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TIKTOK AS A TOOL FOR AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF KOSOVO'S NATIONAL TV BROADCASTERS

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of technology, social media platforms have become increasingly important to everyday communication, especially among younger audiences. TikTok, a mobile-first social network known for its short-form video content and high user interactivity, has emerged as one of the most popular platforms globally. In response to these changes, and in an effort to remain relevant and expand their audience, traditional media, particularly television, have begun integrating TikTok into their content distribution strategies. This involves both republishing content previously broadcast on television and creating new material specifically tailored to the platform's style.

To examine this adaptation, the paper analyzes the strategic use of TikTok by Kosovo's national television broadcasters, RTK, RTV21 and KTV, during the first half of 2024 (January 1 – June 30). With a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis, it presents the type and function of published content (informative or entertaining), production quality (professional or amateur), as well as levels of audience engagement (likes, shares, comments, views). The findings show distinct platform strategies: RTK dominates in terms of quantity but shows limited interaction with its audience; RTV21 adopts a more technically consistent but

less frequent approach; and KTV, though least active, demonstrates a stronger alignment with the dynamics of this platform.

The paper concludes with strategic recommendations for broadcasters to improve engagement and strengthen their integration into this worldwide known platform.

Key words: TikTok, Kosovo, national broadcasters, short-form video, audience engagement.

INTRODUCTION

The widespread use of the internet by people of all ages has made traditional media, such as television, adapt to new trends in order to keep their audience and engage them in more creative ways. Increasingly, television broadcasters are joining popular digital platforms, including TikTok, which has become a significant tool for sharing content in more dynamic and visually appealing formats. This shift reflects a strategic effort to also expand their reach, particularly among younger users who dominate these platforms. As confirmed by audience studies in Kosovo, “young people increasingly avoid using traditional media by replacing them with new media” (Zeneli, 2020). Supporting this, recent research shows that television is no longer the preferred medium among young Kosovars aged 18 to 30, who tend to access content through mobile devices and social networks instead of traditional TV screens (Selimi et al., 2024).

The occurrence of traditional media adapting to new media and technological advancements is well-known among media researchers and is explained through the concept of media convergence. However, it is important to note that such processes should not be understood solely through the lens of technological development. Cultural shifts also play a significant role, influencing how audiences seek new ways to consume media content. As Kosho (2010) argues, in today’s media environment, it is the viewer, not the broadcaster, who increasingly determines what content is consumed and how it is accessed. Moreover, the rise of new media has transformed not only the traditional media system but also the role of consumers in shaping media content. “The majority of online media consumers are young and middle-aged people” (Shahini-Hoxhaj, 2021).

In Kosovo, digital connectivity has reached a notably high level. According to the *Digital 2024: Kosovo* report, which presents up-to-date insights into how people in Kosovo engage with digital tools and services, there were approximately 1.61 million internet users at the beginning of 2024. This represents a penetration rate of 96.6%, highlighting near-universal access to the internet. Additionally, social media usage is widespread: in January 2024, there were 855.9 thousand active social media users in the country, accounting for 51.4% of the total population (DataReportal, 2024). These figures reflect not only a digitally connected society, but also the growing influence of online platforms in everyday communication and information consumption.

Although there are no precise statistics available regarding the number of TikTok users specifically in Kosovo, the global digital report from October 2024 notes that TikTok ranks among the top five platforms, with 7.9% of global internet users aged 16 and above naming it as their favorite (DataReportal, 2024). It is important to recognize, however, that TikTok is no longer used solely for redistributing content originally aired on television. Increasingly, new content is being created specifically for the platform, often using basic video editing skills, and this trend includes Kosovo’s television channels. In many cases, both types of content, repurposed and original, are now coexisting on broadcaster profiles. This change in media dynamics reflects what Krasniqi (2013-2014) has described as a transfer of influence from traditional media to new media platforms.

