June 2024

Monthly report on information disorder May 2024

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Content

Introduction

This summary and descriptive report, offers an overview of the state of information (misinformation) throughout the month of May 2024, based on the data provided by the fact-checking platform - hibrid.info. The format of this report is the first and only of its kind. It is a monitoring report and presents the situation over a one-month period of time and this is 23rd monthly report published so far.

This report is designed by the fact-checking platform hibrid.info, part of the Kosovar NGO "Action for Democratic Society" (ADS) and is supported by the American Foundation "National Endowment for Democracy" (NED) under the project "Promotion of Objective Journalism and Fighting Disinformation".

In this monitoring report is provided an overview of the form of media information on events in and around Kosovo. In the course of this report, several figures (graphics) deriving from the hibrid.info database is presented, divided under several rating categories that are part of the fact-checking methodology of this platform.

The report addresses 8 comparative categories of data, aiming to provide a more objective clarification of the state of information and to explain the trends of disinformation for this monitoring period.

The monitoring categories are:

- Rating of disinformation articles
- The topics used to create and disseminate disinformation content
- Areas upon which disinformation articles are created and disseminated
- IInstitutions and persons tackled by the disinformation articles
- Types of media that have created and disseminated disinformation content
- Categorization of media in Albanian and Serbian language that have created and disseminated misleading conten
- Types of social media that have created and shared disinformation content
- Types of publishers in social media that have created and disseminated misleading content
- Checking and evaluation of statements

The content analyzed by the researchers of hibrid.info and that has served for the preparation of this report is primarily that published in Albanian and Serbian languages.

Evaluation categories of the disinformation

MAIN CATEGORIES
Here are the major categories listed according to the evaluated category
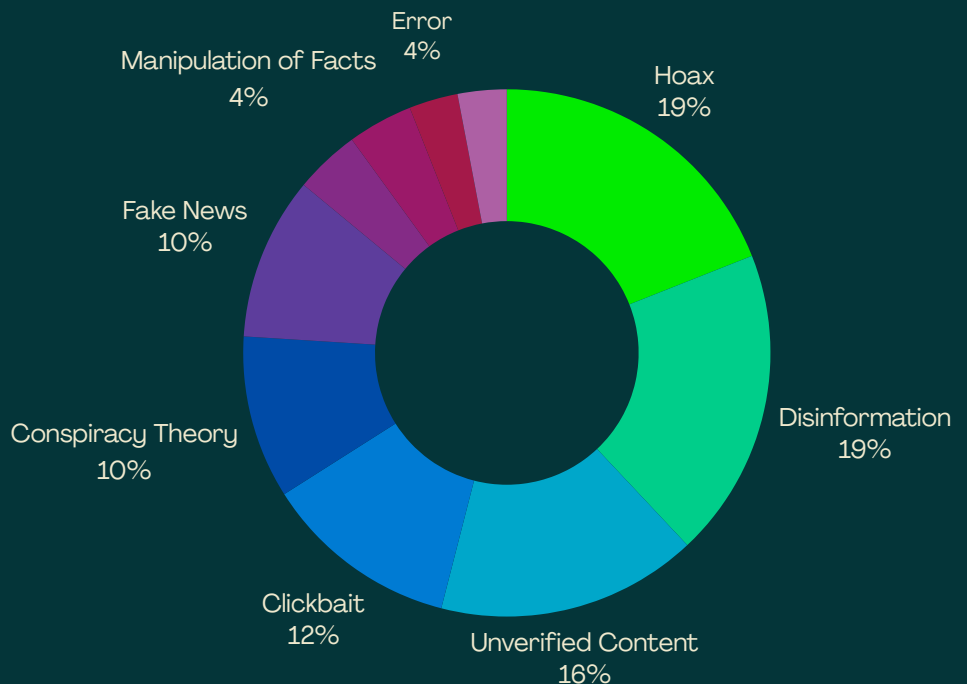
Based on the monitoring and processing of 73 misinformation contents during May 2024, it has been evident that hoax content and disinformation were the two main categories of misinformation, each accounting for 19%. These categories are followed by unverified content with 16%, clickbait with 12%, conspiracy theories with 10%, and fake news with 10%.

As in the previous month, where disinformation dominated as a category of misinformation, disinformation content continued to dominate this month despite having suffered a slight decrease. hoax content, which ranked third as an evaluation category with 16% in the previous month, in the course of this month (May) with an increase of 3% co-share the first position in terms of category of evaluation. This resulted due to the fact that there were a multitude of topics in the political and social domains being evaluated as disinformation or hoax.

These two categories are followed by unverified content with 16%, which took a decrease compared to the month of April, when ranked second (from 22% in April 2024 to 16% in May 2024). Almost all of these unverified contents were published on social media, mainly on topics related to security domain.

Unverified content is followed by clickbait articles at the same percentage as the previous month and conspiracy theories, which noted an increase of 4% compared to April (from 6% in April 2024 to 10% in May 2024).

%38

38% of misinformation articles processed have been rated as "hoax" and "disinformation".

1.1 Analysis of rating types

01. Hoax

Almost all hoax content is published by pages and accounts on social media (Facebook, TikTok). The dominant domains where hoax content is published are, social issues (11%) and politics (5%). The three main topics on which hoax content was published include the promotion of products claiming to cure various illnesses, publications in social media claiming to provide loans, and the Israel-Hamas conflict. Other topics such as call for medical aid, prize games, job opportunities, etc., were also present.

