

BEYOND FAKE NEWS

ADVANCING MEDIA AND INFORMATION
LITERACY FOR AN INFORMED SOCIETY



OSCE

Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe
Mission in Kosovo

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Advancing media and
information literacy for
an informed society

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List of Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AJK	Association of Journalists of Kosovo
AoK	Assembly of Kosovo
EU	European Union
IMC	Independent Media Commission
MIL	Media and Information Literacy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PCK	Press Council of Kosovo
RFoM	Representative on Freedom of the Media
SLAPP	Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VAW	Violence Against Women
VERLT	Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism

Foreword

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, the proliferation of information through various media channels has transformed how societies consume and interpret content. While this digital expansion offers unprecedented access to knowledge, it also presents challenges, notably the spread of misinformation and disinformation. These challenges underscore the critical need for robust Media and Information Literacy (MIL) to empower individuals with the skills to critically assess and engage with media content.

Recognizing this imperative, the OSCE Mission in Kosovo has been at the forefront of promoting MIL since 2016. Our efforts began with initiatives aimed at integrating MIL into the formal education system, collaborating closely with the Ministry of Education, public universities, and civil society organizations. This collaboration led to the inclusion of MIL as an elective subject in primary and secondary schools, and its adoption as a mandatory course in several public universities starting from the 2023/2024 academic year.

Our strategic objectives are multifaceted: to cultivate critical thinking among youth, enhance the capacity of educators to teach MIL, and raise public awareness about the importance of discerning media consumption. In partnership with organizations like DokuFest, we have trained over 70 high school teachers on innovative MIL teaching methodologies, enabling them to effectively impart these essential skills to their students.

Furthermore, the Mission has engaged directly with students through workshops and lectures, reaching over 1,000 high school and university students across diverse communities. These sessions equip young individuals with the tools to navigate the complex media environment, identify fake news, and understand the impact of media on society.

Public outreach remains a cornerstone of our approach. Through televised educational programs, social media campaigns, and interactive quizzes, we strive to engage the broader public in conversations about media literacy. Notably, our media literacy campaigns have addressed the challenges posed by misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the importance of verifying information and consulting credible sources.

Our accomplishments on developing and promoting media and information literacy in Kosovo are the result of collaborative efforts with a wide array of partners, including educational institutions, media organizations, and civil society actors. Together, we are building a resilient society capable of critical engagement with media, thereby strengthening democratic values and human rights in Kosovo.

Acknowledgements

The OSCE Mission in Kosovo extends its deepest appreciation to Blerta Aliu and Dren Gërguri from the University of Prishtina for their invaluable contributions to the development of these policy briefs. Their expertise, research, and dedication to advancing Media and Information Literacy (MIL) have played a crucial role in shaping this document.

Blerta Aliu, PhD, Candidate and Teaching Assistant at the Department of Journalism, has provided critical insights into ethical media reporting, the portrayal of marginalized groups, and the impact of digital content on public perception. Her research on gender representation, media ethics, and media literacy education has significantly contributed to the recommendations outlined in this document.

Dren Gërguri, PhD, Lecturer at the Department of Journalism, has made substantial contributions through his research on artificial intelligence, disinformation, and fact-checking mechanisms. His analysis of AI-driven misinformation, media manipulation, and the role of media literacy in combating fake news has provided a strong foundation for policy recommendations aimed at strengthening Kosovo's media landscape.

Their collective efforts have been instrumental in developing evidence-based strategies to enhance media literacy, promote ethical journalism, and empower communities with the tools to critically engage with media to foster a more informed and media-literate society.

Executive Summary

The rapid digital transformation and the rise of disinformation pose significant challenges to democratic societies, making Media and Information Literacy (MIL) a critical tool in combating misinformation, fostering critical thinking, and promoting responsible media engagement. Kosovo ranks among the lowest in Europe in media literacy, leaving its population highly susceptible to disinformation, biased reporting, and digital manipulation. Despite this urgent need, Kosovo lacks a comprehensive MIL strategy, a structured curriculum, and adequate teacher training, making it essential to develop systematic policies that integrate media education across institutions.

This document consolidates six policy briefs that assess key MIL challenges and propose strategic solutions. The findings emphasize the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach, including integrating MIL into the formal education system as a core subject, equipping teachers with necessary training, and expanding public awareness initiatives. AI literacy is also highlighted as a growing necessity, as artificial intelligence plays an increasing role in shaping information ecosystems. The policy briefs further address the importance of ethical and inclusive media representation of marginalized groups, particularly in combating stereotypes and biased reporting. Additionally, strengthening students' digital competencies is vital to navigating online risks such as misinformation, cyberbullying, and manipulation. AI-based fact-checking tools are also identified as crucial for verifying information efficiently, while addressing gender stereotypes in popular media is essential to fostering more inclusive and equitable societal narratives.

The OSCE Mission in Kosovo plays a central role in advocating for MIL reforms by fostering collaboration among policymakers, educators, media professionals, and civil society actors. Through its support for responsible journalism, digital literacy programs, and fact-based public discourse, the Mission contributes to the development of a more informed and resilient society. Investing in MIL is not just about strengthening Kosovo's ability to counter misinformation - it is a fundamental step toward safeguarding democratic principles, ensuring media freedom, and fostering a culture of informed and active citizen engagement in an increasingly digital world.

Policy Brief 1: Strengthening Media Literacy for a More Resilient Society Against Information Disorder

By: Dren Gërguri, PhD Lecturer – Department of Journalism, Faculty of Philology, University of Prishtina

Kosovo currently holds the second-lowest position on Europe's media literacy index¹. Despite the urgent need for improvement, the Government of Kosovo has yet to take concrete steps to address the issue. The lack of a comprehensive media literacy strategy, curriculum, and teacher training for the subject of media literacy leaves society exposed and unprepared to disinformation and other types of information distortion. Media literacy includes the skills to understand, analyse, assess, and create media content. These skills are essential to building a society resistant to information distortion. This document proposes a comprehensive approach to improve media literacy in Kosovo, based on international best practices and its specific needs.