In this context, the aim of this paper is to analyze how Kosovo’s national television broadcasters, Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK), Radio Television 21 (RTV21), and

Kohavision (KTV), are utilizing TikTok. The study focuses on understanding the types of content these broadcasters share on one of the most popular social media platforms, the primary function of the distributed content, and the forms of audience engagement, including views, likes, comments, and shares. In addition to offering recommendations aimed at improving content strategies and audience engagement, the paper also highlights areas for future research, suggesting directions that could deepen the understanding of how national broadcasters in Kosovo can better adapt to evolving digital platforms like TikTok.

Therefore, this study addresses the following research questions: How do content strategies differ among RTK, RTV21, and KTV on the social media platform TikTok? And what are the outcomes of these strategies in terms of audience engagement?

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this paper, quantitative and qualitative methods of research have been used to analyze TikTok content and user engagement by Kosovo's national television broadcasters. As Wimmer and Dominick (2014) explain, "despite the differences, many researchers now use a combination of the quantitative and qualitative approaches to understand fully the phenomenon they are studying". The methodology consists of desk research, content and comparative analysis.

Content analysis is widely used in media and communication studies to systematically evaluate messages and formats. As Krippendorff (2018) states, it is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts," including multimedia and social content. Comparative analysis, in this context, helps identify differences in how broadcasters adapt to TikTok. According to Esser and Vliegenthart (2017), this method enhances understanding by "placing familiar structures and routines against those of other systems," allowing researchers to identify patterns and draw broader conclusions.

The analysis covers a six-month period, from January 1 to June 30, 2024, during which the official TikTok accounts of RTK, RTV21, and KTV were monitored. The videos shared by these broadcasters during this timeframe (which was selected randomly) were manually reviewed and analyzed individually. In order to support and verify the manually collected data, the study utilized the TikTok analytics and social intelligence platform Exolyt (accessible at: <https://exolyt.com/>), which provided metrics on video performance such as views, likes, comments, and shares. These performance metrics are commonly used in digital media research to evaluate user interaction. As Cheng and Li (2024) explain, "users can engage with the videos with "hearts" (i.e., the likes), comments, and shares, which are important indicators of the success of a TikTok video."

While the study collects quantitative performance data (views, likes, comments, shares), the comparative analysis of content strategies remains largely qualitative and descriptive. As Wimmer and Dominick (2014) explain, and as noted earlier, this combination of methods is well-suited for exploratory studies that aim to identify trends and emerging practices. Although a user survey could provide deeper insights into audience preferences, it was beyond the scope of this paper and is suggested for future research.

The elements analyzed in this study include:

- the total number of published videos,
- content origin (repurposed from a broadcast program or newly created for TikTok),
- content function (informative or entertaining),
- use of in-video text (e.g., questions or brief captions),
- use of hashtags in accompanying captions,
- video production style (professional - *studio-produced content with higher technical quality, editing, and broadcasting standards*, or amateur - *filmed via mobile phone by field reporters or individuals*),

- and key performance statistics: views, likes, comments, and shares.

TIKTOK AND KOSOVO'S NATIONAL TELEVISION BROADCASTERS

In today's digital environment, social media platforms are also recognized as a form of "private" media for each individual. According to Zeneli (2021), social networks are defined as internet-based platforms accessed via browsers or mobile applications, allowing any user with an internet connection to create a personal profile. He emphasizes that these platforms enable users to engage in various forms of interaction, including digital socializing, following media outlets, political parties, movements, and other active actors present on these platforms. One of the most widely used among these platforms is TikTok, the Chinese short-form video app. Its key features, such as its attractive short-form video format and its widespread use among young people, have influenced many media outlets to establish a presence on the platform. As emphasized by Chobanyan and Nikolskaya (2021), traditional media have already begun to recognize TikTok's potential in reaching new audiences.

This trend is also reflected in Kosovo, where both national and regional television channels are exploring digital platforms to engage younger audiences. According to the Independent Media Commission (2024), Kosovo has 19 terrestrial television channels, three of which are licensed for national coverage and the remaining 16 for local or regional broadcasting. As stated by the Independent Media Commission (2019), "The terrestrial channels with national coverage are Radio Television of Kosovo, the public service broadcaster (RTK1), as well as TV21 and Koha Vision (KTV), both licensed as private commercial television channels." All three national broadcasters began operating between 1999 and 2000.

