

Social media and rumors: Mechanisms and confrontation in the Corona crisis

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Abstract:

This paper examined the recent online rumor associated with the coronavirus crisis, and how it was able to spread more sharply with the possibilities offered by social media sites, as its promoters relied on the exploitation and adaptation of these sites to achieve their goals, in the absence of censorship and social and legal responsibility.

Electronic propaganda as news that may carry a lot of false and fraudulent anonymity is spreading confusion, chaos and sedition. Facebook's most widely used site in the COVID-19 crisis has found more space and fertile space to spread.

Keywords: Rumor, coronavirus crisis, social media sites.

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Introduction

The need for information in crises is increasing more than ever. This is because of the importance of information used by individuals to cope with the effects of the crisis. The 2020 health crisis, known as the COVID-19 crisis, is the simplest model. Everyone is looking for correct and accurate information on the causes of the disease and how to prevent it.

Not only are the media no longer the primary source of information, but social media sites are also one of the most important sources, especially since everyone has become a producer of information for media organizations and ordinary individuals.

This fact, in turn, may lead to the interference of the correct information with the false and, thus, the interference of the truth with the rumor. Individuals transmit the latter on social media at every time, so much so that some are a fertile environment for false information that many believe due to the absence of validation methods. Furthermore, thus, people receive them differently and act with behaviors based on them, which may lead them to misconduct that may exacerbate the crisis. Moreover, at the same time, to harm the individuals themselves as a result of following misinformation, what makes viewing the phenomenon of rumor through social media and knowing the causes and solutions of the phenomenon so important.

That is why this study has tried to investigate this by asking the following fundamental question:

How does the coronavirus crisis on social media cause the rumor?

In addition to the following sub-questions:

- What are the potential effects of the coronavirus crisis on social media?
- What are the possible solutions to confront the spread of the coronavirus crisis on social media?

Importance and objectives of the study

The importance of the study comes from the diagnosis of one of today's essential topics in the light of the so-called new media and social media sites, which is one of the disadvantages of these media with the coronavirus crisis; this crisis has increased the exchange of false information and rumors about the disease itself. This phase has seen the circulation of incorrect information about how it is infected and transmitted and ways of preventing it.

The importance of the study is also reflected in the study's objectives:

- Disclose the reasons for falling into the rumor on social media sites, whether they are linked to individuals, media organizations, or other sources of information.
- Reveal the potential negative effects of social media outreach on the coronavirus crisis, whether at the individual or community level.
- Identify possible solutions to confront the rumor phenomenon on social media in light of the health crisis.
- Provide practical suggestions to increase the credibility of social media sites and avoid falling into fake news and rumors, especially in times of crisis.

Conceptualization

1. Social Media: Information platforms or a group of direct communication channels specializing in publishing, interacting, and sharing content (messages, images, audio, and video clips) at the individual and community level, a term that includes new media platforms or interactive websites with social components and public channels of communication (Qamjiyah and Hassan Ahmed Al Qamjiyah 2018), also known as websites where Internet applications provide services to their users that allow them to create a personal page that is publicly displayed and provides a means of communication with the page's creator knowledge and services to exchange information among users of that site (Mekdadi, 2013), are networking and communicative tools that allow for knowledge and information exchange, views, and trends, as well as their commercial and propaganda scope.

2. Facebook: A social network that attracted the acceptance of a significant response from people, especially young people around the world, and did not exceed the limits of a personal blog at the beginning of its inception on 4 February 2004 by a university student Harvard called Mark Zuckerberg to reach out to university colleagues, where network membership was limited to Harvard students but then extended to other colleges in Boston and University. Ivy League and Stanford University expanded the network to include undergraduate and high school students, then crossed the United States border to all countries. Facebook's name refers to a paper book with photographs and information of individuals of a particular university or group.

Facebook is a virtual site where the user bypasses traditional communication methods, attempting to reduce the time and space factor through their chat and messaging features, which allow exchanging and discussing views and ideas, thus disrupting the social structure, cultural stereotypes, and social norms.

