

AUGUST, 2024

MONTHLY REPORT

METHODOLOGY

[New Social Initiative \(NSI\)](#) monitors media and social media in cooperation with [Pikasa Analytics INC](#), a data analytics company that develops and implements tools, software, and machine learning algorithms. The tool allows monitors to count the nominal number of articles on topics and see the level of audience engagement.

Engagements on websites are defined as news articles from each outlet's website shared on Facebook and the total number of likes, shares, and comments they have collected. Social media engagement encompasses likes, shares, and comments gathered from all social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, LinkedIn) for all posts, including photos, videos, and text. The assessment of engagement extends beyond the media outlets to encompass a variety of social media accounts, including those of politicians and opinion makers.

The tool aggregates articles, and the NSI monitoring team reviews them to identify potential disinformation and other information anomalies. However, the tool has several limitations. It is tailored, with Pikasa and NSI monitors handpicked for each observed account. Consequently, the total number of posts and articles includes only the observed accounts, excluding other accounts that may also be posting news. Engagement calculation consists of all shares, comments, and other interactions.

Moreover, private accounts can only be observed if officially designated as accounts of political leaders or fan pages. Consequently, some politicians' Facebook accounts may not be included in the analysis. Another limitation is related to access, as NSI can observe articles and posts published as far back as December 1, 2023.

Observed media that report from Kosovo in Serbian language

Alternativna, Gračanica online, Radio Kontakt Plus, Kosovo Online, KoSSev, Medija Centar, TV Most, Radio Kim, Radio Mitrovica Sever, Radio Televizija Gračanica, and RTK2

Observation period:

August 1 – August 31, 2024

The number of online media observed:

126 media reporting in Albanian and Serbian in Kosovo, 126 media reporting from Serbia, and 24 international media outlets

Monitoring goal:

Information disorders on the Internet and social media, including Websites, online news portals, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, in Kosovo, focusing on the Kosovo Serb information space.

Specific topics observed:

Intention of the Kosovo government to open the Ibar bridge, the murder of a Serbian police officer by Kosovo Albanian prison escapee

Background information about the topics of observation:

In August 2024, the Government of Kosovo made significant efforts to reopen for traffic the Mitrovica Bridge over the Ibar River, a historically sensitive location symbolizing division between northern (Serb-majority) and southern (Albanian-majority) Mitrovica. On August 8, public meetings were held in North Mitrovica, these discussions aimed to engage the Serbian community and other stakeholders in the decision-making process, but were largely unsuccessful. As part of preparations, the bridge underwent a facelift with new paintings to symbolize unity and normalization. Kosovo authorities also carried out structural testing to ensure the bridge's readiness for vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Prime Minister Albin Kurti presented the bridge-opening plan to representatives of the Quint countries and the EU, emphasizing its alignment with freedom of movement and EU integration goals. However, NATO's KFOR mission and international embassies expressed concerns, stressing that the matter should be resolved through EU-mediated dialogue.

In July 2024, a Serbian police officer, Nikola Krsmanović, was killed, and his colleague, Vjekoslav Ilić, was seriously injured during a routine vehicle check in Loznica, near Serbia's western border with Bosnia. The attacker, Faton Hajrizi, identified as a Kosovo Albanian and a recent escapee from a low-security prison in Kosovo, opened fire on the officers before fleeing the scene. The incident sparked a two-day manhunt involving Serbian police and cooperation with Bosnian authorities, ending with Hajrizi's death in a police operation near Loznica.

In August 2024, the Kosovo Police closed nine branches of the Serbian Post in North Mitrovica, Leposavić, Zubin Potok, and Zvečan. The closure was based on allegations that these offices operated without registration under Kosovo's legal framework. The reaction from Serbia was strong, with officials condemning the closures as provocative actions aimed at undermining the Serbian community. Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić labelled the closures as part of a broader campaign against Serbian institutions in Kosovo. Protests were held in response, and Serbia called on the international community to intervene.

The Quint embassies (U.S., U.K., Germany, France, and Italy) and the EU expressed concerns about potential destabilization. While they emphasized the importance of legality and the rule of law, they also urged both sides to address disputes through dialogue and avoid actions that could escalate tensions.

