

Baltic Sputnik News Interests Only Other Sputnik News

Since their [launch](#) in the Baltic States in 2016, local Sputnik News outlets were unable to reach large popularity scores. Most of the articles in these webpages garner only a few likes and up to a couple hundred views. These websites are a part of a large Kremlin-funded news website platform, consisting of over 30 different languages, penetrating not only post-Soviet countries, but also Western Europe. The outreach of Sputnik News and RT have been long [debated](#) amongst experts.

With a particular interest in the Sputnik News platforms in the Baltics, we investigated the scope and variety of backlinks leading to these websites. Backlinks are links that are directed towards a particular website. The number of backlinks is an indication of the popularity or importance of that website. Backlinks are important for Search Engine Optimization because some search engines, especially Google, will give more credit to websites that have a good number of quality backlinks, and consider those websites more relevant than others in their results pages for a search query.

Using a social media listening tool Buzzsumo we were able to investigate the backlinks leading to these websites. Interesting patterns appeared as most of the backlinks leading to the Baltic Sputnik News websites were from other Sputnik News websites. An apparent effect of self-promoting cycle was observed, likely created to artificially boost rankings. Here is what we found.

Social Listening Tool, Methodology and Relevance

BuzzSumo is one of the top social media analytics tools, which comes with a powerful search engine that helps find and analyze the best performing content related to a specific niche, including social media. In the past, we used this platform to analyze the most engaged with online content which had concrete keywords in it. In this article, we analyzed the backlinks related with three Sputnik News domains operating in the Baltic States: <https://sputniknews.lv/>, <https://sputniknews.lt/>, <https://sputnik-news.ee/>. We were able to see data related with the backlinks of these websites from the very start they started operating, but Buzzsumo platform does not allow to download more than 10 000 units of information. In order to have a better understanding of the layout of the backlinks, we chose a time period that is closest in having 10 000 backlinks. In this case, it was a month worth of data, having slightly over 8,000 units of data.

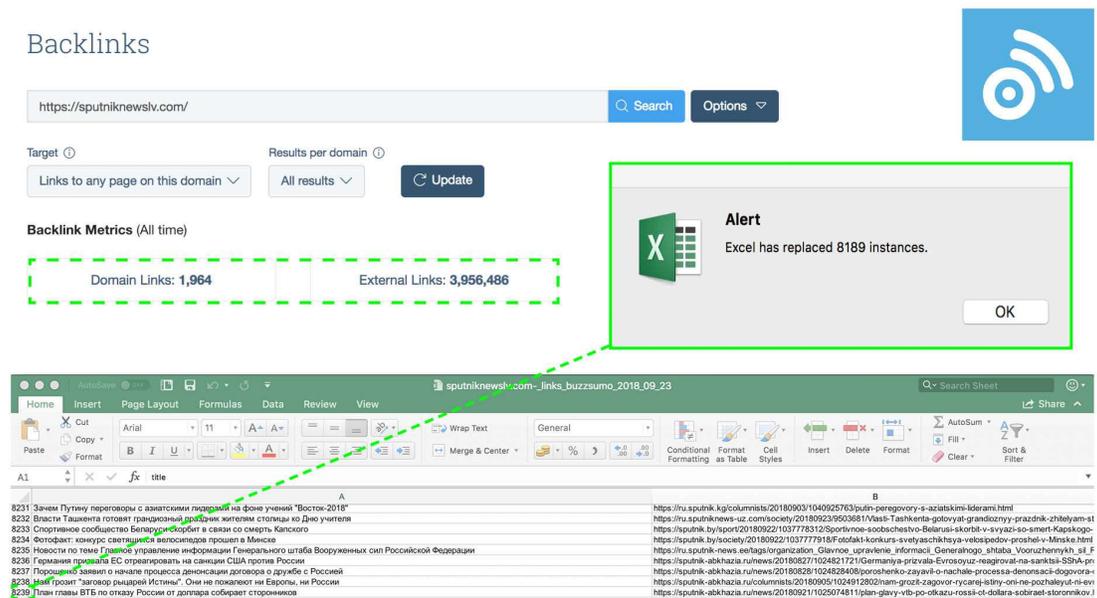
Google gives more credit to websites that have a good number of quality backlinks, and consider those websites more relevant than others in their search engine results pages for a search query. This is not the only factor for the websites to get high on the search query. A search engine considers the content of the sites to determine the quality of a link as well. When backlinks to your site come from other sites, and those sites have content related to your site, these backlinks are considered more relevant to your site. If backlinks are found on sites with unrelated content, they are considered less relevant. The higher the relevance of backlinks, the greater their quality.