According to the Media Ownership Monitor Kosovo (2024), each of these three televisions has a distinct institutional and editorial profile shaped by its origins and development. RTK, Kosovo's public service broadcaster, began operations in 1999 with just two hours of daily programming. Following Kosovo's independence, administrative responsibility for RTK shifted to the government, with its board now appointed by the Assembly. On the other hand, American support was channeled through USAID and was essential to creating the two most professional private television stations (KTV and TV21) in 2000. Both TV stations started as civil society organizations or third-sector media, and as such were freer and more critical in examining issues from various perspectives. "In reality, they were commercial broadcasters from the outset" (Shahini-Hoxhaj, 2021). Together, these three broadcasters form the foundation of Kosovo's national television sector and have each taken different approaches in adapting to the country's changing media landscape.

More than two decades after their establishment, all three national broadcasters have expanded their presence to one of the world's most prominent short-form video platforms. According to their official TikTok accounts, RTK published its first video on May 19, 2023, RTV21 on December 29, 2022, and KTV on June 17, 2021. This indicates that each broadcaster has maintained a presence on TikTok ranging from over a year and a half to more than three years, reflecting a growing interest in adapting to platform-specific content distribution.

However, despite the fact that their TikTok accounts were opened as a means to expand their audience and increase reach, not all broadcasters use the platform in the same way. Some maintain a consistent presence and post regularly, while others use TikTok only occasionally, with limited engagement and activity. This means that they have developed individual approaches to TikTok, both in terms of frequency, content type, and audience engagement.

RTK on TikTok: RTK's official TikTok account, @rtk1official, had 5,315 followers and 93,200 total likes by the end of 2024. The bilingual profile description, "Welcome to the official page of RTK. Mirësevini në faqen zyrtare të RTK-së." (RTK1 Official TikTok, 2024),

communicates both the platform's authenticity and its effort to reach both domestic and international audiences.

Between January 1 and June 30, 2024, RTK published 279 videos, the highest among the three broadcasters. Of these, 192 videos (68.8%) were repurposed segments from existing TV shows or news broadcasts, while 87 videos (31.2%) were created specifically for TikTok. In terms of content function, 84.9% were informative and 15.1% had an entertainment focus.

The use of in-video text was minimal, as only 9 videos included textual overlays. Hashtags were added to the video captions in 82 posts. As for production quality, 215 videos were professionally shot, while 64 had an amateur format, often recorded via mobile devices. Despite its large video output and a high number of views (98,750), likes (11,712), and shares (1,526), RTK did not receive a single comment during this period, highlighting a lack of audience interaction.

RTV21 on TikTok: RTV21's TikTok account, @radiotelevizioni21, had 3,562 followers and 36,800 likes by the end of 2024. The account bio, "*A media company based in Prishtina, Kosovo*" (RTV21 TikTok, 2024), clearly states the broadcaster's identity and location.

In the first half of 2024, RTV21 published 33 videos, of which 25 (75.8%) were repurposed content and 7 (21.2%) were original videos. A balanced content strategy was evident: 54.5% of videos served informative purposes, and 45.5% were entertainment oriented.

RTV21 made frequent use of visual elements. 29 out of 33 videos contained in-video text, and 25 used hashtags in captions. Regarding video quality, 30 videos were professionally produced, and only 3 were amateur recordings. In terms of performance, RTV21's videos accumulated 679 views, 4,951 likes, and 2,368 shares, with only 2 comments in total.

KTV on TikTok: KTV's account, @koha.official, recorded 7,710 followers and 187,100 likes by the end of 2024. Its profile description, "*Ec me Kohën [www.koha.net/r392645](\"http://www.koha.net/r392645\")*," (KTV Official TikTok, 2024) reflects the channel's slogan and includes a direct link to its official website.

KTV published 20 videos during the reporting period. It emphasized original production: 12 videos (60%) were newly created, and 8 videos (40%) were repurposed from TV programs. The content was evenly split between informative and entertaining themes (50% each).

