit of the Media Outlets - systematic review of official websites of major TV stations and Radio on editorial policy and reporting methodology, the presence of sections About us, Editorial Guidelines, or Ethic policy. The accessibility on their websites which also includes the use of disclaimers or labels in news content. An in-depth review was conducted of the websites of leading TV stations, radios, and online portals in Kosovo. The objective was to determine how transparent these outlets are with their audiences. It has been researched whether outlets disclosed their editorial policies, provided clear explanations of how news is selected, researched and produced, and whether they publicly stated their fact-checking processes, correction policies, and disclaimers. It was also examined whether contact information, ownership structure, and funding sources were easily accessible. This allowed to evaluate each outlet's commitment to transparency and accountability in line with international standards.

Integration of European Standards as a Benchmark- an in-depth review of the websites of leading TV stations, radios, and online portals in Kosovo. The objective was to determine how transparent these outlets are with their audiences, assessing whether outlets disclosed their editorial policies, provided clear explanations of

how news is selected, researched and produced, and whether they publicly stated their fact-checking processes, correction policies, and disclaimers. The examination whether contact information, ownership structure, and funding sources were easily accessible was done, evaluating each outlet's commitment to transparency and accountability in line with international standards.

Cross referencing with fact checking platforms- Reports and case studies from regional fact-checking websites like Kallxo.com, Krypometri, and Hibrid.info were examined in order to comprehend the misinformation landscape and evaluate the performance of certain media outlets. Examples of Kosovo media outlets frequently disseminating inaccurate or misleading information were found. These results were contrasted with the transparency levels noted throughout the audit of the website. This gave lucid illustrations of how some media practices are not up to professional standards, particularly when it comes to editorial responsibility and accuracy.

Comparative Evaluation -A comparison of actual media practices in Kosovo with European standard criteria was used to determine how closely each source corresponds to ideal journalism standards. The investigation identified which elements—such as transparency, fact-checking, and ethical reporting—were missing or inadequate. It also recognized media outlets that show promise in meeting European standards, as well as those that require structural or editorial improvements

Situation Analysis

Media outlets in Kosovo have largely neglected the implementation of standards that promote transparency and accountability to the public. Analysis shows that the majority of these outlets do not publish essential information such as ownership details, sources of funding, staff members, shareholders, or the regulatory bodies overseeing their operations. Additionally, key documents like editorial policies and internal working rules are often absent from their online platforms.

Another significant challenge is the quality of published content, particularly the frequent failure to apply basic journalistic standards—such as citing at least two or more independent sources to verify facts—which undermines the credibility and reliability of media reporting in the country.

In recent years, Kosovo's media landscape has seen a profound transformation as a result of the digital age. Information sharing has changed dramatically as a result of the internet and social networking sites like Facebook and Instagram, especially for young people. While TV is still the major source of information, having a long history in Kosovo's media landscape, some radio stations now transmit their material online, so radio has, in some ways, also embraced the digitalization of media. Clearly, online journalism is the most rapidly evolving form of media format as technology and internet usage increases, also causing the spread of misinformation. Extensive use of social networks in Kosovo have allowed readers to access hundreds of thousands of pieces of information and in different cases, its narratives and disinformation from outside the country as well as domestic disinformation sources.

Moreover, in order to worsen interethnic tensions and erode confidence in law enforcement, Kosovo is dealing with a lot of disinformation that is disseminated on different internet platforms. This disinformation frequently manipulates facts, misrepresents

incidents, and creates an atmosphere of instability and mistrust between communities.[1]

Analyses conducted by civil society have revealed that official sources of information are often compromised. Inaccuracies and factual errors have been identified in official documents, public statements by politicians, and even educational materials such as school textbooks. Ethnic divisions, exacerbated by monoethnic journalism, have contributed to significant gaps in coverage and widespread misinformation on political, security, economic, and ethnic issues in Kosovo.

Hate speech and the stigmatization of critical voices remain persistent challenges, undermining freedom of expression and obstructing public access to accurate information.