3. Rumor: It is known as anonymous news, often based on someone or someone. Moreover, it relies on falsifying facts, distorting reality, and disseminating inaccurate information. This news is essential and ambiguous, aimed at influencing morale and anxiety, sowing the seeds of doubt, destroying the meaning or distortion of public opinion, or influencing public opinion for its source, whether political, economic, social, cultural, or military. (Harbi, 2019)

It is also false or misrepresented news transmitted, disseminated, and shared via various social media accounts. The media generally destabilize or undermine opponents. (Amin, 2016)

Rumor is an exaggerated narrative that blends truth with lying, transmitted by users through social media platforms related to COVID-19. It increased as the health crisis evolved, and its objectives have been multiplied by those who embrace it.

Facebook Features and Media Role

Facebook belongs to the so-called social media that were the product of the evolution of the digital or new media level, which carried a set of features that contributed to the transformations of the content level and the public and the relationship between them, including:

Interactive: The roles between the contact person and the recipient are exchanged, the practice of communication is bi-directional and mutual, there is a dialogue between the parties, and it is the most crucial feature of the Internet.

Combining two synchronistic and asynchronous attributes: synchronization means that the audience is exposed to the media during broadcasting, the lack of uniformity of the time element of exposure time (Amin, 2016).

Inclusion and diversity of content: In the old media, the media suffered from the lack of space to take up any topic or accomplish any media material, but with the development of new media, news can be written without the barrier of time, space, or other. (Chakra 2014)

The universality of Access: The new media link to the Internet has made it possible for anyone to become a publisher and communicate their message to all parts of the world without considering differences in geographical spaces and borders do not stop receiving and sending messages. (Radi, 2017)

Flexibility: Information industry companies and their means of trading are racing to provide their services as quickly as possible and best to win the confidence of their audiences, and achieve their best economic return. Therefore, they always strive to achieve their audiences' desires. The user achieves the highest possible flexibility in using communication technology to communicate with news and events, TV shows, and others.

Support for gatherings: Any networking service that allows people to create groups with specialization or religious or social affiliation, such as Facebook (Hatimi, 2015).

Based on the characteristics referred to above, social media sites and Facebook in particular, as they possess apps that allow their users to interact and reflect these interactions, they have several characteristics that contribute to increasing and activating communication among subscribers, including (Al Hamid, 2015):

- The well is a dedicated space for the user with his/her profile with his/her personal information and is attached to a favorite text, photo, or music and can be accessed by friends.
- Photo is a feature that enables users to upload photos and albums from the device to the site and share them with friends.
- The possibility of sending attached messages to friends or anyone showing their wall and attaching messages to photos or files.
- News Feed's feature appears on all users' homepages, through which data is clarified as changes to personal files and friends' birthdays.

Social media, in general, and Facebook, in particular, have been able to impose themselves as a parallel to traditional media. Community ", especially with the interactive feature that it offers, dissemination and combination of various diverse and heterogeneous societal groups, The fulfillment of their wishes and needs, despite the indiscriminate nature of their work, their freedom from legal limitations and the magnification of information. However, they are a source for many users, providing them with freedom of expression, exchange of views, experiences, and views as well as knowledge and scientific additions, as well as being instant in dissemination and the variety of display methods from a post, photo, and video, which increased user activity that went from just receiving to making content Social media sites, including Facebook, have taken control of the flow and circulation of information to make many events and contribute to monitoring certain decisions.