The issue

The lack of media literacy leaves society disarmed in the face of information distortion and brings a series of risks to society that faces disinformation daily on various topics. This is even more disturbing for society, due to the sensitive situation in Kosovo and the possibility of violence that will have its origins in a disinformation campaign. People may trust manipulated information and act based on it. However, this concern may also be present to a large extent in the electoral process, because disinformation is one of the methods used to influence voter decision-making.

In addition to shaping public perception, the lack of media literacy allows certain stereotypes and narratives to gain strength, further deepening societal polarization. Nowadays, information spreads very quickly, especially when it is false. When manipulated content goes viral, it reaches thousands of people before it can be verified and corrected. Many people lack the skills to deconstruct manipulated information and become victims of fraud.

While transformations in the world of information have brought many advantages, they have also introduced significant challenges, increasing society's exposure to information distortion. By contributing to the expansion of media literacy in society, we empower individuals to understand, identify, and critically assess media content, as well as be responsible media users. Information distortion is manifested in three main types:

Disinformation: the deliberate spread of false information for manipulation;

Misleading information: the unintentional dissemination of incorrect information;

¹ Open Society Institute Sofia, Media Literacy Index 2023, <https://osis.bg/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/MLI-report-in-English-22.06.pdf>

Misinformation: the use of true information to cause harm.²

These challenges are especially alarming in Kosovo's sensitive context, where informational disruptions could fuel violence or significantly impact key social and political processes. Previous studies in Kosovo have confirmed that Kosovo population have difficulty distinguishing false information from true information.³ Each of these forms requires a tailored approach, however strengthening media literacy remains one of the most effective and long-term solutions for combating information disorders.

Results

Kosovo without a comprehensive strategy for media literacy - In Kosovo, media literacy is included as an elective subject in some schools in various municipalities of Kosovo, however, many other schools do not include it as a subject at all, which is a serious obstacle to extending media literacy to all students. There is no comprehensive strategy for media literacy. While the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation Government's 2022-2026 Education Strategy 2022-2026⁴ addresses digitalization and the development of digital competence, it does not compensate for the absence of media literacy in the strategy. The terms *digital competence* and *media literacy* are often used together, but they have distinct meanings. Digital competence refers to the ability to use technological tools⁵ effectively, while media literacy focuses on critically understanding and analysing the content delivered through these tools⁶.

There are various models for integrating media literacy into school curricula, with Finland being recognized as the most successful in embedding media literacy across society. In Finland, the cross-curricular integration model has been followed, where media literacy is taught in several different subjects and starts in kindergarten.⁷ Another model of integrating media literacy into schools is when media literacy becomes a separate subject. We have observed this in the case of Kosovo, where media literacy is expected to be taught as a separate subject.⁸

² Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, Information Disorder: Towards an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking, Council of Europe, 2017, <https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research/168076277c>

³ Gëzim Qerimi & Dren Gërguri, Infodemic and the Crisis of Distinguishing Disinformation from Accurate Information: Case Study on the Use of Facebook in Kosovo during COVID-19, *Information & Media*, 94, 87-109. <https://doi.org/10.15388/Im.2021.94.56>

⁴ Strategjia e Arsimit 2022-2026, MASHTI, Prishtinë, 2022, <https://masht.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/03-Strategjia-e-Arsimit-2022-2026-Alb-Web.pdf>
SRB: <https://masht.rks-gov.net/sr/strategjia-obrzovanja2022-2026/>
EN: <https://masht.rks-gov.net/en/education-strategy2022-2026/>

⁵ Anusca Ferrari, Digital Competence in practice: An analysis of frameworks, (Publications Office of the European Union: Luxembourg, 2012).

⁶ James Potter, Introduction to Media Literacy, (Sage: Thousand Oaks: California, 2016).

⁷ Reijo Kupiainen, Sara Sintonen, & Juha Suoranta. Decades of Finnish Media Education. Finnish Society on Media Education, 2008, <https://mediakasvatus.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/decades-of-finnish-media-education.pdf>

⁸ Dren Gërguri, Media literacy should be promoted, but how and what are the challenges? *European Journalism Observatory (EJO)*, 2020, <https://al.ejo-online.eu/kryesoret/edukimi-medial-duhet-te-promovohet-por-si-dhe-cilat-jane-sfidat>

Kosovo, the second lowest in the media literacy index - Finland is ranked at the top of the countries with most resilient to informational disorders according to several international studies. In the Media Literacy Index report⁹ by the Open Society Institute, Finland consistently ranks as the country with the most successful in terms of implementation of media literacy across society. Denmark is second on this list, while Kosovo is the second-to-last on this list. This report assesses the resilience potential to the impact of "fake news" and the post-truth phenomenon by countries using various indicators, including media freedom as reported by "Freedom House" and "Reporters Without Borders," education performance through the OECD's PISA test, public opinion surveys via the "World Values Survey," and political engagement through the UN e-participation index. Ranking second to last indicates that Kosovo faces significant challenges in expanding and developing media literacy.

Recommendations

Educational institutions should incorporate media literacy into curricula at all levels of education, both as a standalone subject and integrated into other subjects, following Finland's example. Integrating media literacy would better equip society to navigate the information environment surrounding it.

The Government of Kosovo should develop a comprehensive strategy for media literacy, which foresees training of teachers, curricula for different levels of education, as well as literature to be used by teachers.

In addition to education, Community-based initiatives that focus on media literacy should be encouraged and financially supported. Civil society organizations should undertake efforts, through various activities, to fill the gaps left by formal education in the spread of media literacy. Civil society organizations, NGOs, youth groups, or other organizations that bring together certain social groups should engage in the development of media education programs, through workshops, courses, and awareness-raising campaigns. These activities can cover a range of topics, from developing skills to analyse news and identify disinformation, to promoting responsible use of social media.

In many countries around the world, city public libraries should be are spaces used to organize aforementioned such community activities.

At the local level, municipalities, in collaboration with publicity libraries, should can organize workshops, courses, and educational resources for people of all age groups.