Key findings

- There was minimal overlap between Serbian and Albanian-language media in terms of covered topics. For example, the Ibar Bridge was a dominant topic in Albanian-language media, while Serbian media focused more on the closure of Serbian Post branches and protests
- Incidents of hate speech and disinformation targeting ethnic and political divisions were reported in multiple outlets, shaping the polarized narratives observed during the month
- Tabloid narratives vilifying individuals and organizations as foreign agents or traitors of Serbian national interest in Kosovo were observed.

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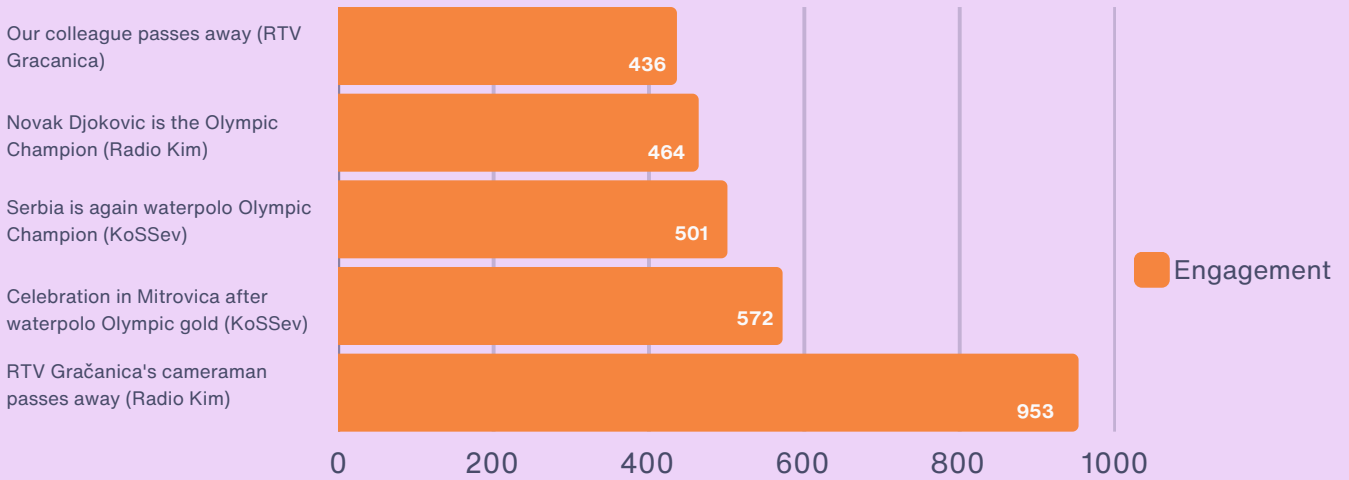
Monitoring results

During the reporting period, the most active media outlet reporting in Serbian language from Kosovo was Kosovo Online, which published 2821 articles with 30,115 engagements. The same website also recorded the most engagements on social media.

During July, Serbian-language media in Kosovo focused on the beginning of the trial accused of the Banjska armed attack (20 articles) and President of France Emanuel Macron's visit to Belgrade (19 articles). Other notable topics included the anniversary of the abduction of journalists in Orahovac (18 articles) and Kosovo PM Albin Kurti's meeting with CIA Chief William Burns (18 articles). None of the most reported topics made it to the audience favorites on Facebook. The Facebook audience engaged the most with Olympics-related news.

