

Misinformation and the Use of Emotional Language in Albanian-Language Media in Kosovo: A Comparative Analysis of the March 2004 Riots and the September 2023 Banjska Attack

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Abstract

This study examines the media coverage of ethnic tensions and violent events in Kosovo, focusing on the March 2004 riots and the Banjska attack of September 24, 2023. The main aim is to analyze how Albanian-language print and online media reported these events, with attention to both quantitative coverage and the language used. The research seeks to answer: How do media outlets in Kosovo cover interethnic conflicts, and to what extent does their reporting reflect bias or emotional framing? The study employs a content analysis methodology, reviewing articles from two major print newspapers, Koha Ditore and Epoka e Re, as well as digital coverage from Koha.net and the online version of Epoka e Re. Over selected periods, the total number of headlines and articles were counted, with a distinction made between content directly related to violent events and other topics. Findings indicate that while both print and online media reported extensively on the events, there were significant differences in the proportion of coverage devoted to ethnic violence. Moreover, the language used in reporting was often emotionally charged and, in some cases, potentially inciting interethnic tension, particularly during the 2004 riots. In contrast, coverage of the 2023 Banjska attack was largely accurate but included emotionally loaded terms. The study concludes that historical, cultural, and political factors, coupled with insufficient coordination with authorities, influence media practices, emphasizing the need for responsible journalism in ethnically sensitive contexts.

Keywords: *Ethnic conflict, Interethnic relations, Journalism bias, Kosovo, Media coverage.*

Introduction

The historical past, as emphasized by Barkey and Gavrilis (2016), reveals that both Serbia and Kosovo, two states in the Western Balkans were under Ottoman administration, where “the Ottoman Empire utilized the ‘millet system,’ categorizing the population by religion, with less emphasis on linguistic and cultural characteristics” (Barkey & Gavrilis, 2016). According to Hagen (1999), following the decline of the Ottoman Empire, there was a resurgence of ethnic identities that incited interethnic conflicts through notions such as “Greater Serbia” and “Greater Albania” (Hagen, 1999).

Building upon Randall’s (2003) assertion that reporting on crime, riots, violence, and other sensitive issues represents one of journalism’s greatest challenges, and considering the journalist’s responsibility “to tell a million people who struck the match and why” (Randall, 2003, p. 81), it is evident that the use of emotional language can foster ethnic hatred (Selimi & Skenderi, 2023) and misinformation (Elias, 2020; Díaz Ruiz & Nilsson, 2023; Segal, 2023) about a constructed reality. The tendency of media outlets to hastily publish unverified information (Selimi & Zejnullahu, 2023) undermines public security; therefore, as noted by Finneman and Thomas (2018) and later by Selimi (2023), news credibility often derives from imitation of journalistic practices (Finneman & Thomas, 2018; Selimi, 2023). Consequently, as Brooks et al. (2005) such situations demand “vigilance, persistence, and caution” (Brooks et al., 2005), lest the boundaries of journalism become, as Ihlebæk and Figenschou (2023) put it, “increasingly contested.”

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It is important to note that Kosovo, once an Autonomous Province within the former Yugoslavia, separated from Serbia in June 1999 following an armed conflict and NATO air strikes against Serbian forces, after which it came under UNMIK administration (UN Security Council, 1999). Nine years later, on February 17, 2008, Kosovo declared its independence (Young, Allcock & Lampe, 2024). As a newly independent state in the Western Balkans—still unrecognized by Serbia—it faces serious challenges related to the integration of the Serbian minority community.

Mitrovica, a city in northern Kosovo bordering Serbia, remains ethnically divided: ethnic Albanians inhabit and administer the southern part under the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Kosovo, while ethnic Serbs in the north, though formally under the same jurisdiction, are politically and institutionally influenced by Serbia. This division often results in outbreaks of ethnic violence. The first such large-scale riots occurred in March 2004, when Kosovo was still under UNMIK administration and governed by UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (UN Security Council, 1999). On March 17–18, 2004, violent clashes erupted after road blockades by members of the Serbian minority escalated when two Albanian children drowned in the Ibar River under disputed circumstances. The incident sparked widespread violence across Kosovo, leaving 11 Albanians and 8 Serbs dead.