KTV did not use any in-video text overlays. However, 13 videos included hashtags in the captions. The production format leaned amateur, with 15 videos recorded using mobile devices and only 5 professionally filmed. In terms of performance, KTV's content achieved 8,232 views, 310 likes, and 114 shares. Most notably, it received 19 comments, indicating comparatively higher engagement and interaction with its audience.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The three national television channels in Kosovo, RTK, RTV21, and KTV, have adopted distinct approaches in their use of TikTok. RTK stands out for having published a significantly higher number of videos compared to the other two, indicating a more consistent effort to maintain a presence on the platform and distribute diverse content.

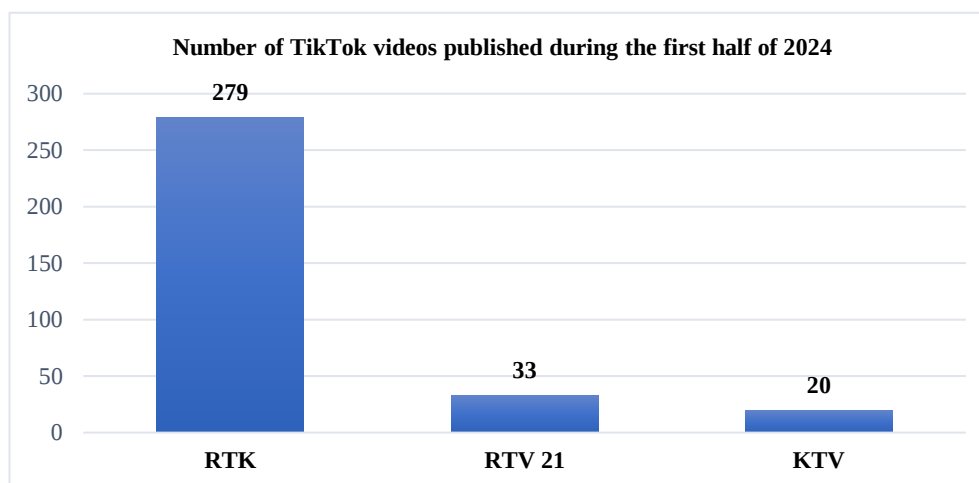


Figure 1: Number of TikTok videos published by Kosovo's national television channels during the period January 1 – June 30, 2024.

The origin and function of published content: A significant portion of the video content published by RTK during the first half of 2024 (68.8%) was repurposed from existing television programming. RTV21 followed a similar approach, with 75.8% of its TikTok content derived from previously aired shows. In contrast, KTV demonstrated a different strategy: 60% of its TikTok posts consisted of newly created content, indicating a more deliberate effort to align with the platform's dynamic. This practice reflects a broader trend observed in the use of TikTok by traditional broadcasters. As Vázquez-Herrero et al. (2021) observe, *“the most common practice is to broadcast fragments of programs, with highlights or curious and funny moments, and participating in challenges on the platform”*.

