

## **RELATION BETWEEN RELIABILITY TOWARDS SOCIAL MEDIA WITH THE SCALE OF CREDIBILITY OF INFORMATION ON KOSOVO-SERBIA DIALOGUE**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to verify the correlation between the level of reliability towards social media and the credibility of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. The findings of this study are an important contribution to this field of study for the Republic of Kosovo, regarding the importance of social media in building trust in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue.

The study methodology is correlated with quantitative data, including a total of 528 subjects selected on a group basis in the municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo, with an average participants age range of 31, with a standard deviation of 11 years, with a minimum age of 18 and older adults aged 67, who were surveyed through measuring instruments.

The correlation analysis showed a weak positive statistically significant relationship between reliability towards social media and credibility in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue and an important linear regression model for prediction size. This study found that increasing reliability to social media is associated with increased citizens' trust in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue.

*Keywords:* reliability, social media, correlation, Kosovo - Serbia dialogue

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### **1. Introduction**

Social media has become an integral part of our daily lives, and increasingly has a huge impact on the way we communicate and stay informed. Today, social media platforms offer ideal opportunities for their users but also for media organizations in publishing informative news or even political ideas, without having to submit to any censorship or other editorial barriers. This new phenomenon in the field of information and communication has empowered individuals and other organizations to be active creators of communication messages instead of remaining as passive (static) recipients of communication content (McClure, 2007). But one of the biggest consequences that these social media platforms face is the level of credibility and the widespread use of fake news. Consequently, more and more mechanisms are required to determine the reliability of the information disseminated on these platforms. As a result, without valid and credible measurements of credibility, managing credibility on social media will be hardly possible.

In general, in our geographical area, research on the treatment of social media is increasing, while in terms of research topics on the credibility of social media concerning the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, they do not exist at all. Since Kosovo's declaration of independence, the topic of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue has been one of the central issues of public opinion in Kosovo.

But since the beginning of this process, the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue has been characterized by a lack of accountability and transparency (KDI 2018). In another public opinion poll in Kosovo, regarding who is responsible for informing about dialogue after the government, the media occupy a central place (KDI, 2016). This paper will make a valuable contribution to the role of social media in informing Kosovo citizens about the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. Similarly, the perception of the Kosovar public regarding the relation between reliability towards social media in relation to the degree of credibility in information on the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue.

## **2. Reliability towards social media**

Media credibility is one of the essential elements in assessing media performance in all the topics they address. Whenever important issues are addressed by the media, either locally or globally, the first question that arises is how reliable that information is. Credibility as a term in the field of media first appeared during the 1950s. (Howland and Wies, 1951). But, because of the complexity of this term, it was not that easy to define with complete accuracy. Despite the difficulties in defining this term, Wathen and Burkell, (2002) see reliability as a criterion that we use to filter out unreliable information. Researchers, in addressing this issue of great importance in the field of media, have identified the concept of media reliability as a rather complex and multidimensional construct (Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1970). Reliability has traditionally been understood as a construct and has been discussed from three perspectives of communication: source reliability, message/content reliability as well as channel reliability (Metzger, et al., 2003). According to (Metzger, et al. 2003) by source reliability, we mean the credibility built in the individual in relation to the message. As for the second dimension, which is the reliability of the message, it consists of the perceived reliability of the communicated message itself, and which include elements such as, quality, accuracy or actuality of information (Metzger, et al., 2003). Regarding the third dimension of reliability, which includes the credibility of the medium or channel, according to Sundar & Nass (2001), by this, we mean the level of perception of reliability that individual users have for a specific medium, such as newspapers, television, internet or blogs (social media).

With the emergence of online media in general and social media in particular, there was an immediate need for researchers in the field to address the issue of online media credibility, especially when it is known that the information we receive from social media platforms, due to their nature, suffers from an obvious lack of a gatekeeping process, which would enable to monitor their content.

Taking such facts into account, reliability is increasingly seen as one of the essential elements for the internet (Johnson and Kaye, 1998). With the rapid development of social media, we also have greater interest from researchers regarding the credibility of social media.

Today, social media helps and has greatly facilitated the process of disseminating information but also the promotion of freedom, especially freedom of expression. But at the same time, it increases the potential or the possibility of misusing this information.