At that time, the Temporary Media Commissioner in Kosovo declared that local media had acted professionally during the riots (Epoka e Re, March 27, p. 11; [Arbresh.info](#)).

Nineteen years later, between September 23–24, 2023, another violent incident occurred when a group of Serbian militants ambushed Kosovo police officers in Banjska, a village and monastery in the municipality of Zvečan, while the police were attempting to remove unregistered trucks blocking a bridge ([Gazeta Express](#)). The attack resulted in the death of one Kosovar police officer and three assailants, who were labeled as terrorists by the Government of Kosovo ([Kosovapress](#)). Although media experts acknowledged the professionalism of Kosovar journalists during this event, it remains of scholarly interest to examine the extent to which unverified information and emotionally charged language appeared in media coverage.

The aim of this study is to explore the effect of language use in journalistic reporting that may evoke emotional responses and contribute to the rise of interethnic hostility—specifically between Albanians and Serbs. Based on linguistic analysis, our objective was to identify, in both print and online Albanian-language media in Kosovo, the use of emotionally charged and biased language that may provoke or reinforce ethnic tension. We sought to compare and substantiate how emotional and hate-laden expressions appeared in the reporting of the two selected events.

This research contributes to the growing field of media discourse studies by addressing questions of journalistic objectivity and language ethics. The central research questions were: Have Kosovar Albanian-language media exercised linguistic caution in reporting sensitive events? and Have they maintained professional standards in covering the 2004 riots and the 2023 Banjska attack? The answers to these questions are presented in the results section.

During the study, we reviewed existing literature and analyzed relevant articles, yielding measurable results. In the current context, where “social media have become ubiquitous over the last years” (Amanatidis, Mylona, Dossis, Kamenidou, & Mamalis, 2024), poorly chosen language contributes to misinformation. The conceptual understanding of misinformation guided our research focus on the democratic implications of media discourse, civic literacy, and media education (Shieh & Nasongkhla, 2024).

The study focuses on the headlines and textual language of news coverage concerning the two aforementioned events, particularly regarding the dissemination of unverified information and the use of emotional discourse in Kosovar Albanian daily newspapers both print and online ([Demokracia.com](#)). Following prior scholarly models that link media texts to four key principles: functionality, communicability, content, and intentionality (Alba-Juez & Larina, 2018; Demetriou, 2018; Hiltunen, 2021) we aimed to highlight the influence of emotional language on readers.

The chosen methodology aligns with the study's objectives. Our primary hypothesis posited that Kosovar media both print outlets covering the 2004 riots and online platforms reporting on the 2023 Banjska incident did not adequately consider lexical selection in headlines or article bodies, which may have inadvertently intensified hostility between the two historically fragile ethnic groups.

For analysis, interpretation, and comparison, we selected two major Albanian-language newspapers in Kosovo: Koha Ditore and Epoka e Re. Until 2020, both were printed dailies before transitioning to digital formats (Selimi, 2023). Koha Ditore was chosen for its wide readership, while

Epoka e Re represented a politically affiliated, left-leaning outlet associated with the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK). The study generated data on publication content and emotional language use, demonstrating how lack of verification can result in misinformation. Using the snowball sampling method, we analyzed relevant literature and selected newspaper editions.

Our findings suggest that the absence of cooperation between media and state or UNMIK institutions contributed to difficulties in obtaining accurate information, leading to misinformation. Similarly, careless linguistic choices in journalistic texts risk inciting interethnic hostility. The results are verifiable and quantifiable.

Nevertheless, the study has limitations, as it focuses on selected days within a short time frame and analyzes only emotionally charged language that could provoke interethnic tension. Future researchers could examine the relationship between media institutions, local authorities, and UNMIK, as well as the sources and fact-gathering practices of journalists reporting on these events.

Literature Review

Previous studies have described journalism as a hierarchical profession shaped by financial, political, or personal interest groups (Cañedo, Demeter, & Goyanes, 2023), influencing both working conditions and journalistic autonomy. As technology increases business pressures on journalists, it forces them to prioritize audience reach over content quality (Mellado & Hermida, 2022) and over the balanced dissemination of information and opinion formation (Horan, 2024).