03. Unverified Content

Unverified content was mainly published by pages and accounts on social media, including two publications in mainstream media. The unverified content published in mainstream media involved claims that a member of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) was injured by an explosive device and a claim about the dismissal of US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Gabriel Escobar, which was denied by the Department of State (DoS). On social media, unverified content was published related to the armament of the KSF, the north, the total number of Albanians worldwide, etc.

02. Disinformation

Disinformation is published on social media (14%) and mainstream media (5%) in Albanian and Serbian languages. These disinformation contents were mainly published from the domain of politics, security and social issues. In Serbian-language media, disinformation was published with false claims that Edi Rama held a rally in Greece without the approval of Greek authorities, and another disinformation piece showing an image of Savo Manojlović, a mayoral candidate for the upcoming local elections in Belgrade, falsely claimed that the photo was taken in 2015 and that the woman next to him is Saranda Bogujevci, Deputy Speaker of the Assembly of Kosovo. In Albanian-language disinformation content published in mainstream and social media, topics included the price of bread, the armament of the Kosovo Police, EU measures against Kosovo, Kosovo and the Council of Europe (CoE), etc.

04. Clickbait

Almost all "clickbait" content was published in mainstream media, predominantly in the domain of black chronicle and politics. Contents from the black chronicle were related to tragic events where the location was not disclosed in the title despite the fact that the events did not occur in Kosovo. Several articles related to population registration, political opposition, and the association of Serb-majority municipalities, using misleading headlines were rated clickbait.

05. Conspiracy Theory

Conspiracy theory was primarily published by media in Serbian language related to incidents in Serb-majority settlements in Kosovo and to other topics. Referring to statements from the Office for Kosovo in the Government of Serbia, some of the events in Serb settlements were interpreted without evidence as ethnically motivated. Additionally, unfounded claims were published in the media that Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti offered Serbian temples (Orthodox churches) in Kosovo to the Vatican and claims by Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vulin linking "Greater Albania" without evidence to Kosovo's admission to the Council of Europe (CoE).

06. Fake News

All fake news was published on social media from the domain of security, social issues and politics. Fake news were published about the armament of the KSF with heavy artillery military equipment, the price of bread, disease cures, etc.
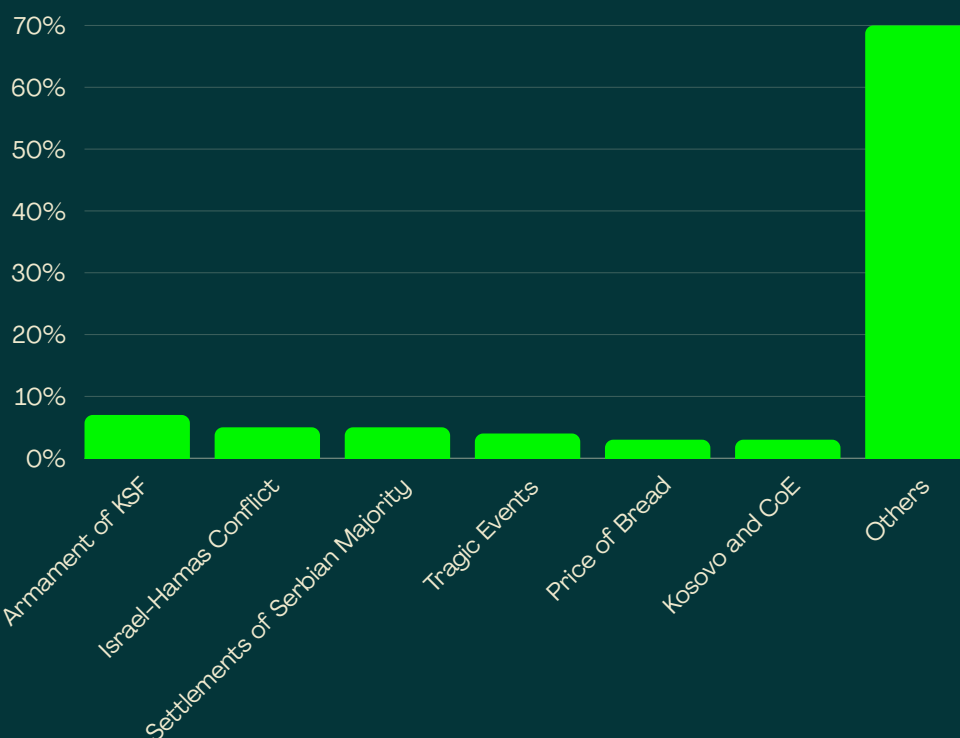
Other misinformation content articles were rated in the categories: manipulation of facts, error, disinformation/clickbait and clickbait/disinformation.

2

The topics used to create and disseminate disinformation content

MAIN CATEGORIES
### Here are the main categories listed according to the topics

Upon making official the purchase of "Bayraktar" drones from Turkey, various speculations have started circulating on social media about other armament supplies, including heavy artillery (helicopters, tanks, airplanes). The publication of misinformation related to unfounded claims about the armament of the KSF has made this topic dominate during May regarding the categorization of topics on which was misinformed.

Meanwhile, the Israel-Hamas conflict, which started on the 7 October last year (2023), continues to be used as a topic for misinformation. In the course of this month as well, several unverified contents and disinformation related to the conflict were published, making this topic the second ranked as most frequent in terms of misinformation.

Several incidents in settlements of Serbian majority in Kosovo during May were used by certain channels to create conspiracy theories about the perpetrators and the purposes of the acts without providing evidence.

