

Electronic Rumors and the Technical and Legal Prevention Methods

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Abstract: This research aims to explore the methods and mechanisms of spreading electronic rumors, as well as the prevention mechanisms, and the major technical and legal methods to achieve them. Through this research, we concluded that electronic rumors have become one of the prominent weapons that possess the ability to destroy societies, its policies, its economy, and its security. In addition to the nations' attempts to figure out scientific, technical, and legal methods and means as solutions to terminate such phenomenon. Nevertheless, these efforts remain insignificant vis-à-vis the huge amount of rumors that started invading the digital space, and which threatens the safety and security of countries and peoples.

Keywords: Rmor,Electronic rumor,Technical Methods,Legal Methods

Introduction:

Rumors are among the dangerous phenomena that have emerged in our societies. They are one of the most dangerous destructive weapons for countries and people, at a time when social media platforms have become one of the major tools in what is called social mass media, new or alternative mass media, owing to their multi-dimensional; political, social, and cultural, role. Yet, at the same time, they carry or promote of one of the sources of threat to the national security of countries and societies, given that some individuals utilize

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these platforms negatively to spread rumors and malicious lies. Rumors remarkably have benefited more than ever from the modern means of communication and mass media, as they can be the cause of social, economic, or political collapse, and spread terror, fear, and social chaos, which also have several consequences. The tensions that take place in societies nowadays are, in fact, caused by the electronic rumor as well as the masses who believe it without confirming the authenticity of the information and the circulating news. Although digitization has not left any space for obscurity and ambiguity regarding the amount of knowledge and information that we can obtain from reliable, and official, sources. As a matter of fact, even the recipient is considered responsible for investigating facts. The chaotic, unconditional, and not legally and ethically controlled abundance and diversity of information created a fertile ground for the spread of rumors. However, due to the demands of several parties and official and social bodies, there have been many attempts to prevent this phenomenon which had – almost clear – repercussions on the security and stability of societies, through attempting to adapt laws which condemn these deeds and crimes. Additionally, digitalization – and its positive aspects – has also been able, thanks to its applications and software, to create programs to process and investigate the legitimacy and truthfulness of information. However, these attempts remain lacking in comparison to the upsurge of electronic rumors that spread daily through social media platforms and its dangers. In this respect, we attempt to research the topic of electronic rumors and the technical and legal prevention methods.

1. Objectives of the study:

This study aims: to know the nature of the electronic rumor

To define methods and mechanisms of spreading them

To know the mechanisms used to prevent the spread of electronic rumors

To define the role of the Algerian law in confronting and preventing the spread of the electronic rumor

To pinpoint the standards and methods of spreading electronic rumors

2. Terminologies

1.2. Definition of Rumor:

There are several definitions of the term “rumor,” but what these definitions have in common is that rumors include unconfirmed information emanating from uncertain origin and dubious veracity, and which is publicly disseminated. It may comprise elements of truth as well as unsubstantiated claims. The rumor may be positive or negative. The rumor might be true, such as unconfirmed bad or good news disseminated prematurely by unofficial sources. The scholar Robert Knapp, who encouraged the US Office of Strategic Services (OSS) to use rumors as a weapon in World War II, defined rumor as: “a referential, situational suggestion or belief without official confirmation.” (Andrew Hiles, 2014, p)

The talks, narratives, and news disseminated by people without confirming their validity or verifying their veracity. It is a private idea which is believed by people, communicated by one person to another, and happens through words spread among people without being based on evidence or a witness. It is news of doubtful authenticity and whose origin cannot be verified. It is related to important topics to the addressed audience, and their belief and dissemination of it weakens their morale. (Azzam Mohammad, Jouaili, 2014, p 142)

2.2. Definition of electronic rumor

The electronic rumor is a destructive communication pattern with questionable purposes. It is promoted and disseminated through modern technological communication means. Either it carries part of the truth, demeans its importance, or it is actually false, which makes it a topic for discussion, debate, and chat in the virtual community of Internet users. It also appears in the form of content which is published without being confirmed through technical means, and electronically processed through information network website or information software, to influence users. (Nabila, Rezzagui, 2021, p. 380)