Johnson and Kaye (1998), in a study of their own, concluded that online newspapers and news magazines were considered among the most reliable. Whereas according to Flanagin and Metzger (2000), the internet was considered to be as reliable as most other media, except for newspapers which showed a higher level of reliability. Kioussis (2001) in his study concluded that people were skeptical of online news sources. Findings in his research showed that newspapers still remained the most reliable media. A study conducted by Maren C. and Hald B (2014), concludes that there were differences in the way news events were covered. In particular, traditional news media were more credible and more impartial, while Twitter appeared less credible and more biased. The study also found that contrary to the prevailing belief, most Twitter updates that named a source for their information chose traditional national news networks as their primary source. This refutes the idea that Twitter was becoming an aggregator or alternative source for news and information, regardless of traditional media. From what we presented above, it is a clear indication that the traditional media still remain among the most reliable, even if they are in their online version. Therefore, individual audiences are paying more attention to the media they perceive as credible. When individual audiences rely more on a particular communication medium for information retrieval, they are more likely to rate the medium as more credible than other media (Kioussis, 2001).

In another study that addresses the issue of credibility, is the research conducted by Hwang, S (2013), regarding the impact of Twitter use on the credibility of politicians as well as the formation of opinions about politicians in South Korea, this study concludes that there is a direct link between respondents' assessment of politicians' use of Twitter and politicians' own assessment. So, Korean politicians who own an account or use Twitter, have greater credibility with young people in real political life than those who do not. It also helps to improve the image of politicians in the eyes of young people.

### **3. Credibility information on Kosovo-Serbia dialogue**

Regarding the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, a common denominator that everyone agrees on is ambiguity and non-transparency. These have been among the central topics on which the debate has taken place since the beginning of the dialogue. Even by some, this process is seen more as a dialogue of elites, than a process that would address the needs of the citizens of the respective countries participating in the dialogue (Bieber, 2015).

This has greatly influenced the dialogue to be seen by the opposition but also the public with many doubts and emphatic skepticism, but also to weaken the public's credibility in the information that was distributed on this topic.

In a research conducted by Garaiova (2017), the non-transparent nature of dialogue was emphasized with particular priority by all interviewees in this research. She underlines that the information about the dialogue remains centralized and hidden from the public eye. According to her, this information vacuum enables to open opportunities for different interpretations of the same events but also of the same agreements reached.

This lack of transparency in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue process has caused a lot of dissatisfaction among the public. According to a Kosovar opinion poll by the Kosovo Democratic Institute, (2018), it finds that the majority of citizens, or over 75%, are dissatisfied with the level of their involvement in the dialogue. Hence, a very high percentage of respondents or about 43% said they have no knowledge of any agreement between Kosovo and Serbia (KDI, 2016). These data show that this is a worrying phenomenon about the lack of proper information of the public, which may negatively affect the final epilogue of the dialogue.

According to Todorović and Malazogu (2011), there is an atmosphere of secrecy about the dialogue in both Kosovo and Serbia, which has made the public of the respective countries more suspicious and fearful, which hinders the building of consensus and mutual trust. The non-disclosure of the texts of the dialogue agreements has significantly reduced the transparency of the whole process, but it has also made it more difficult to reach agreements. More transparency would eliminate ambiguities and enable the parties to move the process forward. Todorović and Malazogu (2011), also claim that, with a higher level of transparency in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue process, arbitrary interpretations would be avoided and would enable the network of dialogue supporters to grow, but could also provide longer-term solutions.

Another element that has apparently had an impact on the low level of reliability of the information on the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue process, was the way it was communicated to the public. In a study conducted by Milovanović (2017), on the role and involvement of civil society and the media in the Brussels Dialogue and their connection to citizens' awareness of political realities, he finds that after every agreement or even during the negotiation process, politicians have chosen the media which have been close to them. This behavior is perceived as a lack of transparency and tendency by the actors of the dialogue to hide their details from the public. Even at this stage, when the dialogue is still one of the biggest issues for both countries, one of its challenges is to increase the transparency and reliability of information.

## 4. Methodology

### Study method and hypotheses

The methodology of this study is mainly non-experimental correlation aiming to find the correlation between the scale of reliability in social media and the credibility of information for the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. This method of dealing with this study problem is considered more appropriate, firstly based on the data collection techniques of the study and secondly the nature of the study purpose. In addition to the main variables such as reliability on social media and information on the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, the study addressed other variables relevant to the control of the study such as gender, place of residence, municipality, age, education, occupation, employment status and relevant questions regarding the use of social networks. The methodology of this study has paid special attention to the threats to the validity of the study by various internal and external factors, for the conclusions to determine the correlation of the main variables of the study.