Among the misinformation contents identified this month, have been processed misinformation related to tragic cases (deaths and murders), the price of bread and content related to Kosovo and the CoE.
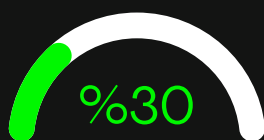
%30 30% of the main topics are about the armament of the KSF, the Israel-Hamas conflict, settlements of Serbian majority, tragic events, the price of bread and Kosovo and the CoE.

Fact-checking analysis according to topics

In the following are summarized analyses of four main topics (themes) addressed by various media and publishers, based on the measurements from the hibrid.info platform through fact-checking methodology.

01. Armament of KSF

All content related to the Iranian attack on Israel was published by accounts on TikTok, pages on Facebook, and YouTube channels in Albanian language. These contents from the security domain were rated as fake news and unverified content. Fake news were rated claims that Turkey had donated 10 "Apache" fighter helicopters to the KSF and that Italy had offered helicopters for purchase to the KSF. Unverified content were rated claims that the KSF had been supplied with 33 "BMC Vuran" vehicles and other military equipment.

03. Settlements of Serb-majority

Misinformation content related to several incidents in settlements of Serbian majority in Kosovo was published by mainstream media and social media in Serbian language, referring to statements from the Office for Kosovo in the Serbian Government and its Chief, Petar Petković. These contents from the security domain were rated as conspiracy theories, due to the fact that the Office and its Chief have interpreted incidents, without any evidence, in the settlements of Serb majority, in spite that the purpose and perpetrators remain unknown, as an intention to ethnically cleanse Serbs.

02. Israel-Hamas Conflict

Misinformation related to the Israel-Hamas conflict was published by pages on Facebook and accounts on TikTok. These misinformation from the domain of security and politics were rated as hoax, manipulation of facts and unverified content. hoax content was rated publications in social media claiming that actor Mel Gibson had spoken about Israel and AI-generated photos showing soldiers holding the Albanian national flag next to the Israeli flag. Unverified content were rated photos published claiming to depict current bombings in Rafah of Gaza Strip. Manipulation of facts were rated statements by Prime Minister Rama while explaining the position of communist Albania regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which was misinterpreted as a rebuke by the Albanian Prime Minister towards Secretary Blinken.

04. Tragic Events

Misinformation content about tragic events (deaths, murders) was published in mainstream media from the domain of black chronicle, which were rated as clickbait. News portals published articles about tragic events (deaths, murders), events that occurred outside Kosovo, but the headlines of these articles did not disclose the location of the event.

3 Types of domains

Based on the monitoring and findings of misinformation content processed during May, it turns out that various publishers (mainstream media, dubious portals and social media) produced and disseminated mostly misinformation content in the domain of security.

MAIN FIELDS
Here are the main fields listed

Weather 3%
Traffic 1%
Black Chronicle 6%
Sports 8%
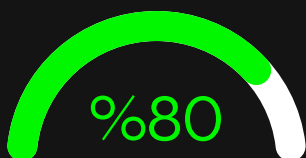Security 29%
Social Issues 23%
Politics 28%
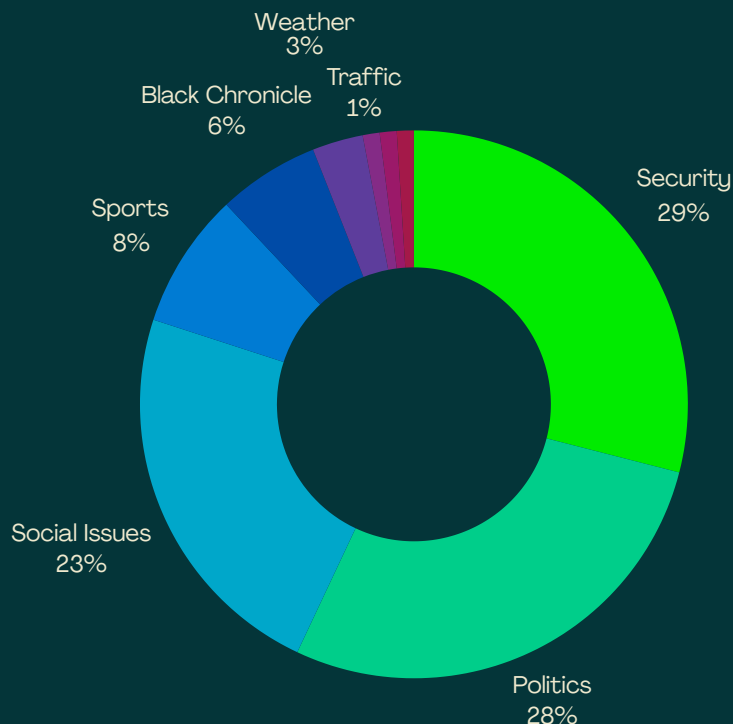
The security domain, which ranked second last month (April) with 28%, ranked first this month (May) with the same percentage of 29%. Mostly unverified content, disinformation and fake news were published in this domain, making security the dominant in terms of domains. In the domain of security was misinformed for topics such as the arming of the KSF, settlements of Serb majority, the Israel-Hamas conflict, the north and the arming of the Kosovo Police with a significant portion rated as unverified content, conspiracy theory and fake news, mostly published on social media.

Security is followed by the domain of politics, which ranked first last month (April) with 29%, while during May misinformation in this domain declined by 1%, making this domain to rank second with 28%. With regard to political topics, there was a variety, including EU measures against Kosovo, recognition of Kosovo and the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. Misinformation from the political domain was mostly rated as disinformation and hoax and was published on social media and mainstream media.

Misinformation on social topics, took a 6% decline compared to the previous month, making this topic to rank third. In social topics, hoax content dominated, including claims about loan provision, products claiming to cure certain illnesses, the price of bread, employment opportunities, etc. These misinformation contents were mainly rated as hoax and disinformation which were published on social media.