Digital platforms may should be used to create online educational content, online courses, or media education blogs, with the aim of creating a broader community that works together to improve everyone's media skills.

Research should be funded in the fields of media literacy and information disorders, and

⁹ Open Society Institute Sofia, Media Literacy Index 2023, <https://osis.bg/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/MLI-report-in-English-22.06.pdf>

Tools should be developed to help detect information disorders and build and strengthen media literacy skills.

Conclusion

Strengthening media literacy requires a comprehensive approach involving public institutions beyond just educational ones, along with civil society organizations, working together to enhance society's resilience to information disorders. In addition to school-based education, community-driven initiatives are crucial for reaching diverse social groups and helping them become more resistant to disinformation campaigns.

Strengthening media literacy fosters a society resilient to information disorders. A society that can understand and critically analyse the media content it encounters will be better equipped to handle any form of information distortion and make well-informed decisions without falling prey to manipulation.

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Policy Brief 2: The Need to Integrate Artificial Intelligence Education in Schools

By: Dren Gërguri, PhD Lecturer – Department of Journalism, Faculty of Philology, University of Prishtina

Artificial intelligence is a powerful technology to impact and change our lives. The role of artificial intelligence extends to everyone's daily life, regardless of the field or profession they practice, in medicine, education, media, etc. Taking into consideration its impact hitherto, as well as the trend of even greater inclusion of artificial intelligence in people's lives, it is imperative that societies be educated about artificial intelligence, the role, possibilities, and ethical implications, and not only of artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence education includes four key elements: understanding what artificial intelligence is; how to use it responsibly; what the potential risks are; and what are the skills needed to work with artificial intelligence. All these help in more effective interaction with artificial intelligence technology, in a more responsible use of artificial intelligence, in critical assessment of the ethical implications of artificial intelligence, as well as in recognition of the role of artificial intelligence in society in general. Knowledge and skills in the use of artificial intelligence, let its users know which artificial intelligence tools are most effective for shaping their goals, for example, for more creativity in the texting, ChatGPT can be used¹⁰, however if source-based results are desired, then Copilot¹¹ is more advanced than ChatGPT.

The issue

The rapid advancement of technology, particularly artificial intelligence, is driving significant changes that will continue to shape our daily lives. To navigate this transformation effectively, it is essential for everyone to stay informed and proactive in preparing for artificial intelligence artificial intelligence's growing integration into various aspects of society.

UNESCO also reacted to this by calling on governments to draft the necessary regulations for the use of artificial intelligence in schools.¹² UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay states that "artificial intelligence can be an extraordinary opportunity for human development, but it can also cause harm and prejudice."¹³ She adds that artificial intelligence cannot be integrated into education without public engagement and necessary regulations from governments.

The lack of education on artificial intelligence in society allows it to become even more deeply immersed in the world of artificial intelligence without acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills for this technology. Thus, people may make important decisions after interacting with artificial intelligence without being aware of the limits of the technology, such as, in some cases,

¹⁰ <https://chatgpt.com/>

¹¹ <https://copilot.microsoft.com>

¹² UNESCO, UNESCO calls for regulations on AI use in schools, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/09/1140477>

¹³ UNESCO, UNESCO calls for regulations on AI use in schools, 2023, Ibid.

the inaccuracy of the information that artificial intelligence provides. With limited knowledge of artificial intelligence, society becomes more vulnerable to manipulation through artificial intelligence-generated disinformation, such as deepfakes.¹⁴

At the same time, education in artificial intelligence helps individuals understand its current limitations, particularly its reliance on training data. When this data is biased or insufficient, artificial intelligence models may perform inaccurately or unreliably.

Results

The need to adapt existing curricula to technological developments - Integrating artificial intelligence education in school curricula is important for the recognition and long-term impact of artificial intelligence on society. It is imperative for everyone, even at a young age, to understand the concept of artificial intelligence, the implications it brings to society, and the ethical aspects of using artificial intelligence tools. Artificial intelligence education can be integrated into school curricula across various subjects, beginning with fundamental concepts and gradually progressing to responsible artificial intelligence usage, programming, and the development of new artificial intelligence-based tools. To achieve this, the current curriculum must be adapted, teachers must be trained, and infrastructure in schools must be created and improved.

In its "Guide to Generative Artificial Intelligence in Education and Research,"¹⁵ UNESCO emphasizes the need to improve individuals' skills to use this technology ethically, responsibly, and effectively. Artificial intelligence education will contribute to the development of this skill, which will help people get the most out of artificial intelligence tools while minimizing their risks.

Recommendations

Formal and informal education on artificial intelligence

Integration into the school curriculum ⇒ In order to recognize the long-term impact of artificial intelligence on society, the artificial intelligence education must be integrated in curricula. Schools should improve infrastructure where needed to provide the necessary conditions to develop subjects related to artificial intelligence. In addition, another challenge is for teachers who need to follow the trend of artificial intelligence development to stay up-to-date with the rapid development of this technology.

Adapting content for different age groups ⇒ Curricula should be adapted for different grades and basic concepts of artificial intelligence should be explained to children, while at a higher pre-university level, curricula can be further developed for the responsible use and creation of artificial intelligence tools.

¹⁴ Dren Gërguri, Information disorder in the digital age, Open Access, 2023, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/375229895_Fake_News_Information_Disorder_in_the_Digital_Age

¹⁵ UNESCO, Guidance for generative AI in education and research, 2023, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000386693/PDF/386693eng.pdf.multi>

Community initiative for education on artificial intelligence ⇒ In addition to formal education, there should also be community initiatives for artificial intelligence education, with workshops for different social groups, online modules or self-paced courses. Various civil society organizations can contribute to this short-term solution by providing opportunities for learning through workshops, seminars, and self-paced online courses. The flexibility of online courses makes them increasingly popular, as they allow individuals to learn at their own pace, fitting education into their schedules without the constraints of geographical distance or other barriers that often limit participation in in-person programs.