Furthermore, social experiments have demonstrated that even public officials are susceptible to disinformation and frequently disseminate unverified information, further perpetuating false narratives.

The media independence in Kosovo is threatened by poor regulation and a lack of funds. Kosovo saw the sharpest decline in the Balkans, falling 24 places compared to last year's score. This year it was ranked in 99th place compared to the 75th place in 2024. "While the Kosovo media market is diverse, its development is limited by its small size and ethnic divisions. Media freedom is threatened by politicised regulation, gag suits, insufficient access to public information and serious risks for the safety of journalists," RSF said.[2] It added that journalists in Kosovo are a constant target of political attacks, and it criticised the adoption of the Law on the Independent Media Commission, which it said allows politics to influence this body.

[1] https://prishtinainsight.com/disinformation-stoking-interethnic-tensions-in-kosovo-mag/

[2] https://rsf.org/en/rsf-world-press-freedom-index-2025-economic-fragility-leading-threat-press-freedom

Similarly, Kosovo is ranked 60th out of 100 countries and described as "Partly Free" by Freedom House, a decline from the 54th rank in the 2021 report.[3]

Additionally, BIRN's disinformation study "Story of our Lies" indicates that Kosovo is vulnerable to external foreign malign influences. It highlights the failure of various stakeholders to implement effective mechanisms for monitoring the spread of disinformation, while the judiciary has struggled to address these cases adequately.

Other studies in Kosovo identified the dissemination of disinformation narratives by some Islamic and terrorist groups influencing Kosovo citizens, through either traditional media or social media.

Online media's growth has democratised media access and expanded the range of voices, but it has also brought new challenges, like disinformation and the consequences of the spread of algorithm-driven news. Furthermore, online news sites frequently compromise fundamental journalistic ethics like fact-checking due to challenging socioeconomic circumstances.

The economic conditions of Kosovo's media sector remain challenging. The media depend on political business power, thus it is often criticised by international organisations for its lack of professionalism. According to Reporters Without Borders, RSF, the media is financially fragile and therefore vulnerable to political influence.[4] The Media Ownership Monitor found that "the market, though relatively small, is crowded, intensifying competition for limited advertising revenue and rendering media outlets vulnerable to external influences, including political and business interests". In addition, journalists face issues including economic insecurity, fear of losing jobs, lack of contracts, undervalued and unpaid overtime work, late salaries, reduction of salaries, lack of safety at work, etc.

[3] https://freedomhouse.org/country/kosovo/freedom-world/2024

[4] https://rsf.org/en/country-kosovo

The Media ownership Monitor team consisting of BIRN Kosovo, Global Media Registry, and independent researchers have established the Media Ownership Monitor, as a publicly accessible database mapping tool, providing information regarding radio, TV, online media outlets and their ownership by companies and/or individuals. Based upon these indicators and other sourced data, the research found that an inadequate legal framework has allowed many media organisations to conceal their revenues from public scrutiny, that there is an absence of regulation on media ownership concentration, and there are concerns regarding the association between individuals who previously held political positions and are currently involved in the media industry. The findings of this research have directly informed key interventions that are required to help the media in Kosovo become more resilient and professional and abide by ethical standards.

A BIRN Kosovo report in March 2023 concluded that Western Balkan countries need to catch up with developed nations in creating legal, technological and industrial frameworks and capacities for utilising AI. In this case, Kosovo's Press Council - PCK has added new rules to its code of ethics for journalists that aim to promote the responsible use of artificial intelligence by the media, while also warning of the risks of AI-driven disinformation.

There are two independent factchecking groups in Kosovo, members of both the IFCN (International Factchecking Network) and the EFCSN (European Fact-checking Standards Network). Krypometer and Hibrid.info have engaged in factchecking activities and have publicly available data on their methodologies, published impressums, correction policies and editorial guidelines.