In fourth place misinformation from the sports domain are ranked. These contents were published in mainstream media and social media, mostly rated as hoax content and disinformation.

%80

80% of the misinformation contents processed pertain to social issues, politics and security domain.
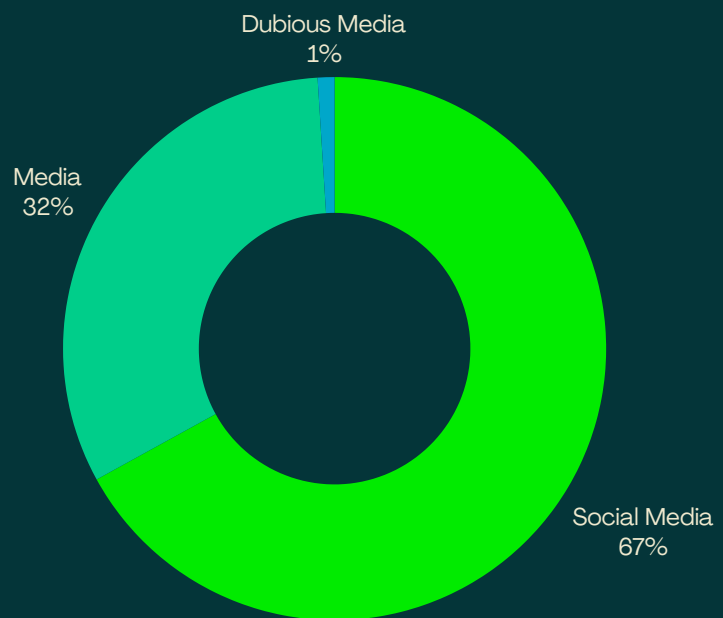
Types of publishers

4

As in the previous month (April), when misinformation published on social media dominated, during this month (May) also, misinformation content from social media pages and accounts continue to dominate. Based on the findings and analysis of misinformation content, it is noted that there is a slight increase of 1% in misinformation published on social media compared to April (from 66% in April 2024 to 67% in May 2024). This can be explained by the fact that all misinformation content and fake news, and a significant portion of disinformation and unverified content are published on social media.

The misinformation identified and analyzed this month, which were published in mainstream media (news portals), shows a similar percentage to the content published during the previous month (April). This occurs because almost all clickbait content and a portion of disinformation, errors and conspiracy theories were published in mainstream media.

DIFFERENCE IN PERCENTAGE BETWEEN PUBLISHERS WITH DISINFORMATION CONTENT

Dubious Media
1%

Media
32%

Social Media
67%

%99

99% of articles with misinformation content were published by publishers in social media (67%) and media outlets (32%).

5 Classification of publications in the Albanian and Serbian language

This measurement shows in which language misleading articles monitored have been published during the one-month period, categorizing the media into Albanian, Serbian and other languages in relation to their reporting on and about developments in Kosovo.

PERCENTAGE OF MEDIA PUBLICATIONS IN ALBANIAN AND SERBIAN LANGUAGES

Publications in English
3%

Publications in Serbian
11%

Publications in Albanian
86%
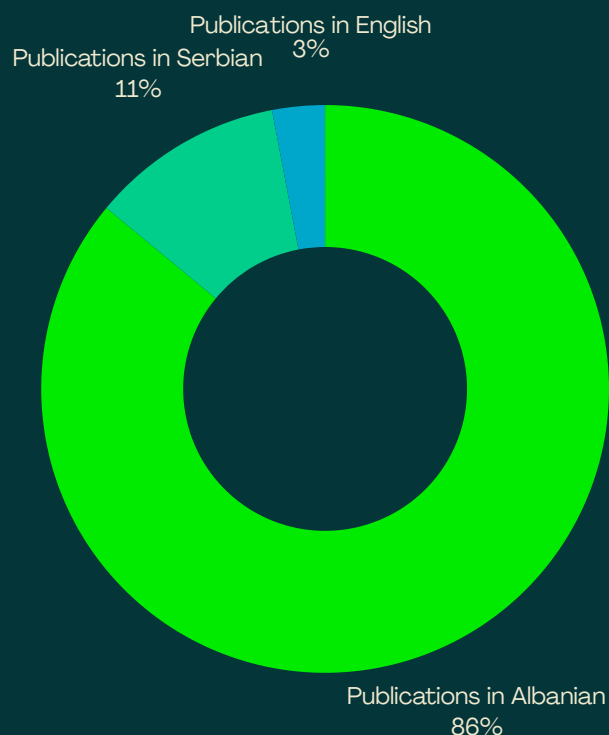
The sample of monitoring and processing of the misinformation contents from the "hibrid.info" platform focuses on misinformation in the Albanian language published in mainstream media, dubious portals and pages and accounts on social media. As a result, during the month of May 2024, publications in this language consisted 86% of the analyzed cases.

During this month, in the course of monitoring, two cases of misinformation in English language related to developments in Kosovo were also analyzed.

5.1 Analysis of articles in this category

In this section of the report, disinformation publications published by media outlets in Albanian, Serbian and other languages are analyzed. The following narrative provides an overview of their interrelations across categorizations, domains, and addressed topics.

01. Publications in Albanian language

More than half of the misinformation content published in Albanian language was published on social media (63%), while the rest was published in mainstream media (22%) and dubious portals (1%). Almost all hoax content and a cosiderable portion of disinformation, unverified content and clickbait articles were published on social media. In the mainstream media are published almost all clickbait articles, all errors and a portion of disinformation and unverified content. On social media, the predominant misinformation domains were social issues, security and politics, while in mainstream media, the main domains were sports, politics and black chronicle.