2.3. Technical methods

Technical methods are deemed an independent science with its own origins, theories, and objectives. As well as an applied science that aims to apply knowledge related to human life. It is comprehensive, i.e., it includes inputs, processes, and outputs. It incorporates all development, design, and management processes. It is systematic, that is, it is concerned with systems and their outputs. It aims to solve problems, and it is maintainable and evolving (mawdoo3.com)

2.4. Legal methods

Legal methods are a set of compulsory rules which regulate the relationships of individuals within society. They require the presence of a public authority to impose penalty. It is the rule or set of rules that regulate a specific issue or activity. (www.mohamah.net)

3. A comparison between electronic and traditional rumors

Electronic rumors derived their specificity from technology and the digital revolution that the world has witnessed, which distinguished it from traditional rumors. The differences between the two are demonstrated below:

- **Quick delivery to the recipient:** one of the aspects of the traditional rumor is slow transmission, unlike the electronic rumor which spreads in more than one geographical area, and may even surpass the national borders of the country.
- **Direct influence on the recipient:** the traditional rumor may be subject to some distortion during its circulation which makes it lose its influence. The electronic rumor, however, usually maintains its initial form in order to influence its recipients. It is made more believable by using methods such as the insertion of various effects that increase the recipient's belief of its genuineness.
- **Increasing numbers of recipients:** traditional rumors usually remain confined to a circle and geographical area, unlike the electronic ones, which are characterized by their quick dissemination through the Internet, owing to the latter's availability and universality so that anyone in the world can have access to it.
- **Relatively stable content:** compared to traditional rumors circulated by people in their private gatherings, which are subject to change and modification through deletion and addition, electronic rumors follow a different method. The recipient who becomes a disseminator performs one single role, which is copying, pasting, or forwarding without changing the content, and this makes the latter relatively stable. (Nabila Rezzagui, 2021, p.381).

4. Characteristics of electronic rumor:

There are several characteristics that distinguish electronic rumors from other rumors that spread in gatherings and workplaces. We sum up these characteristics below:

- **Quickness of circulation:** it is transmitted among the recipients very rapidly especially if it was spread through modern means of

communication, and particularly those related to social media and the use of smartphones, which leads to the growth of the number of rumor recipients.

- **Nature of content:** generally, rumor content is disseminated among individuals. However, as far as social media rumors are concerned, the content is relatively stable because the recipient may sometimes convey it as it is or with additions and modifications. (Mohammad Mansour, Al-Baba, 2020, p.17)

- **Large number of recipients:** receiving and disseminating it with ease.

- **Absence of borders:** electronic rumors can reach and cross all the borders. (Abdelkader bin Abdallah, Al Fantoukh, 2014, pp. 168-169)

- **Cost:** the dissemination of electronic rumors does not require any expenses, since it does not cost much.

- **Influence:** the influence of electronic rumors is stronger on the target audience than that of traditional rumors.

- **Remote interaction:** it has a remote interaction feature, since it can be disseminated through audio recordings, chat, tweets and posts.

- **Universality:** even though it might be directed to a particular social category or audience, it is not demarcated by specific geographical area or political system.

- Liable to adjustments and changes: (Al Daidamouni, Al Cherbini and Sami, Mohammad, 2020, p 367)

5. Criteria of electronic rumors dissemination

- **The importance of the topic:** the importance of the topic of the rumor to the listener, reader, viewer, or to the social media community as a whole.

- **Lack of official information on the topic:** lack of reliable and official information from official authorities and mass media, the ambiguity of some topics, as well as doubts ensuing from the existence of false information, the slow process of clarifying information related to important or urgent matters, failure to keep things under control, mainly during crises and disasters. The mass media may greatly contribute to fabricating facts and events, and blurring the image, creating curiosity among the public. (Marina Zheltukhinaa, Gennady G, p 10584)

- **Not understanding the course of events and news:** by the target audience due to the tense situation they undergo. (Ibrahim, Ahmed Abu Arkoub, 2003, pp. 81 - 82)

- **Fake accounts with false names** whose purpose is to publish personal secrets and information of some public figures, in order to gain the largest number of followers, obtain views, making advertisement contracts, earning money, and creating a fortune.
- **Special pages created by some parties** for the purpose of distributing and promoting a certain ideology, targeting public figures or parties, and which are deemed a fertile land for the transmission and dissemination of rumors.
- **Personal accounts that share news** from unreliable websites on the Internet, although not highly reliable such as blogs and forums
- **News from unknown and anonymous origins**, comes from the mass media, is inconsistent with the truth, it usually consists of speculations to test the public's reaction towards a certain matter. (Reda Abdelouajed Amin, 2016, p. 437)