This analysis of the backlinks important, as Sputnik News websites are [regarded](#) by NATO as an arm of Kremlin propaganda machine. These websites were caught red-handed many

times spreading misinformation, disinformation and blatant fake-news. Most of the articles on these websites rarely reach over of couple of hundred views and usually only garner a few dozens, which suggests very limited penetration of these websites in the Baltic States.

Sputnik News Latvia

Buzzsumo backlinks metrics suggested that Sputnik News Latvia (<https://sputniknewslv.com/>) garnered 1,964 domain links and 3,956,486 since it was launched. Over the period of one month (August 23 – September 23, 2018), garnered 8239 original backlinks. Out of the 8239 backlinks, 8189 were from other Sputnik News domains, making it 99,39% of all monthly backlinks.



Backlink Analysis of Latvian Sputnik News August 23 – September 23, 2018). Image Source – Buzzsumo

Sputnik News Lithuania

Meanwhile, Sputnik News Lithuania (<https://sputniknews.lt/>) garnered 1,231 domain links and 5,312,592 since it was launched. Over the period of one month (August 23 – September 23, 2018), garnered 8239 original backlinks. Out of the 8129 backlinks, 8101 were from other Sputnik News domains, making it 99,65% of all monthly backlinks.

Backlinks

https://sputniknews.lt/

Target: Links to any page on this domain

Results per domain: All results

Update

Alert
Excel has replaced 8101 instances.

Domain Links: 1,231 External Links: 5,312,592

sputniknews.lt_links_buzzsumo_2018_09_23

8120 Спортивное сообщество Беларуси скорбит в связи с гибелью Капского
8121 Луцкиенко: сроки строительства БелАЗЭС срываются, договорилось, что срок возврата кредита надо продлить
8122 Фотобанк: конкурс светящихся вывесок пройдет в Минске
8123 В Сухуме прошла ярмарка сельхозпродукции
8124 Новости по теме Главного управления информации Генерального штаба Вооруженных сил Российской Федерации
8125 Германия призвала ЕС отреагировать на санкции США против России
8126 Порошенко заявил о начале процесса денонсации договора о дружбе с Россией
8127 Нам грозит "заговор еврейской Истиины". Они не покажут ни Европы, ни России
8128 Главные ВТБ по отказу России от доллара собирает сторонников
8129 Психолог Адам Грант: рабочий день должен заканчиваться в 15:00

https://sputnik.by/sport/20180922/1037778312/Sportivnoe-sobschestvo-Belarusi-skorbit-v-svyazi-so-sm...
http://vnuilbrest.by/news/20180922/1037778312/Sportivnoe-sobschestvo-Belarusi-skorbit-v-svyazi-so-sm...
https://sputnik.by/society/20180922/1037778312/Fotofakt-konkurs-svetyaschihyaya-velosipedov-proshal...
https://sputnik-akhazia.ru/Akhazia/20180923/1025087310-v-suxume-proshla-yarmarka-selkhoz-produkt...
https://ru.sputnik-news.ee/tags/organization_sputnik_news_ee/management_informatsionno-izdatel'skaya_vozm...
https://sputnik-akhazia.ru/news/20180922/1024828408/Germaniya-prizvala-Evrosoyuz-ne-reakcionno-re-sa...
https://sputnik-akhazia.ru/news/20180928/1024828408/poroshenko-zayavil-o-nachale-processa-demon...
https://sputnik-akhazia.ru/columnists/20180905/1024912802/nam-grozit-zagovor-rossijskij-istiny-oni-ne-p...
https://sputnik-akhazia.ru/news/20180921/1025074811/plan-glavy-vtb-po-otkazu-rossii-ot-dollara-sobira...
https://ru.sputnik.az/health/20180923/11716749/psiholog-rabota-chasti.html

Backlink Analysis of Lithuanian Sputnik News August 23 – September 23, 2018). Image Source – Buzzsumo

Sputnik News Estonia

Analysis revealed that Sputnik News Estonia (https://sputnik-news.ee/) garnered 3,047 domain links and 3,857,696 since it was launched. Over the period of one month (August 23 – September 23, 2018), garnered 8239 original backlinks. Out of the 8200 backlinks, 8180 were from other Sputnik News domains, making it 99,75% of all monthly backlinks.

Backlinks

https://sputnik-news.ee/

Target: Links to any page on this domain

Results per domain: All results

Update

Alert
Excel has replaced 8180 instances.