02. Publications in Serbian language

Almost all misinformation content in Serbian language was published by media in the Serbian language and a portion on social media. These misinformation pieces were primarily from the security and political domains which were rated as conspiracy theories and disinformation. The incidents in Serb-majority settlements were rated as conspiracy theories, as they were interpreted without evidence as being ethnically motivated. Conspiracy theory were rated also the claims that Kurti offered Serbian temples in Kosovo to the Vatican and the unfounded connection of "Greater Albania" with Kosovo's admission into the Council of Europe by the Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vulin. Disinformation were rated claims that Edi Rama held a rally in Greece without the consent of Greek authorities and that a Serbian politician Savo Malojeviq, a mayoral candidate in the upcoming local elections in Belgrade, it is claimed that a photo taken in 2015 a woman seen alongside him it is the Deputy Speaker of the Kosovo Assembly Saranda Bogujevci.
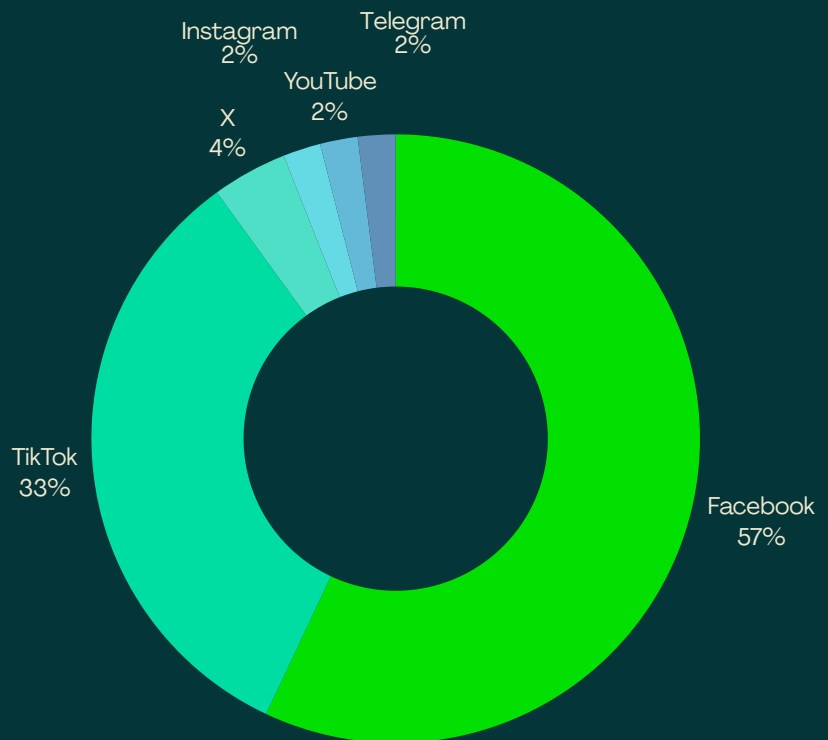
Types of social media

6

In this section, only disinformation articles published and disseminated on social media are analyzed, excluding publications in other media outlets (mainstream media and dubious portals).

During May, 57% of the misinformation content on social media was published on Facebook, while 33% was on TikTok, followed by X with 4% and Instagram, YouTube and Telegram with 2% each. Just like in the previous month, misinformation published on Facebook continued to dominate, though it took a decline of 20% (from 77% in April 2024 to 57% in May 2024).

Meanwhile, misinformation found and processed on the social media platform TikTok marked an increase of 10% (from 23% in April 2024 to 33% in May 2024). Additionally, this month, misinformation content was also found on other platforms such as Instagram, X and YouTube.
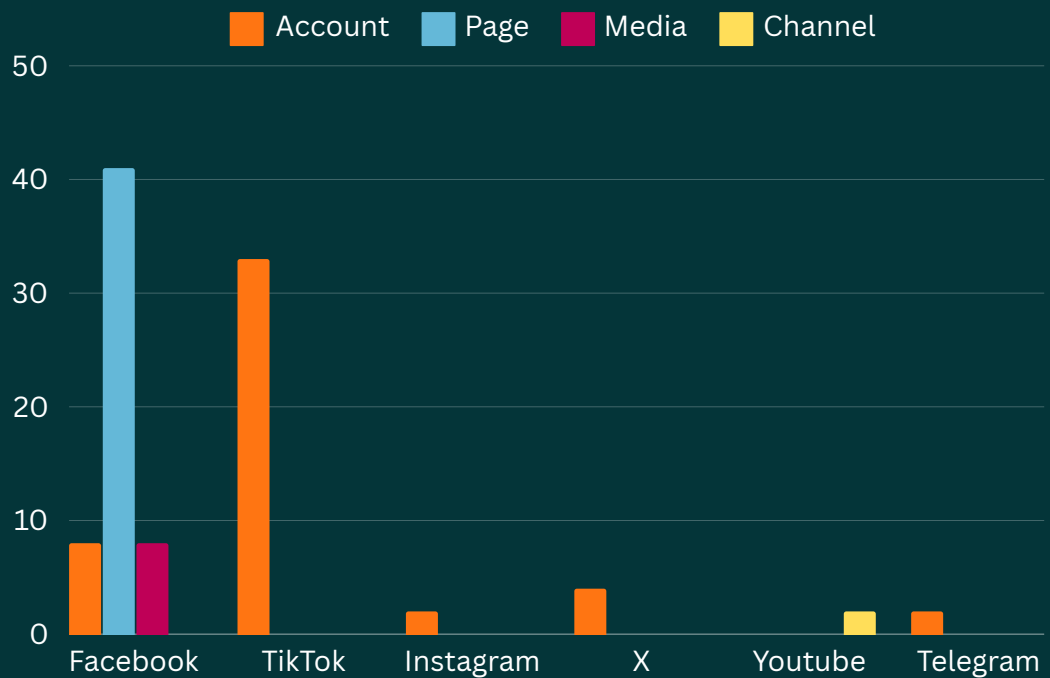
PERCENTAGE OF PUBLICATIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Instagram
2%