Educational campaign ⇒ Media campaign is another form of targeting adult members of society who are already outside the formal education system.

Co-operation between civil society organizations NGOs and technology companies ⇒ Civil society organizations, NGOs can partner with technology companies, combining their expertise with the companies' technical knowledge to organize impactful events and initiatives. These collaborations can help spread artificial intelligence awareness more broadly throughout society, benefiting the different segments of the society through educational activities and engagement.

Institutional support and inclusiveness ⇒ Public institutions, in co-operation with various international organizations, should create funds and resources that support initiatives to expand education on artificial intelligence. In addition, we should ensure that various programs and initiatives are inclusive, accessible to all communities, ensuring that the content is linguistically and culturally adapted.

Conclusion

Education on artificial intelligence is crucial for equipping society with the skills needed to effectively use, understand, and critically assess technology and artificial intelligence. A society with knowledge about artificial intelligence will better understand the benefits of artificial intelligence tools, as well as their limitations. Therefore, everyone will use artificial intelligence responsibly and ethically for their personal and professional needs.

Artificial intelligence education should be evolving and highly dynamic, just like artificial intelligence technology itself. The institution leading this process should be the relevant line Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. The biggest mistake would be to categorically reject these tools and attempt to avoid the vast range of artificial intelligence technologies that are already being successfully integrated into various aspects of life.

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Policy Brief 3: Professional Ethics and Multiculturalism in Media Reporting on Marginalized Groups

By: Blerta Aliu, PhD Candidate, Teaching Assistant at the Department of Journalism, Faculty of Philology, University of Prishtina

The media often fails to report adequately on marginalized groups, including people with disabilities, non-majority communities, the LGBTI community, victims of violence, the poor, women, children, and the elderly, due to negligence, lack of information, sensationalism, or other factors.

Thus far, it has been documented with many examples that the portrayal and presentation of marginalized groups, with particular emphasis on non-majority communities and persons living in economic poverty, in local media is done inadequately.

The inappropriate application of references to ethnicity, pejorative titles, exposure of children living in poverty, the application of inadequate terminology to people with special needs, the LGBTI community, and the inappropriate exposure of the elderly are some of the most common violations of professional journalistic ethics that lead to discrimination and reinforcement of stereotypes for these groups.

On the other hand, all forms of misrepresentations that are mainly found in online media or go viral through digital platforms are in violation of the Press Code. It should also be emphasized that "publicly inciting or spreading hatred, discord, and intolerance among national, racial, religious, ethnic, and other groups, or based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and other personal characteristics,"¹⁶ is punishable under the Criminal Code.

By reflecting upon these unprincipled practices, this brief analysis aims to emphasize the need for awareness among members of the media about the important role that journalists play in constructing reality and cultural values. It also brings to attention that creating a critical approach of the audience to this content is essential.

The issue

The mission of journalism is to critically investigate those who are powerful and give voice to those who are powerless. This is what many codes of journalistic ethics state. However, in reality, we do not always see a principled role of the media while covering multicultural events.

The portrayal of marginalized groups in the media plays a crucial role in shaping and influencing societal perceptions. News coverage significantly impacts how people learn about and perceive

¹⁶ Code No. 06/L-074 Criminal Code of the Republic of Kosovo, Article 141, Inciting discord and intolerance, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=18413>

these groups, as the media serves as a trusted source of information on everyday issues that people may not directly experience.¹⁷

In this context, disadvantaged groups often find themselves presented in the media through a negative perspective, stigma, and discrimination, leading to biased and prejudiced portrayals that can shape the perceptions of the majority.

Results

Although the Kosovo Press Code provides that references to an individual's ethnicity may be made by the media only in cases where such information is directly relevant to the event being reported¹⁸, often the greatest violations of professional ethics are related to the inappropriate use of these references.

Such was the situation in May 2019, when the media was covering a highly problematic event. A woman was being physically attacked and lynched in various forms for two consecutive days by different groups of people in different municipalities in Kosovo, following a fake news¹⁹ that had circulated on social media, alleging that the woman was a child abductor. There are over 80 articles about this event in the Albanian language online media alone²⁰, where each of them emphasizes the ethnicity of the victim of violence in the headline.

"Footages from the moment of the attack on the Kosovo Roma woman in Ferizaj/Uroševac", "The punching of the Kosovo Roma woman, the Kosovo Police provides new details", "The Kosovo Roma woman is attacked again, now in Ferizaj/Uroševac", are some of the 80 headlines that the media have published on portals regarding this event. The reference to the ethnicity of the woman, a victim of violence and lynching, is used several times, not only in the headlines but also within each of these articles. Reporting on such events should not be reflected in this way. Unnecessary emphasis on ethnicity in the headlines and within articles reinforces stigma and discrimination against marginalized ethnic groups.

Similarly, in 2019, for a tragic event that occurred in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, where a child was sexually abused and then deprived of his life, the media covered the event using references to ethnicity in the headline as well as at least five times within the article. "First suspicions after the autopsy: 12-year-old Kosovo Roma boy sexually abused by pedophiles²¹", is the title of the article written on one of the portals about this event. Using this reference at such an event is totally unnecessary and unethical.

¹⁷ De Nolf, Ans, Lise-Lore Steeman, Rozane De Cock, and Leen d'Haenens. 2024. Tuning into Fairness? Comparative Content Analysis of Discrimination Reporting in Flemish Public and Commercial Television News. *Journalism and Media* 5: 1509–1525. <https://www.mdpi.com/2673-5172/5/4/94>

¹⁸ Kosovo Press Code, Kosovo Press Council, https://agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/2614/press-code-for-kosovo_alb_1.pdf.