6. The effects and drawbacks of electronic rumors on society

- Depleting society in terms of thought, and exhausting precautionary plans at the level of the individual and society.
- Creating problems based on illusion and exaggeration, which influences future expectations, given that it is necessary to expect the best and prepare for the worst.
- Creating psychological problems, attacking the target community, and trying to blackmail it either through absolute comfort or absolute risk.
- Rumors directly influence the mindset and tendencies of society: which influences their mental well-being, and slowly but surely, individuals will be discouraged, which directly impacts their productivity, and also indirectly affecting the national security, since made-up rumors, whether negative or positive, create chaos and confusion within society.
- Rumors increase the level of doubt in the credibility and reliability of the competent authorities and decision-makers, since rumors always spread dread and terror in the hearts of expatriates residing in the country where these rumors circulate.
- Rumors render the public opinion into a misleading opinion and a down force that controls the government and its decision-makers, since it is a social force that has an effect on the enacted laws and provisions. This leads to urgently approving laws or postponing the withdrawal of others, in a way that harms the public interest, falsifies

facts, and leads to rights being taken away. (Djamila Kadem, 2022, p. 309)

- Rumors are dangerous in various ancient and modern human environments and societies. Hence, they influence security and stability, mainly during crises, given that with great uncertainty, the number of rumors increases and their spread rises.

7. The danger of spreading electronic rumors

Similar to the electronic rumor's objectives and purposes, its danger is varied. It has political, economic, military, social, and psychological dangers, which are mentioned below:

- The attempt to confuse decision-makers by slowing down or rushing to make decisions concerning some important matters.

- To defeat the internal front and dismantle it.

- To spread a defeatist spirit and influence public confidence during the war by spreading rumors about the uselessness of military efforts.

- It speaks to the human heart and emotions, so they irrationally act upon impulse.

- To stimulate division within society or weaken its belief in its morals and values, as it seeks to create tensions within teamwork in order to impede achievements (Mohammed, Abderraouf, 2019, no page)

- In the case of a new disease outbreak, not only do health systems globally face major challenges, but this also results in the augmented circulation of many rumors and misinformation regarding the etiology, consequences, prevention, and treatment of the disease. The dissemination of such misleading information would conceal healthy behaviors and promotes wrong practices. (Hoimonty Mazumder, Samia Tasnim, Mahbub Hossain, 2020, pp. 171-174)

The dissemination of rumors may result in long-term mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder, panic attacks, feelings of guilt, or suicidal tendencies. (Nayana Ambardekar, 2020)

- Absence of sense of security: because the rumor leaves individuals struggling in a vicious circle of fear, affecting the economic, social, and psychological aspects of their lives. This happens in the absence of the necessary mindfulness to confirm the information before believing it. (Akinlolu Makinwa, 2012, p 9)

8. Electronic rumors and prevention methods

Electronic (or digital) rumors must be fought with the same weapon, that is, with digital tools that monitor their origins and strengths, and respond with a counter-offensive. This can be achieved via the participation of the public in limiting and confirming the validity or

invalidity of the received instant messages, through playing on their interest in constant participation, as well as providing them with simple free and multimedia tools to fight and control rumors.

- Media culture and the public: it is necessary to highlight the culture of responsibility, the importance of facts, and the responsibility of the disseminator in spreading unconfirmed information. It should be understood that whoever helps in the dissemination of any rumor is no different than the one who created it and exposed it to people. The majority of those who practice digital media as a hobby via social media platforms do so instinctively, and not according to systems and laws or experience in the field of media

. (Akinlolu Makinwa, 2012, p 8)

- Artificial intelligence applications: which use advanced algorithms to analyze data and detect traditional fake news. (Wadie Mohammed Al Azazi, 2016, pp. 29-49)

- Digital tracking: the solution that not only detects the rumor, but also follows its circulation, tracks its source, and immediately and systematically verifies its components.