Telegram
2%

YouTube
2%

X
4%

TikTok
33%

Facebook
57%

6.1 Types of publishers in social media

This measurement, through monitoring data, analyzes the interaction on social media regarding the publication and dissemination of misleading articles by various publishers on social media. This is conducted through these main categories of publishers: pages, accounts, media and channels managed by social media users.

The misinformation content identified and processed on social media for April 2024 was mostly published by pages (41%) and accounts (8%) on Facebook, followed by accounts on TikTok (33%) and accounts on Instagram (8%). In May, 8% of the misinformation was published by media on Facebook, 4% by accounts on the platform X and 2% each by accounts on Telegram and channels on YouTube.

6.2 Analysis of Types of Publishers on Social Media

The following social media categories are analyzed in relation to the publication and dissemination of misinformation contents

01. Facebook

01.Social issues (31%), security (8%) and politics (6%) are the three primary domains upon which was misinformed during this month on Facebook. In terms of categories, hoax content made up 16%, while unverified content and disinformation each accounted for 14%. The misinformation topics varied widely within the aforementioned domains, however false news and disinformation about the price of bread, loan provision hoaxs and unverified content about the Israel-Hamas conflict were dominant.

03. X

On the platform X, conspiracy theories were published upon claims of Petar Petković, Head of the Office for Kosovo in the Government of Serbia, of the expulsion and persecution of Serbs living in Kosovo. Additionally, unverified content claiming that a photo of Radoičić armed next to the bust of "Tsar Lazar" in the north was from 2023.

05. YouTube

A YouTube channel published a video which was claiming that Kosovo had expressed interest in procuring weaponry military equipment, which was rated as unverified content.

02. TikTok

Fake news (10%) and hoax content (10%) were the two major categories identified which have predominated in the misinformation in the course of our monitoring and findings on TikTok in May. Security (18%), politics (12%) and sports (2%) are the three domains on which mostly was misinformed in TikTok platform. The arming of KSF and Israel-Hamas conflict are the two topics mostly misinformation was published about, among others.

04. Instagram

An Instagram account published a video claiming to present machines taking sand from the African deserts, dispersing it into the atmosphere to pollute the air, which was rated as a conspiracy theory.

06. Telegram

An account in the Serbian language on Telegram has published a false claim that Edi Rama held a rally in Greece without the consent of Greek authorities, which was rated as disinformation.

Most outspoken personalities and institutions

7

This measurement analyzes data to determine which institutions and personalities (political public figures) have been most outspoken through the monitoring of articles with disinformation content.

**RANKING OF MOST OUTSPOKEN INSTITUTIONS BY PERCENTAGE**
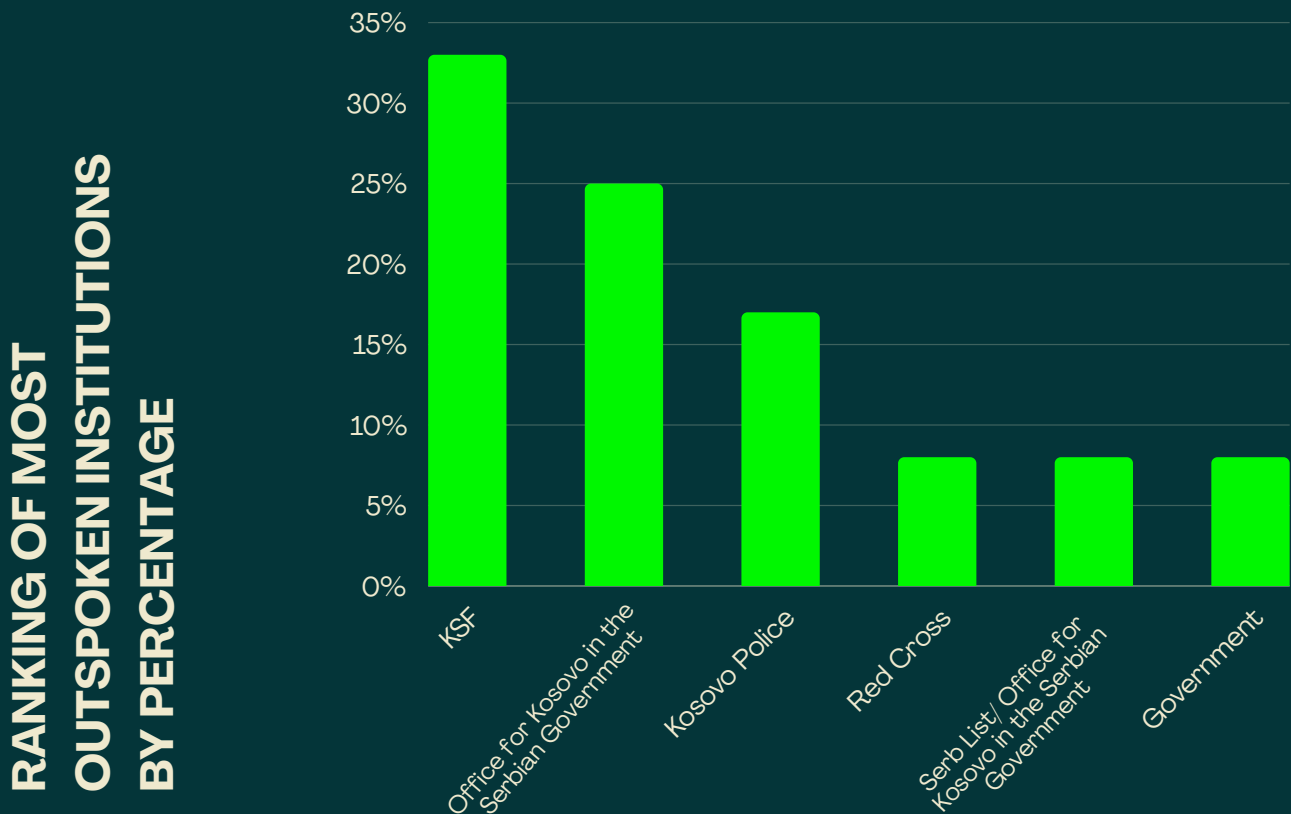
Based on the 73 misinformation contents identified and processed in May 2024, it results that 6 different institutions were mentioned in 11 of them. Among these mentioned institutions, the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) and the Office for Kosovo in the Government of Serbia were the most dominant.