According to the theoretical framework and other similar studies that refer to the reliability of social media, this study has hypothesized the following:

*Ha1. There is a positive correlation between the degree of reliability towards social media and the level of credibility of information on the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue.*

*Ha2. If the reliability of social media would increase, then the citizens' credibility of information provided for the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue would also increase.*

## 5. Population and study sample

The target population of this study were all Albanian citizens of the Republic of Kosovo from the age of 18 who are users of social networks. The study sample was randomly selected in all municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo, with a credibility interval of 95%, an accuracy interval of  $\pm 4$ , the number of groups (38-municipalities), the estimated percentage of variance 50/50 and the expected number of non-responses ( $N \cdot 1.05$ ). From a total of 583 subjects planned to participate in the study, a total of 528 subjects responded positively to this study, with a satisfactory efficiency of 90.57%. The study did not include subjects who were not users of social networks over the age of 18. The number of social network users was provided by the official data of the social network Facebook for the Republic of Kosovo during the application procedure of the instrument. The number of men who participated in the study is 393 or 74.43%, while that of women is 135 or 25.57%. Participants from rural areas are a total of 191 or 36.17%, while 337 participants from urban areas are 63.83% (Table 1). The average age of the participants is 31 years old, with a standard deviation of 11 years, with a minimum age of 18 and an older age of 67. The most dominant age in this study is from 18 to 33, in the second place that of 34-49 and in the third place, from 50 to 67 years old. Based on the social networking platform, Facebook dominates in the first place, then

Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and finally LinkedIn. From municipalities, the participation from Prishtina dominates with 20%, while other municipalities range from 2 to 8% represented in this study sample.

Table 1. Number of participants by gender and place of residence

		Number of participants	%
Gender	Males	393	74.43%
	Females	135	25.57%
Residence	Village	191	36.17%
	City	337	63.83%
Total		528	100.00%

## 6. Measurements and operationalization

The measurement of the degree of reliability towards social media was performed with an appropriate instrument created by the author of the study with a total of 6 questions, which after exponential factor analysis of the overall instrument for measuring attitudes and use of social networks resulted as a unique component in the group of certain factors with the confirmatory factorial coefficient interval from 0.50 to 0.70, also based on the parameters of the sphericity test for a matrix identity and the KMO value sufficient for the sample. The instrument has successfully passed the stages of the factor analysis process in all respects. Overall, the internal interconnection coefficient of the instrument for measuring social media credibility resulted above average with Cronbach's alpha  $\alpha = .69$ .

The next scale for measuring credibility of information on the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, created as a unique component by the factorial analysis of the general instrument for attitudes towards the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue has resulted in a total of 5 questions which refer mainly to citizens' trust in the information reported on the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. In terms of final confirmatory factor analysis parameters, this scale met the requirements of a factorial test of sufficient value for the sample, while the internal intercorrelation coefficient between the questions resulted high with Cronbach's alpha  $\alpha = .78$ . Detailed factorial analyses are not part of this paper.

The measurement of variables through measuring instruments was performed with 5 levels, from (0) – Strongly disagree (4) – Completely agree. The total amount of all assertions for each respective instrument is treated in other analyzes of the processing of the presence of

tested phenomena, namely the highest values after recoding certain questions have represented the highest presence of phenomena in the subjects on a group basis.

## **7. Data collection and ethical criteria**

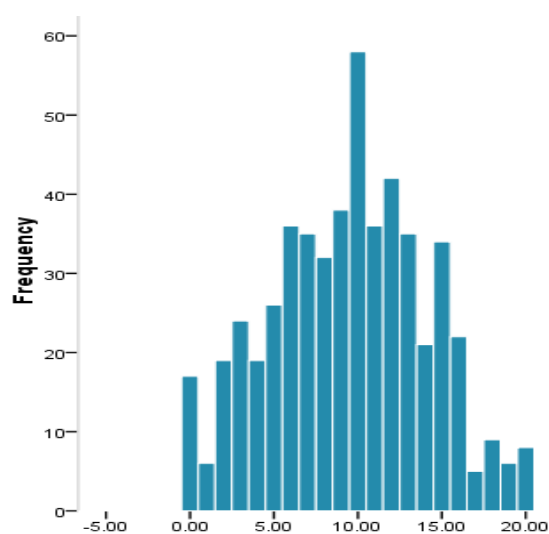
The application of the instrument was realized from February 27 to March 11, 2021, online on social networking sites through funding on the social network Facebook. The financing of the questionnaire was realized in the entire territory of the Republic of Kosovo in accordance with the official records of users for certain countries, through the official website "Dialogue" created in accordance with the relevant standards. The questionnaire was published with the data provided by the researcher and with the contact address for certain issues. This data collection technique has been applied in order to maintain the anonymity of the participants, the greater involvement of the population in the study, the nature of the research variables which relate to the use of social networks and as a result of limitations from the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were guaranteed anonymity, the right to participate voluntarily and withdrawal from the study until the moment of submission. The online registration of data did not use identification numbers or data which violate the identity of the study participant, while the numerical data of participation by municipalities, gender and age were checked correctly. Participants were not accurately informed about the purpose of the study, due to avoiding the impact on giving preferred answers to the study, but were informed about the study variables. Given that online questionnaires are threatened by many factors and that people often refuse to answer online, from the number of participants who did not answer the questionnaire of 9%, we estimate that the realization is successful.