¹⁹ Press release and appeal issued by the Kosovo Police, YouTube, 2019: <https://youtu.be/bUCiUFXKG00>

²⁰ 80 articles from various media outlets on this topic were generated by the 'fax.al' platform, which organizes, collects, ranks and presents the content of other websites in the Albanian language:

<https://fax.al/news/20758972/dalin-pamje-te-reja-gruaja-rome-u-godit-brutalisht-nga-ky-i-ri-ne-mes-te-ferizajt>

²¹ Periscope, accessed on 10.11.2024 <https://www.periskopi.com/dyshimet-e-para-pas-autopsise-12-vjecari-rom-u-abuzua-seksualisht-nga-pedofilet/>

Also, when reporting on economic poverty, there are many examples of exposing the identity of children who live in difficult economic conditions with names and appearances. Exposing children to non-affirmative events that could lead to stigmatization, shame, or even bullying should not be present in the media. Often, various shows that aim to raise funds and change the reality for those families by exposing the lives of families living in poverty, expose children who live in such environments.

Exposing children through unedited images in such circumstances, regardless of whether or not parental approval exists, can lead to the stigmatization of children in the future. If we analyse the show called “Edhe unë jam Kosovë” (In English: “I am Kosovo too”) over the years, which has dozens of episodes accessible on Radio television 21 channel on YouTube, a large part of these shows contain exposure of children living in difficult economic conditions.

For the purposes of this analysis, television shows from 2014 to 2020 were reviewed, revealing that each year, at least one show fully exposed children through footage of their homes, highlighting their struggles with difficult economic conditions.

According to UNICEF and other children's rights organizations, the media, when covering topics involving children, should prioritize the best interests of children. This includes protecting their dignity and privacy, especially in vulnerable contexts. According to UNICEF-supported Guidelines on Media Reporting on Children, the use of a child's identity (their name and/or image) should be done in the best interests of the child. In cases where the child's identity is exposed, he or she must be protected from any harm or incident that could stigmatize him or her.²²

Recommendations

Ongoing training programs focused on strengthening journalists' capacities, particularly young journalists, in reporting on marginalized groups would promote a more inclusive approach and help prevent ethical violations in media coverage.

Institutions, civil society organizations, but also media editorial offices should provide and distribute information materials with the aim of using the appropriate terminology when discussing or reporting about marginalized groups. These materials should be accessible to all audience members in order to promote the application of non-discriminatory language.

Relevant institutions should be attentive in identifying and sanctioning cases of violation of the Criminal Code regarding the incitement to or “public spread of hatred, discord, and intolerance among ethnic, racial, religious, cultural, and other groups, or based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and other personal characteristics.

Extending media literacy to the audience would impact the way the audience perceives events or unprofessional reporting on marginalized groups. Developing the audience's critical thinking on these reports and reaching out to them with a multicultural approach

²² The Media and Children's Rights Guidelines: A Practical Introduction for Media Professionals. The Lao PDR Journalists Association, MICT Lao PDR and UNICEF Lao PDR. Vientiane, 2021.
[https://www.unicef.org/laos/media/6496/file/Media_and_Children's_Rights_\(2021\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/laos/media/6496/file/Media_and_Children's_Rights_(2021).pdf)

would help diminish stereotypes and prejudices that may be created by the media about marginalized groups.

The media should engage in applying an approach that respects and promotes cultural diversity, including the perspectives of marginalized groups in a way that avoids stigmatization and labelling.

Conclusion

Improving access to media reporting on marginalized groups is essential for a just and informed society. The media's commitment to respecting diversity and promoting inclusion strengthens public trust in the media and contributes to the creation of a more equitable society that is sensitive to different cultures and identities.

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Policy Brief 4: Portrayal of Women in Albanian Pop Music Lyrics through Stereotypes and Sexist Language

By: Blerta Aliu, PhD Candidate, Teaching Assistant at the Department of Journalism, Faculty of Philology, University of Prishtina

In various mass media products, women and girls are often portrayed through stereotypes, and misogynistic and sexist language. This portrayal of women is particularly evident in Albanian-language musical productions, where women are often valued primarily for their physical appearance and depicted as greedy, economically dependent on men, and lacking professionalism in certain fields. This brief analysis examines the lyrics of popular songs in recent years, focusing on the portrayal of women and the values attributed to them through music, as well as the impact these representations have on society. It calls for increased awareness and the promotion of more responsible gender representation in music.

The issue

Music is a powerful tool for shaping cultural identity and reinforcing social norms, especially among young people.²³ Music lyrics are considered to have a major role in cultural development and beyond. Song lyrics are more than just a reflection of society, they have a powerful influence in shaping it.²⁴

In this context, an analytical review of the 20 most popular Albanian-language songs from 2022 and 2023²⁵ reveals that, while reaching a wide audience, these songs often convey messages that reinforce gender stereotypes.

The audience is served musical productions from the Hip-hop, Pop, R&B genres that mainly deal with themes of love and everyday life, and include content that portrays women in limited roles, focusing mainly on their physical appearance. Such a reduction of the role of women in society

²³ Susan Hallam and Evangelos Himonides, *The Power of Music: An Exploration of the Evidence*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2022, <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0292>

²⁴ Davis, Sheila. "POP LYRICS: A Mirror and a Molder of Society." *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 42, no. 2 (1985) 167–169. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42576743>.

²⁵ The corpus collection was carried out through an official request at the website popnable.com, which provided the following list of the 20 most listened to Albanian songs online: "Corazon" -Butrint Imeri & Don Xhoni; "Kuku"-Butrint Imeri; "Zemër"-Dhurata Dora & Soolking;"EX"-Elvana Gjata & DJ Gimi-O & Bardhi; "Criminal"-Dhurata Dora; "Katilë"-Don Xhoni; "Gjuj Per To"-Loredana & Don Xhoni; "O Habibi [Albanian Remix]"-Dj Gimi; "TL (Toxic Love)"-Elgit Doda; "Ku Je Ti"-Finem; "Bonjour Madame"-Noizy & Mozzik;"Dashni"-Dafina Zeqiri & MUMA; "Ku Je"-Elgit Doda;"Dale"-Kida & Ledri Vula & Butrint Imeri; "Trust Me"-Don Xhoni; "Alkool"-Noizy & Yll Limani; "Lshoja Zanin"-Yll Limani; "Ska"-Elvana Gjata & Mozzik; "Mi Amor"-Noizy & Dhurata Dora; "Diell"-Fifi., [www. popnable.com](http://www.popnable.com)

brings about wrong perceptions and reinforces gender stereotypes, in this case, positioning women in inadequate roles.