Fake news, typically based on fabricated or distorted facts, is generally understood as misleading information presented as legitimate news. It is often divided into misinformation false news without harmful intent and disinformation false news disseminated with harmful or manipulative intent ([APA, 2023](#) in Bergman, 2023).

Media in the Western Balkans have frequently been criticized for fueling conflict and ethnic hatred (Anderson, Hoxha, & Godole, 2017). The lack of linguistic and editorial caution during reporting often creates new tensions, placing journalism in an unfavorable position and exposing the emotional vulnerabilities and disorientation of correspondents (Lalli, 2002). As Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) observe, “the scale of information pollution in our digitally connected, increasingly polarized world presents an unprecedented challenge.” However, this phenomenon is not limited to online media it also affects traditional print journalism. Various scholars have questioned the accuracy of print outlets and highlighted the resulting erosion of trust (Stubenvoll, Heiss, & Matthes, 2021; Valenzuela, Halpern, & Araneda, 2022).

This erosion of trust allows alternative media platforms to capitalize on public skepticism, often claiming to reveal information “hidden” by official sources (Holt, Ustad Figenschou, & Frischlich, 2019). Moreover, as Hameleers et al. (2022) argue, many media outlets disseminate biased or inaccurate information (Hameleers, 2020; Marwick & Partin, 2022).

According to Bell (2015, cited in Wilson & Umar, 2019), misinformation and disinformation constitute deliberate and intentional falsehoods. Cooke (2017) further explains that such fabrications “are expressly disseminated for the sake of earning money from clicks and views; with lightning speed, fake news goes viral without being vetted or confirmed” (Cooke, 2017).

Abiodun (2024) views fake news as a tool for political manipulation, which as Guess, Lockett, Lyons, Montgomery, Nyhan, and Reifler (2020) argue leads individuals who consume news from untrustworthy websites to develop increasingly negative perceptions of the media and more polarized attitudes.

Edson Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2018) emphasize that fake news mimics the appearance and tone of genuine news stories. Zef M. Segal cites Tandoc, Lim, and Ling, noting that fake news can be analyzed across two dimensions: facticity, which refers to the extent to which false news relies on factual elements, and intentionality, referring to the deliberate intent of the author to deceive (Edson, Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2018). Both dimensions contribute to what Nelson and Kim (2021) describe as “distrust in the media.”

This does not mean that journalists should be targeted (Hermida, 2012; Binns, 2017; Gardiner, 2018; Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016), nor should reporting reinforce divisions among disadvantaged or racialized groups (Waisbord, 2020). Instead, journalistic practice should prioritize objectivity and informational clarity, avoiding emotionally charged or biased expression. As Duffy and Hund (2019) and

Nilsson & Örnebring (2016) assert, using informative and neutral language prevents journalists and media institutions from becoming subjects of public hostility.

According to Humprecht (2021), misinformation by its very nature causes unintended harm, particularly within social media environments, which as Metzger et al. (2021) point out are problematic because they enable the massive and rapid circulation of unverified content. Misinformation, in general, refers to false or deceptive information spread (Ognyanova et al., 2020) to influence public discourse during crises through strategic dissemination (Unlu, Troung, & Tammi, 2024) or to stimulate digital media sales (Erbrich, Wellbrock, Lobigs, & Buschow, 2024).

Scholarly attention toward social media platforms continues to grow (Al-Rawi, Al-Musalli, & Fakida, 2021; Hase, Boczek, & Scharrow, 2022; Negreira-Rey, Vázquez-Herrero, & López-García, 2022; Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, & López-García, 2022).

Drawing on studies of media language, Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis and Derveni (2018) define emotive language as word choice intentionally used to evoke emotion and provoke specific responses in the audience. Different lexical choices can generate different audience reactions (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018). These authors build on earlier research particularly Wodak and Meyer (2009) who compared the relationship between discourse and language use to that between grammar and its practical application (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, in Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018), as well as Van Dijk's theory of discourse rules, which characterize utterances and texts deemed acceptable within specific communicative practices (Van Dijk, 1988a, in Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018).