Coronavirus crisis:

The crisis was created by the coronavirus, which is a broad strain of viruses that may cause disease to animals and humans and cause respiratory illnesses in humans, ranging from common colds to more severe diseases such as Middle East respiratory syndrome " MERS" and the acute respiratory syndrome "SARS" the recently discovered coronavirus causes COVID-19 disease (Mohammadi, 2020), the most common symptoms of COVID are fever, dry cough, and vomiting. Some patients may experience pain and aches, nasal congestion, throat pain, or diarrhea. These symptoms are usually mild and start gradually, some people become infected but show only mild symptoms, and most patients recover (About 80%) without needing hospital treatment. The disease is intensified in nearly one in 5 people who develop COVID-19 infections where they have difficulty breathing. High risk of severe complications among the elderly and people with medical problems such as high blood pressure or heart and lung disease, Diabetes mellitus, and cancer. Also, everyone is vulnerable to the disease and vulnerable to transmitting the infection away from their gender and age (Al Ahmad, 2021)

Rumor through social media: characteristics and factors.

Many spread fake news for several purposes, the majority of which are limited to the desire to influence under the ability of social media to reach several places, as well as: propaganda, political influence, cynicism, emotional influence, and misinformation.

False news methods include:

2 Ironic content: No intention to harm

3 Misleading content: exploiting information to place a subject or individual in a particular context.

4 False related content: the content's title is inconsistent.

5 Misconception: Posting real content in the wrong context of information.

6 Manipulation of Content: Manipulation of Information or Image with the Aim of Deception. (Bousaidi, 2018)

These methods are generally shared by the media, while Facebook is distinct from Facebook as an anonymous source of information, given the abundance of fictitious accounts, aliases, and anonymous identities. This increases the inability to investigate and confirm or deny information. In particular, it is related to medical and health rumors and Facebook's prohibition and blocking of comments that increase the prevalence of rumors and reduce the possibility of falsehood or correction.

One of the most commonly used methods in traditional media is the excitement and attention that has increased with the spread of videos on social media platforms, which are being amputated and taken out of their real context to achieve tendentious goals that expand the reach of rumor, as noted with medical content related to the COVID-19 crisis and its transformations.

Electronic rumor characteristics

Users of social media sites differ in their trends towards spreading rumors on their accounts and in how to deal with it, where they fall into three categories (Help 2020):

Category I : is the tendentious group that aims to spread confusion in society to achieve its demonic objectives, especially about the nation's security and the citizen.

Category II: lacks a culture of informatics, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, is unaware of its risks and ignorance of the penalties for its dissemination.

Category III: Young people who have yet to absorb the ethics of dealing with modern media deal with them irresponsibly and must be sensitized.

Different characteristics from ordinary rumor characterize electronic rumor because it is linked to a modern method and there is a different environment, the most important of which are:

- Speed: Moving and spreading through many electronic accounts takes a short time.

- Cost: Electronic publicity does not require expenses for distribution.
- Skip the boundaries of the place: where you jump the spatial boundaries in less time.
- Source identification: Where through electronic tracking of the source of rumors, its source is reached without being affected by the falsification of carriers (Sayud and Blame 2020)

It also features: (Razaki 2021)

- Growing numbers of recipients: If traditional rumors remain locked in the circle or geographical region from which they emanate, electronic rumors quickly circulate among internet users, especially with social media sites.
- Relatively stable content: It is accepted that the traditional rumor of change and change in people's councils and on the tongues of carriers is the opposite of the electronic rumor in which the user of communicative sites copies and pasts content without misrepresenting it.
- High losses resulting from the internationalization of informatics: e-commodity targets cost a lot of time and money to refute and affect their financial positions near or far.

Prevalence factors during a crisis (coronavirus crisis).

The transmission of rumors through social media platforms has increased in several factors, the most important of which are the frequent use of the latter with the ease and speed of transmission of information between users without verifying its authenticity or lack thereof, as well as the lack of effective oversight and laws criminalizing the transmission and circulation of incorrect news, and the difficulty of identifying an absolute personality of rumors (War 2019), and despite the cultural, educational or political importance of these sites and the dynamic that societies have identified in their existence..., However, the downside was reflected during the crisis period. And in particular, the health crisis in the whole world and Algeria, The Covid-19 crisis, which revealed the emergence of parallel media outlets, has made its content a combination of truth and rumor in the absence of credibility and documentation of the news, the uncertainty of health conditions, statistics and the reality of the epidemic.