[5]Since the technology started moving increasingly fast, media outlets (except state broadcasters) have relied on advertising for funding, while CSOs primarily rely on donations. Attempts by certain media outlets to increase revenue through subscriptions were unsuccessful. Media outlets are monetizing video content on social media as an alternative revenue stream. However, this leads to ethical difficulties, particularly when reporting in the public

[5] *IREX-2024*:/https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/VIBE_2024_Kosovo.pdf

interest. Some media outlets prioritize engagement over news and information. As video materials become more widely used, traditional media often fails to stick to reporting ethics and ethical commitments. Due to a lack of professional media channels, journalists often take shortcuts when incorporating digital journalism such as failing to hyperlink the cited sources.

The media environment faces significant challenges in combating disinformation, particularly due to factual inaccuracies and outdated regulatory frameworks. The Code of Ethics of the Independent Media Commission (IMC) is no longer fit for purpose, failing to address the complexities of the digital age and the spread of disinformation. The IMC has not yet adopted a revised code that sets clear obligations for fact-checking or provides guidance on the use of artificial intelligence in audiovisual media.

On the other hand, the Code of Ethics for the Written Media—endorsed by 50 member outlets—addresses many of the key challenges posed by disinformation. It outlines journalists' duties to report truthfully, uphold the right of reply, and correct inaccuracies. It also mandates transparency in media financing and addresses the use of artificial intelligence in online media content.

However, despite the existence of this comprehensive code, the Press Council of Kosovo (PCK) has not been able to enforce transparency requirements and ensure consistent adherence to ethical standards among its members.

The Association of Journalists of Kosovo has developed an **Editorial Policy Guide** to assist media outlets in establishing their own editorial standards, drawing from both local and international best practices. The guide outlines core ethical principles, including the obligation to report accurately, verify information, avoid disinformation, ensure balanced reporting, and protect the rights and privacy of vulnerable groups. It also emphasizes transparency, editorial independence, and the need to disclose the use of artificial intelligence in content creation.

Several media organizations have adopted their own editorial or ethical guidelines. Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK) has set standards that prioritize accuracy, non-partisanship, and rigorous fact-checking in all its programming. Journalists are expected to verify information carefully and remain impartial.

Internews Kosova, a certified fact-checking organization and co-producer of KALLXO.com (with BIRN Kosovo), has also established detailed editorial guidelines. These include a strong focus on accuracy, a mandatory multi-step fact-checking process, and a commitment to editorial balance, fairness, and the right of reply. Journalists are required to fairly represent all sources and ensure transparency regarding their credentials.

Kosovo Media in Relation to EFCSN Standards

The implementation of fact-checking programs requires full transparency from fact-checking organizations and strict adherence to a clear methodology.

The EFCSN Code of Standards outlines seven principles that must be followed by its members or those seeking membership. Research has identified several challenges in how media outlets in Kosovo comply with these standards.

The EFCSN requires organizations to adopt a "System of Compliance," which includes a public commitment to all ethical standards. This commitment should be clearly displayed by featuring the EFCSN badge on their websites.

However, the research shows that many media outlets in Kosovo, despite being licensed by the IMC or being members of the PCK, do not make their membership or compliance visible to the public. They often fail to promote their adherence to the code of ethics or link to the relevant oversight mechanisms.

The second standard of the EFCSN Code of Standards requires media organizations to ensure full transparency in their fact-checking methodology, particularly in how topics for reporting or investigation are selected. This includes publicly publishing the selection and decision-making process on their official websites. The EFCSN also mandates that all statements be evaluated equally, regardless of the source, and that media outlets provide an online platform for citizens to submit concerns or suggest topics for fact-checking.

Moreover, fact-checkers are expected to explain in detail the steps taken to verify information, allowing readers to replicate the process using publicly available data. Each verified claim must be supported by at least two reliable sources, and the use of anonymous sources must be justified with accompanying

documentation. When citing experts, their credentials and affiliations must be clearly stated to ensure transparency and credibility. Additionally, the EFCSN requires that every investigation undergo at least one editorial review by someone other than the original author prior to publication.

Despite these detailed requirements, research shows that most media outlets in Kosovo fail to fully implement them. Many do not publish their methodology, lack public reporting mechanisms, and do not meet the sourcing, transparency, and editorial review standards outlined by the EFCSN. This highlights a significant gap between the standards set by the EFCSN and the current practices in the Kosovar media landscape.