Van Dijk (1988a) provides a concise but valuable overview of the historical development of discourse analysis, linking its origins to classical rhetoric, including Aristotle's foundational theories (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Derveni, 2018). As Macagno and Walton (2014) note, emotive expressions "can move us, they can frighten us, and they can lead us to action" (Macagno & Walton, 2014).

Methodology

This research employs the methods of analysis, interpretation, and comparison, focusing on a content analysis of a representative sample of the Albanian-language media in Kosovo. For the purposes of analysis, interpretation, and comparison, two Albanian newspapers in Kosovo were selected: *Koha Ditore* and *Epoka e Re*. Both were daily printed newspapers until 2020, after which they transitioned to digital format in March 2020 (Selimi, 2023).

Koha Ditore was selected as one of the most widely read newspapers in the country, while *Epoka e Re* was considered an ideologically left-leaning newspaper, closely aligned with a political party in Kosovo (PDK). The rationale for selecting these two daily print newspapers was to examine their coverage of the March 2004 riots in Kosovo. For the case of the Banjska attack, the same two newspapers were selected, which are currently published exclusively in electronic format.

For the first case study, concerning the coverage of the March 2004 riots, the printed editions of the newspapers were obtained from the author's personal archive. Ten issues of each newspaper were analyzed, interpreted, and compared, covering the period from March 17, the day the riots began, until March 27, 2004. Regarding the second case, which focuses on the attack by a group of Serbs in Banjska, Mitrovica, the same two newspapers were analyzed in their digital editions, published over a ten-day period, from September 24 to October 3.

The electronic editions were obtained from the respective media archives. Articles from *Koha.net* were retrieved from the website's archive, where they were organized chronologically by publication time, whereas articles from *Epoka e Re* were obtained from the newspaper's archive in PDF format. In total, 1,381 articles from the printed editions and 1,487 articles from the electronic editions were reviewed.

The qualitative analysis focuses on evaluating the media according to specific principles, such as ethical and professional standards, which can be observed relatively easily in each newspaper issue. The qualitative methodology emphasizes content representation, with the analysis primarily examining how information is presented in the media, particularly the quality and diversity of the information provided. It is important to note that the media's stance toward the events under study is the central focus of this research. The results are presented graphically to illustrate potential differences between the media outlets within the monitored time frame. The monitoring period lasted ten days, during which all relevant articles concerning the two selected events were read, analyzed, interpreted, and compared.

Results And Discussion

“Koha Ditore” is the first private Albanian-language newspaper in Kosovo. Its first issue was published on March 31, 1997. The newspaper was considered among the most liberal in Kosovo and, according to an OSCE report, it was the most widely read and trusted newspaper, enjoying a readership of 38% (OSCE, 2009). During a ten-day period from March 17 to March 27, 2004, this newspaper published a total of 749 different articles in its daily sections and 133 articles in supplements covering culture, innovation, showbiz, sports, etc., which were not included in this study.

Table 1. Headlines from March 17 to March 27, 2004.

Printed newspaper: Koha Ditore				
Date, March 2004	Front-page headlines	Headlines about riots on front-page	Total about riots	Total headlines & articles
17	7	1	3	78
18	6	1	25	69
19	7	7	38	86
20	7	6	42	71
21	7	5	35	60
22	7	4	23	52
23	7	3	35	58
24	8	4	22	68
25	7	4	13	68
26	7	3	13	72
27	7	0	10	67
Total	77	38	259	749

As shown in Table 1, from the 749 published headlines in the daily print newspaper Koha Ditore, 259 articles covered riots in Kosovo. The front page contained an average of seven headlines, with a minimum of six on some days and a maximum of eight on others. On March 17 and 18, only one headline on the front page covered riots, whereas on March 19, 2004, all seven front-page headlines addressed the riots. On March 24, of the eight front-page headlines, four were about riots. On other days, the average number of headlines about riots ranged from three to six. The curve of front-page headlines did not fluctuate significantly. Front-page headlines on riots began with one headline, peaking at seven. Internal articles on riots started with three on March 17, reaching a peak of forty-two on March 20, then gradually declining to ten. Overall article numbers fluctuated moderately, ranging from 72 on March 24 to a peak of 86 on March 19, and finally decreasing to 67. Based on these findings, both front-page headlines and internal headlines on this topic showed a rise and then a decline over the period.