- Rumor control centers: are observatories equipped with the necessary technologies and applications to monitor the cyberspace and detect rumors, especially during crises and emergencies. Anouk, a researcher from the British University of York, pointed out – in his study about the spread of rumors on social media platforms – the importance of such centers in fighting misinformation, and providing citizens with authentic data in a timely manner through various means of media and communication, such as: websites, social network platforms, instant feeding services, e-mail, and text messages, as well as traditional mass media.

- Collaborative prevention: is based on the user's participation in confronting rumors by spreading awareness among users, and urging them to report dubious content.

- Digital reputation management systems: these are systems associated with public relations and corporate and business setting. However, they can be generally employed to detect trending topics, collect feedback on them, and write responses or counter content and post it. (Kadem Djamila, 2022, pp. 311-312)

9. Legal mechanisms for preventing electronic rumors in Algeria
The Algerian law considered the importance, status, and self-worth of the individuals and revealing their secrets is among the forbidden

matters owing to the people's privacy that must be preserved. The Algerian law also tackled honor crimes, violating people's self-worth, and revealing their secrets, in the third chapter of the third book, in its fifth section, in Articles 296 and 303. It covers defamation, insults, false reporting, and revealing secrets. What is common among all the previous offenses is the implication of each crime on the victim's self-worth, apart from the fact that they are all oral or written offenses, and according to the arrangement established by the Algerian law, we mention them as follows:

(Mohammad Sobhi, Najm, 2003, p. 97)

There are conditions that must be met in crimes based on rumors via social media, given that, if one of these conditions is absent, the crime legally and statutory inexistent. These conditions are represented by the material conditions and the moral conditions. Modern criminal techniques established the principle of the legality of crimes and punishments, or what is known as the principle of "every crime and punishment are governed by the law." This principle indicates that the organizer must determine beforehand the actions which are considered as a crime if committed by a person. Hence, the legal model of each crime is defined, as well as its punishment.

Even though the Algerian Penal Law does not literally mention the terms "rumor", "social media platforms" or "electronic rumor", they can be inferred from the provisions of some articles. In this respect, it was stated in Article 296 of the same Law that:

It is considered defamatory to allege an event that would violate the honor and self-worth of the defamed persons or entity, and this direct or reposted allegation is punishable, even if this was done on a suspicion, or if it the intended person or entity are not mentioned by name, yet it was possible to identify them through the way of speaking, shouting, threatening, writing, posts, banners, or advertisements.

Moreover, the punishments specified by the Algerian law for this crime differ depending on the nature of the person receiving the offense. As far as individuals are concerned, punishments are included in Articles 298 to 303. It is stipulated by Article 299 that insulting an individual or several individuals is punishable by imprisonment from 01 to 03 months and a fine ranging from 10.000 DZD to 25.000 DZD. The victim's pardon puts an end to criminal prosecution. If the victim is a public official, the punishment differs. It is stipulated by Article 144: whoever insults a judge, an employee, a public officer, a

commander, or a member of the public force via an utterance, a sign, sending or delivering anything to them in writing or drawing privately while performing their duties, shall be punished with imprisonment from two (02) months to two (02) years and a fine ranging from 1000 DZD to 500.000 DZD, or one of these two punishments.

When it comes to the President of the Republic, Article 144 stipulates that: it is punishable with a fine for insulting or slandering, whether by writing, drawing, statement, by any method of broadcasting voice or image, or by any other electronic, information or media means, while it is stipulated in Article 62 that: every Algerian who knowingly contributes to weakening the morale of the army or the nation, aiming to harm the national defense, commits the crime of treason and is punishable by death. (Official Gazette, 2006, p. 23)

Punishments for disseminating rumors are mentioned in the fifth section of violations of the individuals' honor and self-worth, their private life, and revealing their secrets.

Article 32: amends and supplements the above-mentioned Articles 298 and 299 of the ordinance No. 66-156 of Safar 18, 1386 corresponding to June 8, 1966, and written as follows:

Article 298: defamation towards individuals is punishable by imprisonment from two (02) to six (06) months and a fine that ranged from 25,000 DZD to 50,000 DZD, or one of these two punishments. Additionally, the victim's pardon puts an end to criminal prosecution. Article 303 bis. It is punishable by imprisonment from six (06) months to three (03) years and a fine ranging from 50,000 DZD to 300,000 DZD, to intentionally violates the sacredness of the individuals' private lives by any of the following means:

- By taking pictures, audio recording, or transferring private or confidential calls or conversations, without the permission or consent of the owner.
- By taking, recording, or transferring a picture of a person in a private place without the permission or consent of its owner.