The free posting enjoyed by the user of the websites facilitated the circulation of a lot of news without verifying its accuracy and authenticity The number of its users increased rapidly to 53% or 136.1 million Arab users. This contributed to the rapid spread of rumors, especially with the coronavirus crisis. The sites, especially Facebook, have become a source for many to know what's happening around them. Watch for news of infected people, vaccines, and other information related to the pandemic.

The speed of widespread circulation and dissemination of information was among the most important factors that caused widespread rumors to spread beyond the barrier of space and time. We saw and read the toll of infected people at the municipal level and even its villages. We also received news of distress calls from hospitals in remote locations.

A factor in the spread of electronic rumor is the power of Facebook to influence people Publishers use the various tools available, from text, photo, video, effects, etc., which lends a lot

of credibilities to the rumor, with which users are sympathetic sentimental issues, thus achieving the goals of support and support And the possibility of interacting with propaganda through Facebook's features such as commentary, admiration, participation, and others increases its prevalence and impact.

The rumors of coronavirus continue to claim many victims, especially with panic and fear caused by rumors, and Facebook, "where misinformation about the number of people infected with the virus in some Arab countries has spread to these sites not only to question their health and preventive system, but also to show their agility and vulnerability to their people, and to accuse them of lack of transparency and credibility before the international community. In this context, the Muslim Brotherhood has also taken advantage of social media to spread rumors aimed at sparking panic among citizens in Egypt and abusing the Government, criticizing its way of confronting and containing the virus "

E-Rumor and the COVID Crisis: Monitoring the Most Important Rumors and Ways to Respond to Them.

Types of COVID-related electronic rumors.

With the onset of the Covid-19 crisis, Facebook has witnessed a tide of unclear news from the source, as well as doubts about what the official bodies specializing in the epidemic are reporting, many of them to doctors, health workers, academics and citizens, which have been in the form of rumors about the disease, its source and ways of dealing with it.

1. **There is no coronavirus**, but the repercussions of the fifth generation of the Internet: This rumor spread as the virus emerged in Wuhan. and the number of people infected was said to be the result of the launch of the fifth generation of the Internet, It is the same reason there were victims in Western countries. in which electromagnetic waves causing flu-like symptoms are released, According to exberliner, it started from a site called connection events at the end of January but only recently went viral.

2. **The virus is a factory in Afghanistan**: a video has been promoted in which its maker speaks that the coronavirus was made in Afghanistan from sarin gas. It has a total of about 4 million viewers. The author asserted that many soldiers had been injured and, as evidence of his veracity, confirmed that his source of information was the Scripps Research Institute.

3. **The virus is a conspiracy against people**: the rumor promoted at the beginning of the virus that it is spreading in Europe to get rid of the elderly and to serve their political and economic interests.

4. **The virus is a biological weapon**: especially between China and America, where many media outlets broadcast statements that there were laboratories in China and that they manufactured and developed the virus. We also saw statements by China accusing America of the same. And Rollingstone belied this rumor with a professor of biology's statement, and He told the Washington Post that there was nothing in the analysis of the virus genome that showed that the act was engineered. Science refutes the idea that the virus is a biological virus (Azam 2020)

5. **Vaccine complications:** This rumor relied on the news that new coronavirus vaccines are changing human genes because they rely on the use of ARN A-messenger DNA, as well as prolonging ears and transforming humans from one human being to another (Tawfik 2021)

6. **Eating some herbs and foods:** There have been many rumors about some diets treating people with COVID, many of which have been by virus professionals, doctors, or pharmacists. We have seen videos about the importance of garlic and thyme and that they are a substitute for medication, muzzle, and stone.

7. **Information on the duration and living conditions of the virus:** Rumor has spread about the temperature at which the virus is tolerating and losing its life, and it has been said that the virus cannot withstand the high temperature so people have preached the hot Palo that the country knew, with which it dropped the rumor.