Kosovo Security Force was mentioned in four misinformation contents, specifically unverified content and fake news published on social media. This institution was mentioned in unverified claims regarding the supply of heavy military artillery.

The Office for Kosovo in the Government of Serbia was mentioned in four misinformation contents in the context of the political entity in Kosovo, the Serb List (Lista Srpska). This Office was mentioned in conspiracy theories published by media in the Serbian language, which, referring to statements from this Office, interpreted some developments in the settlements of Serbian majority in Kosovo as ethnically motivated.

The Kosovo Police (KP) was mentioned in two misinformation contents published on social media, where via a published photo is falsely claimed that the Kosovo Police were supplied with 5000 long rifles as well as via a video is claimed to depict the Kosovo Police in action, which was actually footage from a TV series.

All other institutions were mentioned once in the misinformation contents identified and processed. The Government institution was mentioned in hoax content where a dubious link was deceiving that the Government was providing free solar energy. The Red Cross was mentioned in hoax content claiming that the institution was providing aid to Kosovo for people suffering from diabetes.

RANKING OF MOST OUTSPOKEN INDIVIDUALS BY PERCENTAGE
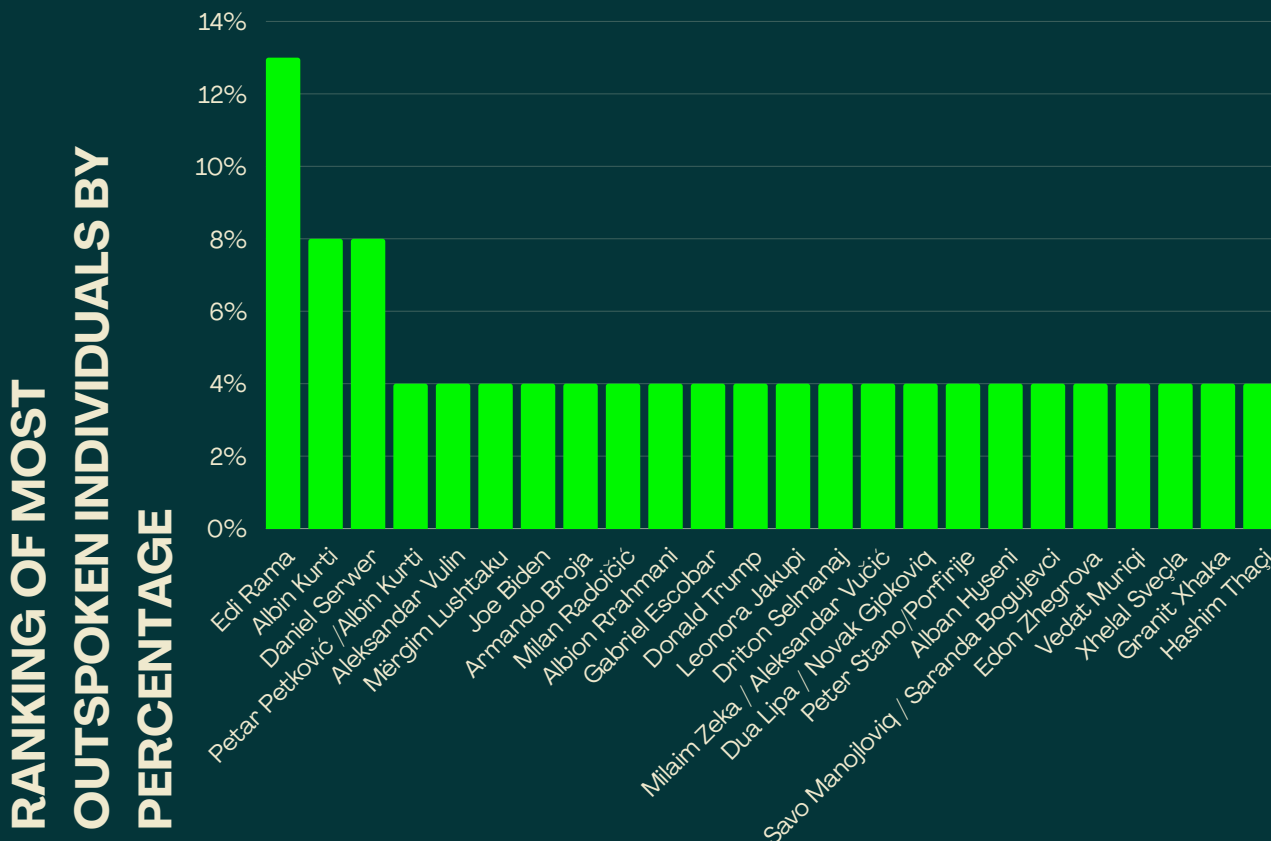
The Prime Minister of Kosovo, Albin Kurti (4 instances of misinformation) and the Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama (3 instances of misinformation), are the two most frequently mentioned figures in the 24 misinformation contents involving personalities. Kurti has been mentioned by media in the Serbian language with the conspiratorial claim that Kurti offered Serbian temples in Kosovo to the Vatican and the false claim of an 80% increase in crimes during administration of Albin Kurti. Kurti was also mentioned in the conspiracy theory where the Head of the Office for Kosovo in the Government of Serbia, Petar Petković, claims without fact that Kurti is criminalizing the northern part of the country and seeking justifications for "physical and legal violence" against Serbs.