International studies also show that the genres that have the highest fraction of songs containing sexist content are Hip-hop, R&B, and soul, regardless of the gender of the artist.²⁶ The scientific study "A Large-Scale Analysis of Gender Bias and Sexism in Music Lyrics", conducted with the most popular songs in the English language over five decades (1960 - 2010), highlights that in terms of linguistic bias, the lyrics of male solo singers contain more gender bias than those of female solo singers. This can be observed, for example, in the stereotype that describes men as stronger and more focused on being successful, and on the other hand, women as inclined to be closer to family.²⁷

At the same time, a significant percentage of respondents believe that popular music impacts their lives and view this content as reinforcing gender stereotypes. Encouraging critical thinking when engaging with musical products is crucial, particularly for younger audiences.

Results

Objectification of women and sexism in music lyrics - Through analytical review of popular song lyrics, it was observed that girls and women are often depicted by reducing their role to superficial characteristics such as body lines, clothing style, and economic dependence on men. The most popular songs in recent years spread derogatory language through which women are portrayed as "sex objects", conveying messages that reinforce stereotypes and divide gender roles.

For example, in the song "Corazon" by Butrint Imeri and Don Xhoni, where women are compared to cocaine, to express emotional addiction and physical attraction, we find an analogy that treats women as objects of use and not as equal partners in a relationship.

Meanwhile, "I'll buy you diamonds, I'm not here to buy you roses", is a phrase from this song that reinforces the stereotype that women are economically dependent on men and are attracted to material things.

In the song "Bonjour, Madame" by Noizy and Mozzik, the woman is described by her body lines and appearance, while the text explores visual aspects in a sexist way, portraying women as sex objects and diminishing any content of their character or personality. This type of portrayal marginalizes the role of women and affects the audience's real perceptions.

Use of vulgar and violent language - The lyrics of some songs contain inappropriate terminology and promote violence against women as part of romantic relationships, creating an environment where violence and crimes are glorified as a symbol of love. The song "Gjuj për to" (I shoot for her) by Loredana and Don Xhoni, includes phrases that express the willingness to kill for one's partner, thus reinforcing the idea of love as a means of control.

²⁶ Betti, L., Abrate, C. & Kaltenbrunner, A. Large scale analysis of gender bias and sexism in song lyrics. EHR Data Sci. 12, 10 (2023).

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370167004_Large_scale_analysis_of_gender_bias_and_sexism_in_song_lyrics

²⁷ Ibid

Impact on audience perceptions and reinforcement of gender stereotypes - From a survey conducted with 100 respondents of different ages to see the impact that musical products have on them, the vast majority of respondents in Kosovo claimed that their perceptions of the role of women are negatively affected by musical content.²⁸ Nearly 89% of survey participants expressed the belief that the messages conveyed by popular Albanian music negatively impact the way women and girls are perceived in real life, reinforcing gender stereotypes and portraying women in superficial rather than substantive aspects.

While for the majority of respondents, music lyrics are of particular importance when listening to songs, almost 98% of them stated that they have encountered music lyrics in Albanian with inappropriate and vulgar content. The vast majority of them also express that they have encountered music lyrics in Albanian with content that reinforces gender stereotypes.

Recommendations

Raising awareness among music productions, artists, producers, and songwriters about the negative effects of sexist content and the promotion of violence in society would have an impact on the creation of music that better represents women and girls.

Media should implement strict regulatory policies that prohibit sexist musical content in their daily programs. The media should also focus on promoting positive role models that promote positive approaches and gender equity.

Audience members, especially young people as the biggest followers of musical trends, should have opportunities to be exposed to media literacy materials through school programs but also informal learning, which would encourage critical thinking among them regarding the consumption of mass media products, including music.

Relevant institutions, in cooperation with civil society organizations and the artistic community, should develop clear guidelines for musical products, setting standards for fair gender representation and sanctioning the distribution of materials that contain derogatory language and reinforce gender discrimination. Therefore, there is a need to draft and implement regulatory legislation that prohibits musical content that promotes gender stereotypes, sexism, and violence.

Conclusion

The spread of gender stereotypes and objectification in Albanian popular music is an issue that should be viewed with concern. The study highlights the vital need to undertake necessary actions that provide and promote media literacy for Kosovan audiences in Kosovo, especially for younger audiences. Encouraging critical thinking among audiences is key to promoting the creation of responsible and fair content, helping to strengthen the positive portrayal of women and girls in society.

²⁸ From the presentation of the research "The Image of Women in Albanian Popular Music Lyrics" at the International Seminar on Albanian Language, Literature and Culture, 41st edition in Prishtinë/Pristina:
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/53TYKnxds6wXkxNX/>

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Policy Brief 5: Media literacy as a solution for empowering students to combat online risks

By: Blerta Aliu, PhD Candidate, Teaching Assistant – Department of Journalism, at the University of Pristina, Faculty of Philology, University of Prishtina

Digital transformation is recognized as a powerful force reshaping societies and economies, profoundly influencing daily life. This evolution underscores the urgent need to enhance digital competencies within education and training systems and institutions.²⁹

An international study on computer and information literacy conducted among students highlights that young people do not develop sophisticated digital skills simply because they grow up using digital devices.³⁰ This indicates a need for young people to undergo adequate learning programs to build their capacities on the effective use of digital devices so that they can be useful to them in their education as well as in the commitments they will have in the future.

At the same time, if we look at the exposure of children and young people over the last decade to media, with particular emphasis on digital media, we see a drastic increase in the amount of time spent consuming media content. According to research by international organizations dealing with media literacy issues, children between ages 8 and 12 spend four to six hours on digital media, while adolescents over 12 spend an average of seven to nine hours a day on the media.³¹ A similar trend among these age groups is also found in Kosovo. Research conducted for the purposes of the present analysis with students from 25 primary and secondary schools in Kosovo shows that nearly 40% of respondents use digital platforms up to four hours a day.