“Epoka e Re”, another daily printed newspaper in Kosovo, was established on December 15, 1999, with its first issue published on January 5, 2000. This newspaper was considered close to the Democratic Party of Kosovo and was one of the more extreme publications, frequently criticizing the government formed by the Democratic League of Kosovo. During the riots on March 17-18 in Kosovo, this newspaper also paid special attention to the events.

Table 2. Headlines from March 17 to March 27, 2004

Printed newspaper Epoka e Re				
Date, month March 2004	Front-page headlines	Headlines about riots on front-page	Total about riots	Total headlines & articles
17	5	1	5	47
18	4	1	26	57
19	6	6	57	75
20	7	7	48	74

22	5	5	37	61
23	5	5	45	56
24	5	5	38	55
25	7	5	30	52
26	6	4	29	71
27	6	1	24	84
Total	56	40	339	632

As shown in Table 2, from March 17 to March 27, 2004, Epoka e Re published 632 articles, 339 of which covered riots. Front-page headlines during this ten day period ranged from five to seven, with 40 headlines specifically on riots, averaging four per day. Table 2 shows that this newspaper also experienced fluctuations in front-page headlines about riots, beginning with one headline on March 17-18, peaking on March 20, and falling back to one headline by March 27. Internally, articles rose from five on March 17 to a peak of fifty-seven on March 19, then dropped to twenty-four by March 27.

Regarding misinformation and language use, both Koha Ditore and Epoka e Re published news with unverifiable information. For instance, on March 17, 2004, Koha Ditore ran the front-page headline: "Three Albanian children drown in Ibar while fleeing the Serbs," which, while emotional, appears to have arisen from unverified sources. Witness accounts of surviving children were inconsistent. Another front-page headline on March 18, 2004, read: "16 killed and 575 injured in riots across Kosovo," inciting emotion and inter-ethnic tension. Reports of fatalities varied 16, 20, or 31 though the verified number was 19 civilians (11 Albanian, 8 Serb) (Koha.net, March 17, 2019). The discrepancy resulted from poor coordination between journalists and UNMIK representatives at the time. Kosovo parliament members accused UNMIK of failing its duties (Epoka e Re, March 18, 2004, p.16), which misinformed readers.

After the riots ended, Koha Ditore published an article on March 19, 2004, covering the burning of two mosques in Niš and Belgrade by Serbs. Similarly, Epoka e Re misreported unverified claims, publishing on March 17, 2004: "Serbs drown three Albanian children in the Ibar River," later varying the number of victims in subsequent issues.

For the September 24, 2023 attack, the digital newspaper Koha.net published 1,202 headlines over ten days, 322 of which addressed the attack and 880 covered other events.

Table 3. Headlines on the September 24, 2023 attack in the digital newspaper "Koha.net"

Articles			
Date, months Sepetembre and October 2023	For the attack	Other	Total articles
24	82	51	133
25	48	70	118
26	50	90	140
27	39	110	149
28	29	87	116
29	18	105	123
30	12	93	105
1	7	82	89
2	12	91	103
3	25	101	126
Total	322	880	1202

As seen in Table 3, on September 24, 2023, Koha.net published 133 headlines, 82 about the attack and 51 on other topics. The peak number of headlines occurred on September 27, with 149 total, but only 39 related to the attack. Coverage gradually increased again after October 1. The table shows fluctuations in headlines about the attack: from 82 on the first day, dropping to 25, while total headlines declined from 149 on September 27 to 89 on October 1, then gradually rising again.

The electronic and PDF version of Epoka e Re published 285 headlines over eight days on the Banjska attack, 59 on riots, with 71 front-page headlines, 30 on riots.