Furthermore, EFCSN standards require that every statement or fact be supported by at least two reliable sources. However, this principle is not consistently applied in much of the media content produced in Kosovo, raising concerns about the accuracy and credibility of reporting.

The third chapter of the EFCSN standards focuses on ensuring impartiality and preventing political bias in media outlets that implement fact-checking programs. This standard requires media to maintain political neutrality, refrain from endorsing or appealing for votes on behalf of any political party, and avoid entering into agreements with political entities that could compromise their credibility or independence.

Additionally, EFCSN standards prohibit the employment of individuals who hold political positions and require media organizations to establish strict internal procedures to ensure that staff members abstain from making political statements or comments, both publicly and within their professional roles. An essential EFCSN standard is the prohibition of accepting gifts, accompanied by the requirement for media outlets to publish clear policies on preventing political influence and combating corruption.

However, analysis of the current situation in Kosovo reveals that most media outlets lack publicly available anti-corruption policies and do not publish administrative acts regulating staff behavior in

public. Furthermore, policies concerning political declarations and contractual relationships with political parties are generally absent from their websites.

In the area of anonymity and confidentiality, EFCSN standards call for explicit privacy protection policies and stringent procedures when interviewing children. These include obtaining informed consent and publishing child protection policies. Research shows that most media outlets in Kosovo do not have or at least do not publicly share such policies, and journalists are often not equipped with consent forms for interviewing minors.

EFCSN also emphasizes the importance of correcting errors transparently. Media outlets are required to publish their correction policies and maintain public records of any rectified content. Yet, in the analyzed media outlets, there were very little visible sections dedicated to corrections or public correspondence, and edit histories were very limited, almost inexistent.

Furthermore, EFCSN encourages its certified members to display a direct link for the public to file complaints about the media's performance. In Kosovo, however, most media outlets do not promote complaint mechanisms provided by the Independent Media Commission (IMC) or the Press Council of Kosovo (PCK) on their websites.

The fourth chapter of the EFCSN standards focuses on transparency between the media and the public. Outlets are required to be open about their organizational structure, funding sources, partnerships, and governance, as a means to foster public trust. Media must disclose ownership, legal status, and the professional background of key staff involved in fact-checking operations. They are also expected to publish editorial structures, ownership shares, and organizational statutes online. Financial transparency is strictly mandated, requiring the media to report any single source of income exceeding 1% of their annual revenue or any contribution over 5,000 euros.

However, transparency in ownership and organizational structure remains a systemic problem among most monitored media outlets

in Kosovo. Few provide information on their decision-making bodies or disclose their funding sources, falling short of EFCSN's transparency standards and weakening public trust in their operations.

Table with the ideal standards for comparison

Fields	Ideal/Desired Standards	Actual Practices	Identified Gap
Collaboration with fact-checking organizations	Review content from independent fact-checkers prior to publication and integrate their content when possible.	There is little to no publicly available information on how most media outlets in Kosovo conduct independent fact-checking within their newsrooms. With the exception of verified fact-checking organizations—who are required to publish their methodologies—most media do not disclose their internal fact-checking practices, editorial review processes, or standards for verifying information. This lack of transparency makes it difficult for the public to assess the reliability of news content and weakens confidence in the media's commitment to accuracy and accountability.	Media organizations should develop and publicly share comprehensive editorial guidelines that clearly outline their journalistic principles, fact-checking methodologies, and verification processes. Making these practices accessible would enhance transparency, strengthen accountability, and build greater confidence among audiences.
Institutionalization of rigorous verification in a systematic editorial process	An institutionalization of rigorous verification of facts and sources before publication. Each article must be reviewed by another editor before publication. Editorial guidelines should ensure that a diversity of sources are consulted in	Media outlets should urgently develop and publish comprehensive editorial and fact-checking policies on their websites. These should clearly define verification processes, editorial oversight mechanisms, source diversity requirements, and ethical conduct standards. By doing so, media organizations can improve	Media should publish editorial guidelines, including how they conduct factchecking and verification of information and sources.