Considering the huge amount of time that children and young people spend online or in front of screens, they are highly exposed to various messages that can have a negative impact on their health, well-being, and identity.

This brief analysis highlights the urgent need for every child and young person to be offered the opportunity to be informed about the risks and harms that can come through exposure to various media content. It is also necessary to provide information on how to avoid these risks so that media content serves for entertainment, proper information, and positive engagement. Educational institutions should prioritize the development of digital skills in young people, equipping them to thrive in an ever-evolving digital landscape and preparing them for future opportunities.

²⁹ The Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027), European Union (EU), Brussels, 2020 <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan>

³⁰ Fraillon, Ainley, Schulz, Friedman, Duckworth, Preparing for Life in a Digital World: International Computer and Information Literacy Study 2018, Springer International Publishing, February 2020 <https://www.iea.nl/sites/default/files/2020-04/IEA%20International%20Computer%20and%20Information%20Literacy%20Study%202018%20International%20Report.pdf>

³¹ Media Literacy Now, NGO Media Literacy Now, accessed on: 05.11.2024, <https://medialiteracynow.org/>

The issue

Media and technology are ubiquitous today, whether at home, school, work, recreational facilities, etc. All messages and information received from the media, whether traditional or digital, have an impact in shaping the audience's attitudes and beliefs on many issues. At the same time, mass media platforms and products help members of the audience, especially young people, express themselves, share information, and connect with others.

While the digital world provides numerous benefits, it also poses significant risks, particularly regarding the negative effects of media messages on younger audiences. Online safety, online bullying, inaccurate and misleading information, low self-esteem, mental health concerns, negative body image, reinforcement of stereotypes, excessive screen use are some of the most prevalent online dangers that students and young people everywhere can potentially face.³²

To protect themselves and their peers from these circumstances, students must build a set of skills that help them analyse the information and messages they receive on various digital platforms.

Media theorists and scholars believe that people need the ability to access, analyse, and think critically about the range of messages they receive and send in order to make informed decisions about everyday issues facing them, such as health, work, politics, and entertainment.³³

It is precisely through media literacy that these skills are developed. Media literacy is designed to foster critical thinking and logical reasoning, empowering individuals to stay well-informed and actively engage as responsible people in the advancement of a democratic society.³⁴

Incorporating media literacy into school curricula, as well as non-formal education, can provide students and young individuals with essential skills to mitigate the harms and risks associated with online interactions.

Results

Students in Kosovo see media literacy as a solution to online risks - A survey was conducted in 2024 in order to take a closer look at the habits of using digital platforms by primary and secondary school students in 25 schools in Kosovo, from which it emerged that almost 80% of 500 respondents considered the subject of "Media Literacy" useful if it were to be included in their curriculum.³⁵ They have assessed that media literacy as a school subject would be very helpful in the way in which they would understand and analyse media messages including advertisements, videos, posts, news and various trends that are shared through digital platforms.

³² Media Literacy Now, NGO Media Literacy Now, accessed on: 05.11.2024, <https://medialiteracynow.org/>

³³ Hobbs, Renee, The Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, Digital and Media Literacy: A Plan of Action, Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute, November 2010. https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Digital_and_Media_Literacy.pdf

³⁴ Tahiri Aliu, Lindita, Critical Media Literacy, Armageddon, Prishtina, 2018.

³⁵ Blerta Aliu, International Seminar on the Albanian Language, Literature, and Culture, August 28, 2024, Culture Session, The Influence of Global Trends on Albanian Youth as Users of Digital Platforms, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=968867438378479&set=a.729525618979330&type=3>

At the same time, students have revealed that their lifestyle is greatly influenced by digital platforms, with particular emphasis on social media where they spend a big part of their time. 79.8% of them claimed that they get advice about clothing, music, sports, and food from social media. This highlights the direct impact that media content has on these audiences. In fact, nearly 60% of them have stated that they have purchased items online based on online advertisements seen on social media.

Media literacy enhances students' competencies for fair and analytical perception of media messages - Media literacy is considered to provide the necessary tools and skills for audiences to be safe and competent consumers of media.³⁶ According to the international organization Media Literacy Now, media literacy expands the concept of education, as messages today come in many forms, and literacy can no longer simply refer to the ability to read and write. Media Literacy Now also estimates that media literacy prepares young people with an understanding of media sources and systems, their purposes and influences, as well as the tools for critical thinking and self-regulation.

Recommendations

Educational institutions in Kosovo must take all necessary technical and substantive steps to include the subject of media literacy in formal school teaching as soon as possible.

Since the subject of media literacy is not included as a regular subject in the curricula, schools should include media literacy as an optional subject and increase the capacities of teachers to contribute to this topic.

Educational institutions should organize training, and produce school materials, information brochures, and relevant literature on media literacy. Training and literature should be accessible and dedicated to teachers, students, and parents.

Conclusion

Media literacy is extremely important for preparing new generations to operate successfully in today's digital complexity. Integrating media literacy as a subject in the education system would create a strong foundation for students and young people to be protected from the dangers that come from false and misleading information, online violence, the spread of prejudice, etc.

To ensure a safer future and to empower youth with accurate information, it is essential to foster broad community participation. This effort should begin within institutions, schools, and families, where each stakeholder plays a vital role in addressing this important issue.

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Policy Brief 6: The role of artificial intelligence in increasing accuracy and speed in the fight against disinformation

By: Dren Gërguri, PhD Lecturer – Department of Journalism, Faculty of Philology, University of Prishtina

The issue

Disinformation continues to be one of the main challengers to important social processes around the world. The numerous possibilities for misusing various artificial intelligence-based tools by malicious actors require faster action and response from fact-checkers as well. The situation in the information ecosystem has changed even more after the inclusion of artificial intelligence. The widespread proliferation of disinformation across digital platforms, also due to the development of various artificial intelligence tools, has posed a great challenge for manual fact-checking.