## **8. Results of the study**

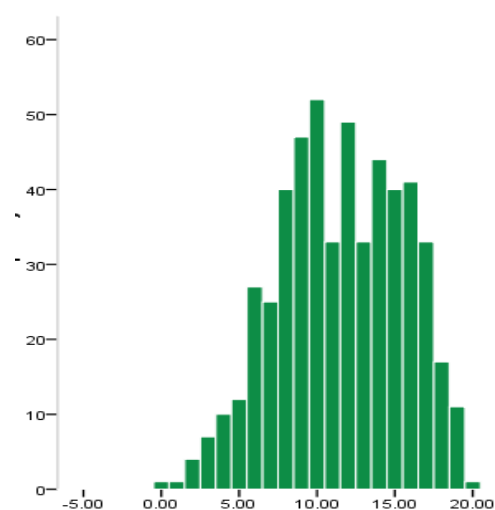
Table 2 presents the descriptive data of the findings for the two main variables of this study, namely the scale of credibility in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue and reliability in social media. Out of a total of 528 valid cases included in this study, the overall average level of credibility in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue is  $M = 9.45$  with standard deviation  $SD = 4.65$ , with a minimum value of 0 and a maximum of 20. Based on the found and expected mean ( $M = 10$ ), as well as the value of the distribution according to Skewness ( $Skw = -.02$ ), we consider that the distribution of the means is mainly focused to a greater extent around the overall average (Graph 1). Reliability towards the media is presented with average  $M = 11.51$ ,  $SD = 4.01$ , from minimum values 0 and maximum 20. Based on the Skewness distribution value ( $Skw = -.175$ ), it is concluded that the distribution is normal with a slight advantage on the side positive distribution (Graph 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics on reliability in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue and Credibility of Social Media

Reliability towards Kosovo-Serbia dialogue		Reliability towards Media
N	Valid	528
Mean		9.45
Std. Deviation		4.65
Skewness		-.022
Std. Error of Skewness		.106
Minimum		.00
Maximum		20.00



Graph 1. Reliability towards Kosovo-Serbia dialogue



Graph 2. Reliability towards media

Referring to the main purpose of this study and the relevant assumption, Table 3 presents the statistical relationship between reliability of social media and credibility through Pearson



correlation, meeting the necessary statistical criteria for the use of parametric statistics. The coefficient of the relationship between trust in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue and social media ( $r = .37$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $N = 528$ ) shows a weak positive relationship, but statistically significant. This result supports the hypothesis that "there is a positive correlation between the scale of reliability of social media and the level of credibility of information on the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue", respectively, the tendency to increase reliability of social media, is supported by increasing credibility on Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, but with a weak relationship.

The size prediction of the change of confidence in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue from the reliability of social media as a predictor variable, according to the linear regression with adjusted R is  $R^2 = 13.7\%$  ( $F(1,526) = 84.65$ ,  $p = .00$ ), model which accepts the hypothesis that if credibility of social media were to increase, then reliability in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue would also increase. This result explains that the variance of reliability the Albanians of the Republic of Kosovo have in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue is explained by the level of reliability they have towards social media, namely the statistical significance of social media.

Table 3. The correlation coefficient between reliability of social media and Kosovo-Serbia dialogue

		Reliability towards Kosovo-Serbia dialogue
Reliability towards social media	Pearson Correlation	.372**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	528
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).		
$R^2=13.7\%$ ( $F(1,526)=84.65$ , $p=.00$ )		

## 9. Discussion and Conclusion

Kosovo citizens, for almost a decade, are confronted with information about the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue every day. It is evident that social media is becoming their main source of information about this topic more and more. However, given the natural functioning of social media, their credibility as a source of information remains a serious concern. Previous studies suggest that reliability is the key to a medium's success. Today, the public is not only passive

recipients of media messages, they are now quite active in choosing communication channels, especially when they carefully address an important issue (Rubin, 2002). This research aims to fill a vacuum in the field of research on this topic, answering the question of whether there is a positive correlation between the scale of reliability of social media and the level of credibility of information on the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue.

Based on the findings of this research, there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between reliability towards social media and credibility in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. However, this relationship is not at very high levels. Also, the results of this research showed that increasing the level of reliability to social media is associated with increased citizens' trust in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. These results show the need to increase transparency concerning the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, where public confidence in this process would increase even more.

## 10. References

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