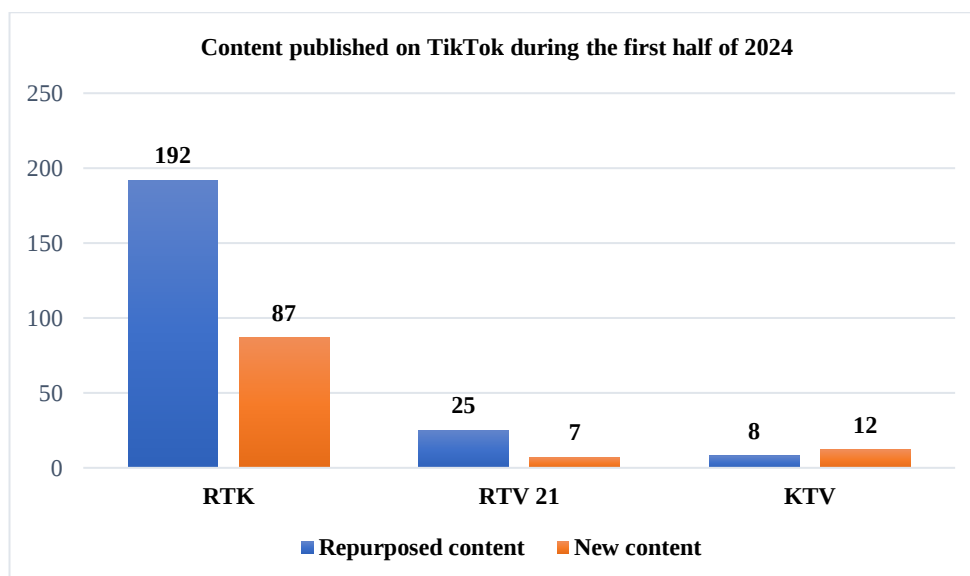


Figure 2: Type of content published on TikTok by Kosovo's national television channels during the period January 1 – June 30, 2024.

According to Mast (2018), the core objective of programming lies in the effective distribution of both information and entertainment. In line with this, the data show that RTK's content skews heavily toward informational programming (84.9%), with entertainment-focused content comprising only 15.1%. Meanwhile, RTV21 and KTV offer a more balanced mix. Specifically, 54.5% of RTV21's content is informative, while 45.5% is entertainment oriented. KTV presents an equal distribution (50% informative and 50% entertaining) reflecting an intentional attempt to attract and engage a younger, more interactive audience.

Use of text, hashtags, and video production format: Not all videos published by the three national television channels included text overlays, whether in the form of a question or brief information, nor did all of them utilize hashtags in the accompanying captions. These elements play a key role in enhancing discoverability, as they serve as navigational tools for users. For instance, users searching for general content related to a specific topic can simply type a relevant hashtag and browse through the platform's results.

Additionally, not all videos shared on TikTok by these broadcasters were professionally produced. Several clips were filmed using mobile phones by journalists or submitted by citizens in response to specific cases. This inconsistency in content production may suggest that these outlets are either underutilizing the full potential of the platform or struggling to adapt to its format, which favors concise, visually engaging, and mobile-friendly content. However, this variation in production quality may also reflect strategic choices. As Feng et al. (2023) point out, "professionals may intentionally produce videos that are amateur-like to be authentic or organic on TikTok". This fits the platform's culture, where relatable content often outperforms polished formats. Chobanyan and Nikolskaya (2021) note that "even serious and least entertaining videos can get millions of likes and views" if they connect with users. Similarly, Vázquez-Herrero et al. (2021) observe that "the most common practice is to broadcast fragments of programs, with highlights or curious and funny moments, and participating in challenges on the platform." This suggests that what may seem inconsistent can in fact be varied attempts to match TikTok's logic.

Data show that RTV21 made more consistent use of text overlays (29 out of 33 videos, or 87.9%) and hashtags (25 out of 33, or 75.8%) in its posts, indicating a deliberate strategy to enhance engagement through structured and detailed captions. In contrast, RTK and KTV lagged behind in this regard. RTK included text in only 3.2% of its videos (9 out of 279) and hashtags in 29.4% (82 out of 279), while KTV used no embedded text at all and applied hashtags in 65% of its posts (13 out of 20).

Regarding video quality, KTV relied more on amateur-style production (15 amateur vs. 5 professional videos), whereas RTK and RTV21 followed a more traditional model with higher proportions of professionally filmed content. RTK published 215 professional videos and 64 amateur ones, while RTV21 produced 30 professional videos and only 3 amateur clips. This aligns with their broader approach of primarily repurposing pre-broadcast television content for TikTok.

Performance: Despite publishing a large volume of videos and consequently accumulating a high number of views and likes, RTK received no comments on any of its posts. In contrast, RTV21 recorded the highest number of video shares, while KTV had the most comments, indicating a higher level of audience interaction.