Consequently, fact-checkers should increasingly integrate artificial intelligence into their daily operations to effectively address the vast amount of disinformation present in our information ecosystem. Various companies have developed artificial intelligence-based tools, offering solutions to challenges of manual fact-checking, a process that can take up a lot of time and resources.

Results

Process automation and increased efficiency - Automation of various tasks through artificial intelligence can significantly increase the speed, scale, and accuracy of fact-checking.³⁷ One way is through natural language processing and content analysis to identify the main points of the text, identify contradictions within the text, and detect logical errors. Artificial intelligence tools can also help to analyse whether the text uses emotional or malicious language.³⁸ Another way is to develop models that can identify certain phrases or writing styles that are mostly used in disinformation. This would enable large data sets to be analysed and artificial intelligence would be able to detect anomalies within that data set. Artificial intelligence can also be used to analyse audio-visual content. Tools based on artificial intelligence can analyse photos to verify whether they are manipulated or fabricated.³⁹

Artificial intelligence-based tools to combat disinformation - Various companies are already working on creating new tools and applications that use artificial intelligence to assist in

³⁷ Robert Wolfe & Tanushree Mitra, "The Impact and Opportunities of Generative AI in Fact-Checking." ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency, 2024.

³⁸ Isabel Straw & Chris Callison-Burch, Artificial Intelligence in mental health and the biases of language-based models. PLOS ONE, 15(12), 2020, e0240376.

³⁹ Dren Gërguri, The role of AI in the information war: From analysis to shaping narratives, 2024, <https://drenerguri.com/the-role-of-ai-in-the-information-war-from-analysis-to-shaping-narratives/>

verification. ClaimBuster, MyAIFactChecker, Factiveverse, and GPTzero are among several text verification tools already used by fact-checkers in different countries around the world that we can highlight. All of these can be used for free, while there are others that are paid, such as the Perspective API developed by Google or Factiveverse.

ClaimBuster⁴⁰ can be used to quickly identify various claims circulating on the Internet. MyAIFactChecker works similarly⁴¹, except that this tool offers a wide range of services, including sentiment analysis and resource classification. There are now specialized tools for identifying texts that are generated by artificial intelligence, as another opportunity to detect disinformation when it is produced using artificial intelligence. Such is GPTzero⁴², which detects whether content is generated by artificial intelligence, and if it's an article or comments from social media bots.

In addition to text verification, artificial intelligence-based tools can now help verify audio, picture, or video content. AI or NOT⁴³ is a tool that helps verify photos or audio content generated by artificial intelligence. Meanwhile, for videos generated with artificial intelligence, such as deepfakes, there is still no sufficiently effective tool for detecting deepfakes, because existing tools do not yet have the necessary accuracy to be fully relied on. Therefore, we can propose the use of the DeepFakeShield model⁴⁴ which suggests six steps that help anyone verify whether a video is deepfake or not.

Current limitations of artificial intelligence tools - In all this evolution, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of artificial intelligence tools. For instance, these algorithms are trained on specific data sets, highlighting the importance of the initial training data used.⁴⁵ Additionally, language presents another significant challenge, as some AI tools are only trained in particular languages, which can hinder their effectiveness in others.

Recommendations

For infrastructure development:

Supporting the development of specialized artificial intelligence tools for Albanian and Serbian languages ⇒ To enhance the credibility and accessibility of fact-checking in Kosovo, we recommend fostering a supportive environment for companies to develop artificial intelligence tools in Albanian and Serbian. By specializing in these languages, these tools will become more effective when trained on local materials, ultimately benefiting fact-checkers, journalists, and other professionals in the Albanian and Serbian-speaking communities.

⁴⁰ ClaimBuster, <https://idir.uta.edu/claimbuster/factchecker/>

⁴¹ <https://www.myaifactchecker.org/fact/>

⁴² <https://gptzero.me/>

⁴³ <https://www.aiornot.com/dashboard/home>

⁴⁴ Dren Gërguri, Introducing DeepfakeMburoja: 6-step model to combat artificial intelligence manipulation, 2024, <https://drengerguri.com/prezantimi-i-deepfakemburoja-modeli-me-6-hapa-per-te-luftuar-manipulimin-nga-inteligjenca-artificiale/>

⁴⁵ Emily M Bender, Timnit Gebru, Angelina McMillan-Major, and Shmargaret Shmitchell. On the dangers of stochastic parrots: Can language models be too big? In Proceedings of the 2021 ACM conference on fairness, accountability, and transparency. 2021, 610–623

Funding of research projects in universities ⇒ Higher education institutions should develop new research projects that focus on integrating artificial intelligence into various fields.

For fact-checkers:

Integrating artificial intelligence tools into fact-checking ⇒ Support for fact-checking organizations to integrate artificial intelligence tools into their work.

Cooperation with the industry ⇒ Support for more cooperation between fact-checkers and technology or media companies.

Specific research ⇒ These organizations require support in the form of research grants in partnership with researchers.

For education and awareness:

Incorporating artificial intelligence education into the school curriculum ⇒ To gain a deeper understanding of the role of artificial intelligence, particularly in the verification process, as well as its impact on daily life, it is essential to provide education on the subject. The Artificial Intelligence education will support the development, implementation, and ethical use of artificial intelligence. The irresponsible use of artificial intelligence only brings additional problems to the information environment. To address this issue, it is crucial to implement various measures aimed at educating individuals about artificial intelligence, specifically its general role and application in fact-checking.

Organize educational campaigns ⇒ Another important step for government institutions, as well as civil society, is to engage in campaigns that promote education on artificial intelligence, in order to raise awareness about the role of artificial intelligence in society as well as the ethical and responsible use of artificial intelligence.

Conclusion

The rapid advancement of technology and artificial intelligence does not diminish the importance of human judgment in the verification process. Rather, it empowers fact-checkers to identify instances of disinformation or manipulation more swiftly by utilizing these AI tools. Thus, despite the development of artificial intelligence-based tools, human oversight and judgment remain essential in the verification process, and combining them with artificial intelligence tools helps to combat disinformation more effectively.

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