The attempt to commit the crime stipulated by this Article shall be punished with the same penalties stipulated for committing the crime. The victim's pardon puts an end to criminal prosecution.

Article 103 bis. 1 the penalties stipulated by the previous article shall be enforced on whoever keeps, puts, or allows for audio recordings, pictures, or documents obtained by one of the acts

stipulated by Article 303 bis. of the same law, to be made available to the public or others, or to be used by any means.

If the press commits the crime stipulated by the previous clause, special provisions stipulated in the relevant laws shall be applied to determine the responsible individuals.

Article 303 bis. the court may forbid the criminal, who commits the crimes stipulated by Articles 303 bis. and 303 bis. 1, from exercising one or more of the rights stipulated by Article 9 bis. 1 for no more than five (05) years. The court may also order the publication of the conviction verdict according to the methods stipulated by Article 18 of this law.

The court shall order the confiscation of the items used to commit. (Official Gazette 2006, p 23)

Based on these demonstrated laws, we notice that the laws and regulations associated with the offense of spreading rumors and electronic rumors are not openly and explicitly mentioned in the Algerian Penal Law, but rather they are adapted from other similar punishments, such as crimes of violating someone's honor, defamation, and the use of tools and means or allowing their use, such as taking pictures, audio recording, and using documents to reveal information and news. Therefore, we conclude that the current set of laws does not keep up with the development witnessed by societies nowadays; which necessitates reconsidering the current laws, in order to diminish the spread of some electronic offenses and crimes inflicted by digitization. Making a judgment related to new crimes using old penalties neither achieves the intended purpose nor addresses the problem effectively.

10. Recommendations of the study

- Trying to take advantage of technology and use it to fight electronic rumors by detecting falsified information and news, such as developing applications to investigate fake information, news, and pictures. These applications actually exist as initiatives by some youth, yet it is better to use them, try to develop them, and benefit from them.
- Passing laws that keep up with technological development and its drawbacks, and enacting regulations that include clear and severe punishments to criminalize disseminating rumors and violating the nation's security and people's sanctity of on social media platforms, because the currently valid laws are adapted laws derived from old ones, and they most of the time, fail to determine the real, necessary

punishment for the disseminators of rumors and several other electronic crimes.

- Trying to fight rumors quickly and effectively in the cyberspace through attacking them immediately by official authorities before becoming trendy and the most searched topic in search engines, which increase the severity of the issue.

- Spreading awareness, through scheduling TV shows and programs, in the presence of law, sociology, and psychology specialists, and any entities capable of educating the public about the danger of being controlled by rumors, the necessity of confirming the truthfulness of the information before posting and forwarding it, referring to official news outlets, and not joining suspicious pages whose primary aim is to obtain higher numbers of views, even if this would lead to damaging the nation's security and reputation by falsifying facts.

- Official institutions and organizations should embrace the culture of reacting to rumors, and try to be more present in the virtual world on more than one social media platform. We notice almost complete absence of some official organizations, especially those associated with the national sector, from the virtual world, on social media platforms and networks, continuously and uninterruptedly. Preparing for urgent situations concerning rumors and their quick and effective prevention methods, as well as creating special entities with the purpose of keeping up with all novelties.

- Publishing media content, including news and dismissal of falsified news, about the organization.

- Spreading clear information and news in a way that prevents interpretation and multiple perspectives, and providing conclusive information, which may decrease the circulation of interpretations that sometimes pave the way for the rumor.

Conclusion:

Generally speaking, among the features of social media is the quick and widespread dissemination of news and messages. This is usually considered advantageous, however, when delving deeper into this we notice the huge amount of rumors and false information that circulate rapidly and widely on this network, which may be spread intentionally by some users to deceive other users, or unintentionally due to misunderstanding. In any case, this leads to clearly visible consequences, urging countries and governments to try to figure out solutions for this dilemma, which became the source of many social,

political, and economic crises, by trying to invent modern methods with the integration of technology, electronic programs, and algorithms, as well as enacting a set of laws through which they try to put an end to this phenomenon that characterizes this era.

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