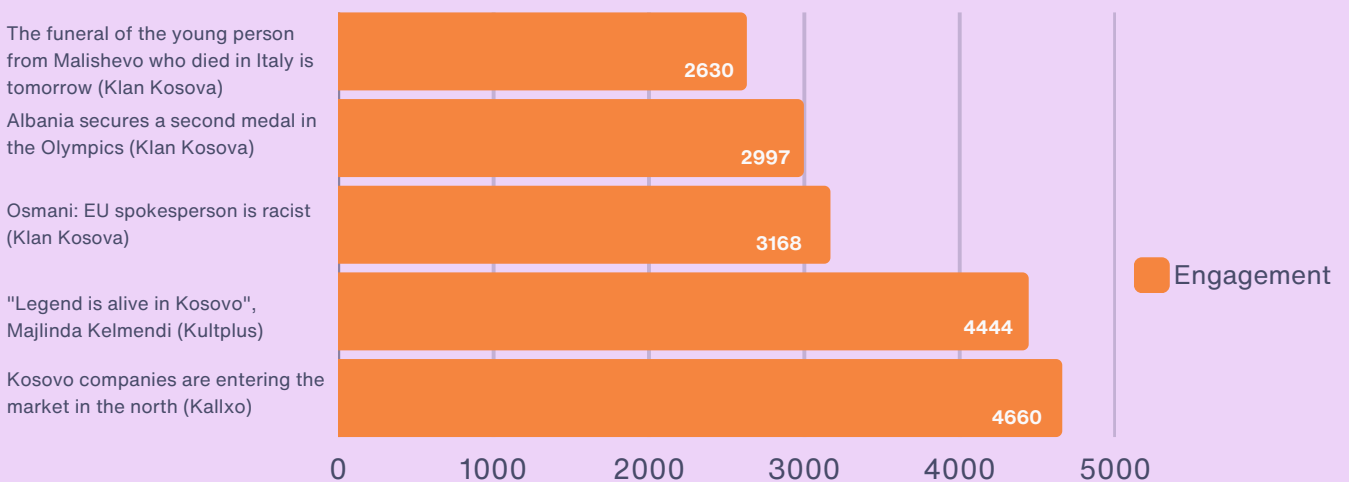
Since May 2024, an overall decrease in engagement levels has been observed. However, August 2024 saw a slight increase in audience engagement on Facebook compared to July 2024. Engagements are still considerably lower than those recorded in the first half 2024.

Popular articles in Serbian language on Facebook



As is usually the case, there were no overlaps in the most reported topics in Serbian and Albanian-language media in Kosovo in August. The posturing of KFOR cordons as part of an exercise on the main bridge in Mitrovica was a topic covered in 458 articles across Kosovo's online media spectrum in the Albanian language. This was followed by 376 articles about the murder of a family relation of the Kosovo President Vjosa Osmani who was speculated to have been involved in alleged sexual harassment. Finally, 370 articles were written in Albanian about the repainting of the main bridge in Mitrovica. The most covered topic garnered the most engagement, too (7879). When examining the most popular individual articles on Facebook, the topic of the Ibar bridge and sports overtook the audience engagement.

Popular articles in Albanian language on Facebook



During the reporting period, the most active media outlet reporting in the Albanian language from Kosovo was Bota Sot, which published 10,155 articles with 61,458 engagements. However, the website that recorded the most engagements on social media was Klan Kosova, with 186,625 engagements, on 3,567 published articles in August.

At least five¹ online and notable media in Kosovo rebroadcasted an article that, with no concrete evidence, supports the claim that the Visoki Dečani Monastery directly invests in hydropower plants in the region. The hydropower plants in Dečani, such as HC "Deçani," HC "Bellaja," and HC "Lumbardhi II," are operated by the company Kelkos Energy, which has been criticized for environmental damage and legal irregularities in their operation.

The monastery has opposed these hydropower projects,² mainly due to concerns over environmental degradation and their location within the Special Protected Zone surrounding the monastery. This area is designated to safeguard cultural and natural heritage and restricts industrial development. However, in the past years, continual disinformation campaigns have attempted to implicate the Orthodox Monastery of Visoki Dečani in their construction.

Disinformation campaigns against Monastery of Visoki Dečani are among the most frequent campaigns against Serbian heritage in Kosovo and in August, another article³ promoting a book with heavily revisionist and biased view of the Visoki Dečani issue was observed.

The article on Radio Kosova e Lirë discusses the book "Manastiri i Deçanit dhe Pronat Shoqërore" by Adem Lushaj, published by Jalifat Publishing LLC, which critiques the ownership claims of the Visoki Dečani Monastery over properties in Deçan municipality. The book alleges historical and legal irregularities in how the monastery acquired certain lands, portraying the claims as illegitimate and conflicting with Albanian community interests. The narrative heavily emphasizes the notion of unjust land appropriation without fully addressing the decisions in favor of the monastery of the Basic Court, the Supreme Court, and finally, the Constitutional Court of Kosovo, the monastery's legal protections under Kosovo law and international frameworks, such as the Special Protected Zones Law.