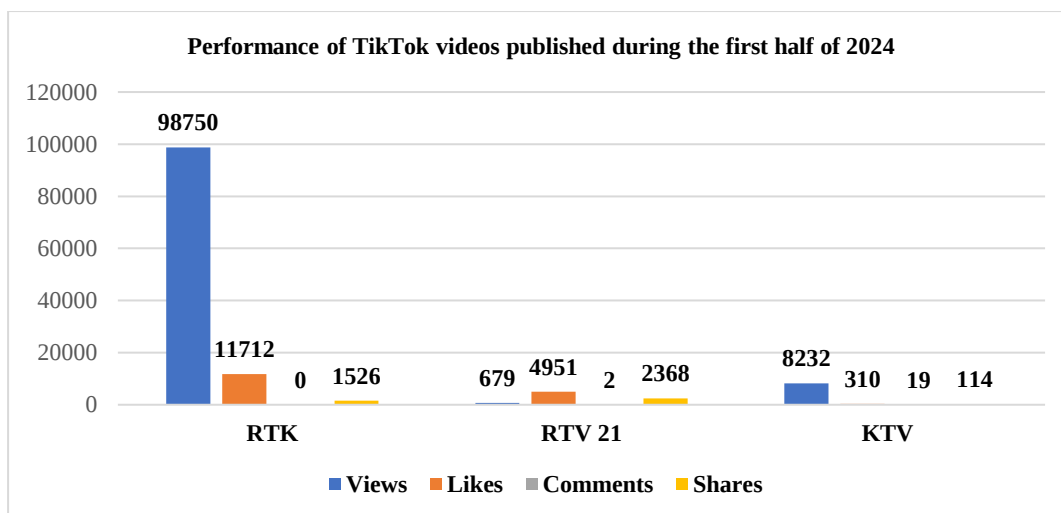


Figure 3: Performance of TikTok videos published by Kosovo's national television channels during the period January 1 – June 30, 2024.

Based on the content analysis, it appears that RTK's dominance in informative content may be contributing to its low engagement rate, particularly in terms of audience interaction. Meanwhile, KTV, which prioritized entertainment-oriented content over informational material, recorded the highest number of comments. This suggests that tailoring content to the platform's expectations may result in stronger user engagement on TikTok. As highlighted by Chobanyan and Nikolskaya (2021), "entertainment part is one of the must-have attributes the young audience wants to see in TikTok news formats", indicating that infotainment-style videos may be better suited for attracting user interaction on this platform.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The comparative analysis of TikTok activity by Kosovo's national broadcasters (RTK, RTV21, and KTV) during the first half of 2024 (January 1 – June 30) reveals distinct approaches in how each television channel engages with the platform. The findings also indicate the absence of a consistent, long-term content strategy across all three outlets. This aligns with Vázquez-Herrero et al. (2021), who observed that most generalist television channels globally lack a clear strategy that effectively integrates their TikTok activity with their traditional television offerings.

Although RTK produced the largest number of TikTok videos, primarily with informative content, the broadcaster's limited use of visual tools, such as in-video text and hashtags, combined with a total absence of user comments, points to a major challenge: low audience interaction.

In contrast, RTV21 demonstrated a more active use of visual features, yet its video performance remained relatively weak. This may be attributed to the channel's reliance on repurposed content and irregular posting patterns. The lack of original content creation and consistent publishing frequency continues to hinder its ability to fully leverage TikTok's potential.

KTV presents a different case. Despite publishing fewer videos, it showed a stronger alignment with TikTok's platform dynamics. Its content strategy emphasized original production and an even balance between informative and entertaining videos. The high number of comments, despite low overall output, suggests that KTV's content is more engaging and relevant to the TikTok audience.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen TikTok engagement among national broadcasters in Kosovo:

- Develop clear, long-term strategies tailored specifically to TikTok's format and audience behavior;
- RTK should focus on increasing audience interaction by incorporating more visual cues such as text overlays and strategic use of hashtags;
- RTV21 needs to improve posting frequency while maintaining the use of descriptive captions and engagement tools;
- KTV is encouraged to continue producing original and entertaining content, while gradually expanding its output and integrating more informative elements to reach a broader audience.

To further support the evolving use of TikTok by broadcasters, future studies should focus on a more in-depth content analysis of TikTok videos, including additional variables such as video duration, emoji use, audio/music selection, presence of branding (e.g., logos), and whether the content uses clickbait techniques; a comprehensive demographic study of TikTok audiences in Kosovo, including their media preferences and content interaction habits, to help broadcasters refine their strategies; a comparative regional analysis of how national broadcasters in other Balkan countries utilize TikTok, which could offer valuable insights into best practices and cross-cultural trends.

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