8. **The spread of corpses in the streets and the fainted we saw on the facebook pages:** were coupled with the onset of the virus.

Methods of addressing electronic propaganda.

Over the ages, societies have experienced many rumors aimed at dismantling the community's fabric. and to sow discord and confusion among individuals, questioning information and the credibility of the official media and rumors have increased and become more intense with the modern techniques of what has been distinguished as mentioned above, During the Covid-19 crisis, it became clear that the primary and fundamental objective of rumors was to spread concern and mistrust, especially with the dark media we live with, with the freedom of opinion and expression that characterized these sites.

- **Interference with the religious aspect:** The propaganda industry and misinformation at all times is a crime against societies and their harmony but they are in a time of epidemics, as are the peoples of the globe today with the coronavirus. s Religious Opinion Committee, which goes beyond the objectives of excitement and incitement and maneuvers immune capacity in the face of the deadly virus, was not confined to simple people during the coronavirus. Inventory ", but entered writers, artists, intellectuals, culture, religion, media, politics, and health, As we have seen fabricated images and old videos reposted as new, We also saw those who used the art of rhetoric, rhetoric and "demagogy," via various publicity means written, visual and networks The Internet, to control speech by misrepresenting speech, information and statistics and the practice of methods of attracting, misleading, controlling speech and suggesting thought and mind, By falsifying and reshaping reality by reshaping ideas, concepts, and perceptions in the recipient's mind as reality And then control the attitudes of public opinion, and the rumors and misinformation that spread like wildfire cannot be accounted for here. In the face of this abnormal situation of misinformation, religious opinion had to support the security, political, and media aspects of the response, The Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Religious and Algerian Affairs called on citizens to deal with the propaganda with all necessary caution, especially in these days when the epidemic is spreading, a memorandum prohibiting the rumor industry and disseminating it and circulating it, it is a lie that is regarded as deaf and disobedient. An Algerian ministerial committee has outlawed disseminating rumors about the coronavirus

pandemic. and the statement of the Algerian Advisory Committee stated that everyone agreed on the damage to the individual and society of the rumors mental health, weakening self-confidence, questioning the nation's efforts and abilities, and influencing the system of values and ethics. Other effects that cause discord in society, God Almighty says: "Sedition is greater than murder," and "Sedition is greater than murder" (Zahar 2020).

- In order to address such practices, **media providers must train their staff and media professionals on how to verify the news**, document its sources, and, in return, support serious and credible electronic pages, as well as pages that seek to detect rumors and trace their source, and then refute them with evidence-based facts.

- **The enactment of laws** and even the activation of laws that criminalize the publisher of rumor to serve as an example to others. In our Arab world, because of its conservative nature, the impact of rumors can be devastating. How many families have suffered from rumors, and the Internet laws in Arab countries are still limited or unable to address this scourge?

- **Carry out public information campaigns** to raise awareness of the coronavirus: In particular, disseminating misinformation about the virus and disease may cause many people to become infected. Civil society associations and institutions carry out these campaigns in cooperation with doctors and pharmacists.

- **Awareness quotas on official channels** supported by social media pages and bloggers.

- **Take firm decisions and strict action by the Ministry of Health** against doctors, health workers, and pharmacists who promote false or incorrect information.

Results of the study:

The paper concluded with a set of findings that can be summarized as follows:

- The widespread use of social media sites has resulted in a negative use orientation, especially the dissemination of rumors about the subject matter of the study.

- Increase the level of COVID-related e-rumors with COVID-related developments and multiple waves that rumor promoters have been able to handle professionally.

- Lack of official information and confidence in it (due to several factors) makes individuals receive and trade rumors positively.

- The absence of religious consciousness and moral values has made many social media pioneers contribute to spreading rumors without thinking about their consequences.

- Medical agencies' lack of credibility and failure to contain the crisis and provide the right information was one of the most important reasons people believed the rumors.

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