1 <https://www.botasot.info/kosova/2214278/beteja-per-ligjshmerine-e-hidrocentraleve-ne-decan-thahet-lumbardhi-e-degradohet-ambienti/> and <https://www.koha.net/arberi/beteja-per-ligjshmerine-e-hidrocentraleve-ne-decan-thahet-lumbardhi-e-degradohet-ambienti/> and <https://teve1.info/beteja-per-ligjshmerine-e-hidrocentraleve-ne-decan-thahet-lumbardhi-e-degradohet-ambienti/> and <https://telegafi.com/beteja-per-ligjshmerine-e-hidrocentraleve-ne-decan-thahet-lumbardhi-e-degradohet-ambienti/> and <https://04online.info/beteja-per-ligjshmerine-e-hidrocentraleve-ne-decan-thahet-lumbardhi-e-degradohet-ambienti/>

2 <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/08/19/kosovo-road-construction-sparks-row-with-serbian-monastery/>

3 <https://www.radiokosovaelire.com/ramiz-tafilaj-shtepia-botuese-jalifat-publishing-llc-pranzanton-librin-e-autorit-adem-lushaj-manastiri-i-decanit-dhe-pronat-shoqerore/>

The article also announces that the book contests the ownership of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The Visoki Dečani Monastery is universally recognized as a Serbian Orthodox Church monastery, with historical and cultural roots dating back to the 14th century. Built between 1327 and 1335 under the patronage of King Stefan Dečanski of Serbia, it has served as a significant spiritual and cultural center for the Serbian Orthodox Church. Often, nationalistic or revisionist narratives in Kosovo challenge the monastery's Serbian Orthodox identity, framing it as a local or shared heritage site to dispute Serbian claims over the land or to diminish its religious significance. However, such claims lack historical evidence and are generally seen as politically motivated.

An article with potential elements of hate speech was observed in Klan Kosova⁴ website. It discusses the case of Faton Hajrizi, a Kosovo Albanian who escaped prison and was accused of killing a Serbian police officer in Loznica, Serbia. The article presents in the title statements describing Hajrizi as the "first Albanian to kill a Serbian police officer on Serbian territory," a remark that can be perceived as provocative and potentially inflammatory. Elements of the coverage appear emotionally charged, focusing on the national or ethnic identity of the individuals involved. The particular case was a large part of the July monthly report, as the event happened then and also sparked politically and ethnically charged information disorders.

The statement prompted the reaction of the Serbian Minister of Internal Affairs, Ivica Dačić, who characterized it as "glorification of terrorism". In the title transferring this statement, tabloid Pravda used racial slur "šiptar".

Another potential example of hate speech is an article by Koha⁵ on the possibility of opening the Ibar bridge in Mitrovica for traffic, in which a citizen is quoted using a racial slur "shkive".

In media from Serbia, a Kosovo-related topic that heavily dominated the media space was the shut-down of nine Serbian Post offices and interim bodies for local self-governance in northern Kosovo by Kosovo Police. The event sparked a plethora of incendiary and politically charged language. Officials like Minister for Family Milica Đurđević Stamenkovski called the move a „crime“ and „ethnic cleansing“. The Director of the Serbian Government Office for Kosovo accused the Kosovo PM of wanting „provoke a war“ and „expel Serbs from Kosovo.“

⁴ <https://klankosova.tv/kamishi-per-faton-hajrizin-shojotari-i-pare-ge-vrau-qolic-serb-ne-territorin-e-serbise/>

⁵ <https://www.koha.net/arberi/mitrovicasit-akuzojne-perendimin-se-nuk-po-ua-respekton-vullnetin-per-hapjen-e-ures>

Serbian tabloids reported on the action by using words such as „bandits“ to describe Kosovo police and „terrorist“ to describe Kosovo PM.