Domain Links: 3,047 External Links: 3,857,696

sputnik-news.ee_links_buzzsumo_2018_09_23

A1 title

8194 Германия призвала ЕС отреагировать на санкции США против России
8195 Порошенко заявил о начале процесса денонсации договора о дружбе с Россией
8196 Нам грозит "заговор еврейской Истиины". Они не покажут ни Европы, ни России
8197 Главные русские обиды: Стоянов - участники Курской битвы вручили поддразнения от Президента РФ
8198 В Эстонии объявили из продажи книгу Матюшевса с опасными советами окопным
8199 Главные ВТБ по отказу России от доллара собирает сторонников
8200 Психолог Адам Грант: рабочий день должен заканчиваться в 15:00

https://ru.sputnik-news.ee/tags/organization_sputnik_news_ee/management_informatsionno-izdatel'skaya_vozm...
https://sputnik-akhazia.ru/news/20180927/1024821721/Germaniya-prizvala-Evrosoyuz-ne-reakcionno-re-sanktsii-rossi...
https://sputnik-akhazia.ru/news/20180928/1024828408/poroshenko-zayavil-o-nachale-processa-demonst...
https://sputnik-akhazia.ru/columnists/20180905/1024912802/nam-grozit-zagovor-rossijskij-istiny-oni-ne-p...
http://www.stena.ee/blog/v-estoni-izyali-iz-prodazhi-knigu-matshova-s-opasnymi-sovetami-onkopnym
https://sputnik-akhazia.ru/news/20180921/1025074811/plan-glavy-vtb-po-otkazu-rossii-ot-dollara-sobiraet-storonnikov.html
https://ru.sputnik.az/health/20180923/11716749/psiholog-rabota-chasti.html

Backlink Analysis of Estonian Sputnik News August 23 – September 23, 2018). Image Source – Buzzsumo

Findings

Sputnik was founded in 2014 after the Kremlin [closed](#) the RIA Novosti news agency and it launched their Baltics branches in 2016. According to the Buzzsumo analysis, vast majority of the backlinks (99,39% – 99,75%) of the Baltic states Sputnik News backlinks consist of other Sputnik News domains. This is a highly unnatural result for a news website, suggesting that the traffic to these websites is simulated by the outlet itself. This finding shows that these websites are not only lacking readers, but also fail to attract attention from other websites and outlets.

Furthermore, knowing the very limited readership and even the absence of advertisement on these websites suggest that they have a different *modus operandi* from traditional news media outlets. As most of the contemporary news outlets gain their funds from advertisement or paid subscription, absence of both in the case of Sputnik News clearly show that they get their operational fund elsewhere. It is well known, that Sputnik News is receiving funds from the Kremlin and is fully dependent on these resources, as the limited readers' interest in it would force it to close its Baltic outlets under the rules of a free-market economy.

This is only a preliminary analysis of the Sputnik News outlets and the results might not apply to websites run in other languages, which Sputnik News has over 30 different language domains. Also, due to limitations of the platform, only a snap analysis of the previous month was made, nonetheless checks from other randomly selected monthly provided very similar results with over 99% of links being from other Sputniks News domains.

In order to have an objective opinion, a few other more popular randomly selected mainstream media websites in the Baltics were checked: www.15min.lt, www.postimees.ee, <https://apollo.tvnet.lv/>. All of these websites had little to none (only a few backlinks from the English version website, constituting up to 5% of the total engagement numbers) backlinks from the same domains. A more thorough analysis of mainstream media websites is needed for an objective comparison, nonetheless, preliminary findings show that having large numbers of backlinks from domains run by the same outlet is an unnatural behavior in other news websites in the Baltics states.

Conclusion

The results of this research provide a good glimpse to the backdoor of the Kremlin-funded Sputnik News. The unusually high percentage of backlinks from other Sputnik News websites suggest two main findings, that the Baltic Sputnik News outlets do not interest other websites to refer to them and that a likely deliberate cross-promotion cycle is set-up to provide as much coverage as possible. Despite the fact that the number of backlinks are not the only factor in Search Engine Optimization, it is argued to be amongst the most important. This tactic can be seen as a desperate move in order to promote the currently largely unpopular media coverage in the Baltic states, furthermore signifying a systemic

approach to cross-promotion. A separate research should be constituted in order to check how much this strategy affects the Search Engine Optimizations and if this aggressive cross promotion is carried out according to the rules.

As the efficiency and outreach of Sputnik News in other regions can be debated, it is evident that the Baltic branches of the outlet are not reaching the results Kremlin would like to see. Out of all different disinformation warfare tactics that Kremlin is using in the Baltic states, Sputnik News would most likely rank not on the top of the list. According to its founder Dimitri Kiselyov Sputnik News mission is to “speak about what others keep quiet about”, but apparently disinformation they are providing does not really interest the Baltic audiences, or other websites.

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