Table 4. Headlines in “Epoka e Re” digital version, Sept–Oct 2023

Epoka e Re				
Date, September and October 2023	Headlines on the Front Page	Headlines on the Front Page about the attack	Headlines about the attack	Total Headlines
25	9	2	3	27
26	10	5	8	38
27	10	4	11	41
28	11	5	9	46
29	11	6	12	39
30	0	4	5	33
2	10	3	10	33
3	10	1	1	28
Total	71	30	59	285

As shown in Table 4, over the course of eight days (since the newspaper does not publish on Sundays, with September 24 and October 1 both being Sundays), this newspaper did not give much publicity to this event. This is because, when comparing the total headlines with those specifically addressing this issue, the latter represent a significant portion.

But shown, there is a rise and fall in the publication of headlines both on the front page and inside the newspaper. On the front page, the number of headlines goes from two up to six, then drops again to one headline on October 3. Inside the newspaper, headlines increase from three on September 25 to twelve on September 29, and finally decrease to one on October 3. When comparing the two print newspapers, it can be observed that while Koha Ditore published a total of 749 headlines during the March 2004 riots, only 259 of these articles addressed the riots. In contrast, Epoka e Re, although publishing fewer headlines overall (632), had 339 articles focused on the riots. The data are presented in the table below.

Table 5. Publication of headlines in the daily print newspapers “Koha Ditore” and “Epoka e Re” during the period March 17–27, 2004

Newspaper	Headlines on the Front Page	Headlines on the Front Page about the Riots	Headlines about the Riots	Total Headlines
Koha Ditore	77	38	259	749
Epoka e Re	56	40	339	632

As shown in Table 5, both on the front page and inside the newspaper, these two newspapers differ in their focus on the March 2004 riots in Kosovo. Koha Ditore published more headlines on the front page a total of 77, of which 38 were about the riots whereas Epoka e Re had fewer front-page headlines, a total of 56, but proportionally, more of them addressed the March 2004 riots in Kosovo. Inside the newspapers, Epoka e Re also published more articles on the riots than Koha Ditore, even though Koha Ditore published a total of 749 articles compared to 632 articles in Epoka e Re.

Table 6. Publication of headlines in “Koha.net” and “Epoka e Re” during the period September 24 – October 3, 2023.

Newspaper	Headlines about the attack		Other Headlines	Total Headlines
KohaNet	322		880	1202
Epoka e Re	59		226	285

As shown in Table 6, of the 1,202 articles published on Koha.net, 322 were related to the attack. In contrast, in Epoka e Re, out of 285 articles published, only 59 dealt with the attack. On Koha.net, roughly one-quarter of the articles focused on the attack, whereas in Epoka e Re, about one-fifth of the articles addressed it.

Comparing the total number of news articles published with the number of articles covering the attack on September 24, 2023, from September 24 to October 3, 2023, it can be said that the number of publications was not excessively high and was reasonable. This suggests that, although both newspapers are Albanian and the attack was carried out by local Serbs, they refrained from over-publishing news on this issue. However, there are differences in terms of interest in this event. Koha.net, over eleven days, published 322 articles on the attack out of a total of 1,202 articles. Epoka e Re, over nine days, published a total of 59 articles on the September 24 attack out of 285 articles.

Regarding the language used by these two printed newspapers, it can be said that it was not carefully chosen; it was emotional and could incite Albanian-Serb interethnic hatred. The expressions commonly used in these publications included: drowned; a young Serb injured; dead; wounded; severe violence; ethnic cleansing; gangs of bandits; mosques burned; etc. In *Epoka e Re*, expressions such as Serbian gangs; killings of Albanians; killed; wounded; houses burned; etc., were used. These expressions were poorly chosen because they were highly emotional and could fuel Albanian-Serb interethnic hatred.