The intention of the Government of Kosovo to open the Ibar bridge for traffic, amid widespread opposition from the Serbian-majority population in North Mitrovica, triggered similar narratives. The Serbian President, Aleksandar Vučić, engaged in the potential spread of panic by announcing that the Government of Kosovo would “forcefully open the bridge”⁶ even announcing possible dates for this. Informer called the intentions related to the bridge “a plan from Hell.”⁷ Pravda wrote about Kurti's “rabies”.⁸ Večernje Novosti announced that Kurti is “preparing an attack on Serbs.”⁹ Happy called a sting of Kurtis moves in northern Kosovo “monstrous.”¹⁰

In August, a well-established practice of delegitimizing protests in Serbia by connecting them with uncorroborated claims to the government of Kosovo was again observed. For example, Petar Petković,¹¹ a Serbian official claimed that recent environmental protests in Belgrade are coordinated with political actors in Priština, with the shared aim of destabilizing Serbia and removing President Aleksandar Vučić from power. He suggested that the protests' ecological concerns are a cover for broader political agendas.

In an article with particularly foul language, titled: "In the Stinking Mire: Sava Always Closer to Foreigners than Goraždevac and Gračanica! From Kosovo, He Only Cares About Priština, Where Rockefeller Money Comes From,"¹² tabloid Kurir engages in delegitimizing Savo Manojlović, leader of the *Kreni-promeni* movement, accusing him of being an agent of foreign interests and traitor of national interests, particularly those related to Kosovo. It alleges that Manojlović has ties to foreign organizations like the Rockefeller Foundation, which is claimed to finance his activities. The piece dismisses his environmental activism as a facade for political ambitions and equates his actions to the betrayal of Kosovo Serbs in areas like Goraždevac and Gračanica.



⁶ <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/1397238/ocekujemo-nasilno-otvaranje-mosta-predsednik-srbi-severa-kim-upozoravaju-opasne-planove-pristine-oko-kosovske-mitrovice>

⁷ <https://informer.rs/politika/vesti/934977/vucevic-aljbin-kurti-most-na-ibru>

⁸ <https://pravda.rs/2024/8/22/besnilo-u-pristini-kurti-nudi-samo-nasilje/>

⁹ <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/1399594/kuri-sprema-udar-srbe-zapad-preti-saopštenjima-medjunarodna-zajednica-ima-raspolaganju-niz-mehanizama-primora-pristinu-odustan>

¹⁰ <https://happytv.rs/vesti/politika/doveo-u-pitanje-opstanak-srpskog-naroda-ono-sto-je-kurti-uradio-nasem-narodu-je-monstruozno/762403/>

¹¹ <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/1398030/organizatori-protesta-pristina-sinhronizovani-ima-ju-jedan-cilj-rusenje-vucica>

¹² <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/politika/4428911/u-smrdiljivom-glibu-savu-uvek-bliži-stranci-od-goraždevca-i-gračanice-od-kim-brine-samo-za-pristinu-odakle-ležu-rokfelerove-pare>

Similarly, former state secretary, Dijana Hrkalović criticized environmental activists, whom she labeled "fake ecologists," accusing them of planning to block Belgrade as part of a broader strategy to destabilize Serbia and target President Aleksandar Vučić. She claimed that these actions are financially supported by foreign organizations, allegedly aimed at undermining Serbia's sovereignty. The article also used word "šiptar".

In addition to this and aforementioned article by Pravda, the racial slur "šiptar"¹³ was observed in at least two more articles by Informer, bringing the total number of observed articles that used this word to four.

¹³ <https://informer.rs/politika/vesti/937561/siptar-besan-jer-ne-moze-da-otvori-most-na-lbru-kurti-ponovo-hapsi-srbe-sa-kim> and <https://informer.rs/hronika/vesti/936064/pretece-poruke-ambasade-konzulati>

This report is prepared by New Social Initiative, a civil society organization from North Mitrovica to ultimately impact inclusiveness, trust-building, democratization processes and good governance in Kosovo. While doing so, NSI follows its vision of an inclusive society built on trust and appreciation among its communities, in which citizens from all ethnic groups actively participate in the society and its governance.