Fields	Ideal/Desired Standards	Actual Practices	Identified Gap
	producing journalistic content with adequate time for response, with clear and transparent methods and approaches for defining the criteria for authoritative information. There should be guidelines on establishing relations with sources which protect the independence of the journalism, including barring employees from accepting in a professional context any gifts, favours, or services that go beyond common social and courtesy items. The process of verifying information and selecting topics must be transparent and accessible to the public, allowing audiences to understand how editorial decisions are made and ensuring accountability in reporting.	public trust, enhance the credibility of their journalism, and demonstrate a strong commitment to transparency and accountability.	
Transparency with editorial guidelines and policies	Make editorial guidelines available to the public in a readily accessible and understandable form. Publish non-partisanship and corrections policies and make them easily accessible. Best practice is to have guidelines and policies available publicly rather than on request.	The vast majority of media websites analyzed do not provide publicly accessible editorial guidelines or detailed explanations of their reporting and fact-checking methods. This lack of transparency prevents the public from understanding the ethical standards, decision-making processes, and verification procedures that underpin the content they consume. Without clear editorial frameworks, it becomes difficult to assess whether media outlets adhere to principles such as accuracy, impartiality, and accountability. Moreover, the absence of published fact-checking methodologies raises	Ibid

Fields	Ideal/Desired Standards	Actual Practices	Identified Gap
		concerns about the credibility and consistency of the information being presented. In an era of widespread disinformation, the failure to communicate how journalistic content is produced and verified significantly undermines public trust and the media's role as a reliable source of information.	
Source transparency in publications	Cite all sources used, except in cases where the security of the source is at risk. Design and apply products and features (e.g. information panels, banners, pop-ups, maps and prompts, trustworthiness indicators) that lead users to authoritative sources on topics of particular public and societal interest or in crisis situations. Statistics and external photographs/video/ audio content should be sourced and verified. Any reasonable conflict of interest or political bias should be addressed in publications.	Ibid	Ibid

Fields	Ideal/Desired Standards	Actual Practices	Identified Gap
Transparent and Accessible Mechanisms for Public Accountability	Offer audiences direct channels to request corrections and submit claims for verification, within the corrections policy on their website. Include in their corrections policy a detailed account of how they assess requests for corrections. Correct every known mistake promptly with a correction note in the same publication. Acknowledge the addition of any new information to a publication in an update note. Establish clear and accessible links for submitting complaints to oversight bodies such as the IMC or the PCK. Publish the statutes of media organizations to ensure transparency regarding their legal and organizational structure. Disclose annual financial reports and detailed information on all sources of revenue to promote accountability and public trust.	the vast majority of media websites in Kosovo do not have publicly accessible correction policies, nor do they offer clear and structured mechanisms through which the public can raise concerns, request clarifications, or seek corrections of inaccurate content. This lack of transparency limits public engagement and undermines accountability in the media sector. With the exception of the public broadcaster and a small number of fact-checking organizations or donor-funded media outlets, most media entities do not publish editorial guidelines that define their journalistic standards, values, or decision-making processes. Furthermore, there is little to no transparency regarding the methodologies they use for reporting and fact-checking.	Media outlets should maintain publicly accessible correction policies that are clearly visible and easy for readers to find on their websites. These policies should outline the procedures for acknowledging and rectifying factual errors in a timely and transparent manner. This absence of clear editorial frameworks contributes to inconsistency in reporting and weakens public trust in the credibility and independence of the media. To enhance accountability and audience engagement, media organizations should provide user-friendly forms or dedicated contact channels that allow readers to submit concerns, request clarifications, or challenge the accuracy of published content. In addition, media outlets must demonstrate financial transparency by publicly disclosing their sources of funding and detailed financial reports. This includes listing major donors, advertisers, and any other entities contributing to their operations, in order to foster public trust and minimize potential conflicts of interest.

The Democracy for Development (D4D) Institute was established in April 2010 by a group of analysts were increasingly worried that the state-building 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.

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