Prime Minister Rama has been mentioned in misinformation contents, including a statement as he is explaining Albania's communist position regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which was twisted in interpretation to appear as criticism of the Albanian Prime Minister against U.S. Secretary Anthony Blinken; the false claim that Rama said Serbia will never recognize Kosovo; and the disinformation in Serbian language on Telegram that Edi Rama held a rally in Greece without the consent of Greek authorities.

Methodology

For the preparation of this monitoring report, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used.

With regard to quantitative methods, a database was initially created from ADS/hibrid.info in order to break down and analyze in details the misinformation trends. Through this database, maintained and updated on regular daily basis by the ADS/hibrid.info staff, articles with misinformation content are monitored. The selection of misinformation contents for analysis is based on importance, relevance, virality and context. These criteria are determined by the experienced monitoring team in the information sphere.

This means that all articles published on the hibrid.info platform are placed in the database, and the latter serves as the main source for preparing the monitoring report. Furthermore, the methodology used to analyze the presented data in the monitoring report enables data filtering into daily, weekly, and monthly basis, mainly in quantitative form, to better understand the phenomenon of disinformation of those analyzed articles for this one month period of time according to various categories and ratings.

Parallel to this, another important source for this report is the ADS/hibrid.info methodology (published on the hibrid.info website) for combating informational disorder. This methodology, which is first and foremost based on qualitative methods, has been developed by the professional staff of ADS/hibrid.info and is in line with the highest international standards for fact-checking, following the guidelines of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), respectively. ADS/hibrid.info is a full member of this international mechanism - IFCN.

This monitoring report covers the period from 1 – 31 of May 2024, having processed 73 misleading contents.

This short monitoring report provides a snapshot of the one month state of play of information (misinformation) during May 2024, based on the data from the fact-checking platform – hibrid.info.

Conclusions

In the findings and processing of 73 contents during May 2024, it was established that hoax content and disinformation were the two main categories of misinformation, each comprising 19%. This occurred due to the abundance of topics from the domains of politics and social issues that were classified as disinformation or hoaxs. These categories were followed by unverified content with 16%, clickbait with 12%, conspiracy theories with 10% and fake news with 10%.

After making official the purchase of "Bayraktar" drones from Turkey, speculations about other armament supplies, including heavy artillery such as helicopters, tanks and airplanes, began circulating on social media. Unfounded claims about the KSF's supplies dominated the misinformation during May. Meanwhile, the Israel-Hamas conflict, which started on the 7 October 2023, continued to be a significant source of misinformation, with many unverified contents and disinformation. Additionally, incidents in the settlements of Serbian majority in Kosovo were used by some channels to create unfounded conspiracy theories.

Predominantly unverified content, disinformation and fake news on topics such as the arming of the KSF, settlements of Serbian majority, the Israel-Hamas conflict, the north, the arming of the Kosovo Police, etc., has made the security domain to lead during May with 29%. Security is followed by a variety of topics from the political domain, including EU measures against Kosovo, Kosovo's recognition, Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, etc., which were rated as disinformation and hoaxs and were published on social media and mainstream media. hoax contents about loan provision, products claiming to cure certain illnesses, price of bread, employment opportunities, etc., from the social domain, were mostly rated as hoaxs and disinformation published on social media and ranked third in the categorization of domains.

Same as in the previous month (April), misinformation published on social media continued to dominate this month (May) as well, with a slight increase of 1% (from 66% in April 2024 to 67% in May 2024). This can

be explained by the fact that all hoax content and fake news, as well as a significant portion of disinformation and unverified content, were published on social media. During May, 57% of misinformation content on social media was published on Facebook, 33% on TikTok and 10% on other platforms (X, Instagram, YouTube, Telegram).

In the 24 misinformation contents where personalities were mentioned, the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Albin Kurti, was mentioned 4 times, while the Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama, 3 times. Kurti was accused of conspiratorial and false claims by media in the Serbian language, including the false allegations of offering Serbian temples in Kosovo and the claim that he is criminalizing the northern part of the country. Meanwhile, Rama was accused of false statements and distorted interpretations of his positions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which was twisted in interpretation as criticism of the Albanian Prime Minister against U.S. Secretary Anthony Blinken; the false claim that Rama said Serbia will never recognize Kosovo; and the disinformation in Serbian language on Telegram that Edi Rama held a rally in Greece without the consent of Greek authorities.

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