Regarding the Banjska attack, which occurred on September 24 by a group of local Serbs, it can be said that, despite accurate and objective reporting in their articles, the newspapers also used expressions that could provoke emotions and interethnic hatred. These two electronic newspapers, during coverage of the Banjska attack, used expressions that could incite such reactions. The electronic newspaper Koha.net employed emotionally charged expressions that could be considered as inciting interethnic hatred. On September 24, 2023, Koha.net published news using phrases such as: “Police officer killed,” “Police operation,” “Armed persons,” “The terrorists,” “Two attackers killed,” “Terrible attack,” “Attack in the north,” “Police injured,” “Situation in the north,” “Terrorist attack in the North,” “Arsenal of weapons,” etc.

Regarding the other Albanian-language electronic newspaper, *Epoka e Re*, it also used emotional and hate-inciting expressions during reporting of the event. From September 25 to October 3, 2023, in published articles, both in headlines and within the text, expressions such as: “Criminal act,” “Attack on the police” (Epoka e Re, September 25, 2023), “Attempted uprising,” “Uniformed formation” (Epoka e Re, September 26, 2023), “Armed group,” “Criminal group” (Epoka e Re, September 27, 2023), “Killed terrorists,” “Guard of the Serbian BIA chief” (Epoka e Re, September 28, 2023), “Victims of terrorism” (Epoka e Re, September 29, 2023), “Tensions in northern Kosovo” (Epoka e Re, September 30, 2023), “Perpetrators of the attack” (Epoka e Re, October 2, 2023), “Terrorist attack” (Epoka e Re, October 3, 2023), etc., were used expressions considered to incite emotions and interethnic hatred.

Based on these data, it can be concluded that the language used was not carefully selected and was emotional and hate-inducing, potentially leading to interethnic hatred.

Table 7. Summary of emotional words used by the two newspapers.

Newspaper	Date(s)	Emotional / Hate-Inducing Expressions
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Koha.net	24-Sep-23	Police officer killed; Police operation; Armed persons; The terrorists; Two attackers killed; Terrible attack; Attack in the north; Police injured; Situation in the north; Terrorist attack in the North; Arsenal of weapons
Epoka e Re	25-Sep-23	Criminal act; Attack on the police
Epoka e Re	26-Sep-23	Attempted uprising; Uniformed formation
Epoka e Re	27-Sep-23	Armed group; Criminal group
Epoka e Re	28-Sep-23	Killed terrorists; Guard of the Serbian BIA chief
Epoka e Re	29-Sep-23	Victims of terrorism
Epoka e Re	30-Sep-23	Tensions in northern Kosovo
Epoka e Re	2-Oct-23	Perpetrators of the attack
Epoka e Re	3-Oct-23	Terrorist attack

Table 7 shows that both Koha.net and Epoka e Re used highly emotional words in their reporting, such as “killed,” “terrorist,” and “armed group.” These words appeared in headlines and texts, emphasizing violence and interethnic tension. While the reporting was factual, the emotional language could provoke readers and reinforce Albanian-Serb hostility. This highlights the importance of neutral language in sensitive contexts to avoid escalating interethnic conflict.

Conclusions

Although efforts are made in Kosovo to maintain objective journalism, as emphasized by information officials, political tensions and Albanian-Serb ethnic distrust create situations in which both print and online journalism can reflect ethnic bias. This is largely due to Kosovo’s historical, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. Regardless Albanians and Serbs have lived together in Kosovo for centuries, apart from the territory they share, they have little else in common. They have different languages, religions, histories, traditions, and cultures. Adding to this, for centuries, Albanians were under Serbian rule, which has contributed to enduring mutual intolerance between these two Balkan peoples.

Similarly, media in Kosovo, although not necessarily intentionally misleading, have sometimes disseminated unverified news due to a lack of coordination with local Kosovar authorities and UNMIK officials particularly regarding the March 2004 riots. This failure to verify information obtained from sources may have contributed to the spread of riots throughout Kosovo and to unnecessary casualties. Moreover, the language used in reporting was often emotionally charged and, in some cases, potentially inciting interethnic tension, particularly during the 2004 riots.

Regarding reporting on the Banjska attack, these two media outlets provided accurate information, and there was no misinformation that could incite interethnic hatred.

The study concludes that historical, cultural, and political factors, coupled with insufficient coordination with authorities, influence media practices, emphasizing the need for responsible journalism in ethnically sensitive contexts

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