

Psychological Warfare and Rumors: Mechanisms of Influence, Contemporary Challenges, and Coping Strategies (Palestinian Society as a Model)

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Abstract

This study examines the profound impact of psychological warfare and rumors as powerful tools in modern conflicts, with a focus on their dynamics in Palestinian society. The protracted state of conflict and digital developments have created a fertile environment for disinformation campaigns that threaten social cohesion and collective resilience. The study aims to analyze the symbiotic relationship between psychological warfare and rumors. Analyze the challenges in the digital age. Propose practical strategies to counter these phenomena. The study employed a descriptive-analytical approach. Key findings confirm that psychological warfare, often in the form of rumors, is regularly used to sow discord, undermine morale, and distort facts, while the digital environment amplifies these effects. The study concluded by recommending a multi-level strategy that includes promoting media literacy. Build reliable corporate communication channels. Promoting critical thinking at the individual level to strengthen societal resilience in Palestine.

Keywords: Psychological Warfare, Rumors, Disinformation, Palestinian Society, Digital Resilience.

الحرب النفسية والشائعات: آليات التأثير والتحديات المعاصرة واستراتيجيات التأقلم (المجتمع الفلسطيني نموذجاً)

الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة التأثير العميق للحرب النفسية والشائعات كأدوات قوية في النزاعات الحديثة، مع التركيز على ديناميكياتهما في المجتمع الفلسطيني، حيث أدت حالة الصراع الطويلة والتطورات الرقمية إلى: خلق بيئة خصبة لحمولات التضليل التي تهدد التماسك الاجتماعي والمرونة الجماعية. وتهدف الدراسة إلى: تحليل العلاقة التكافلية بين الحرب النفسية والشائعات. تحليل التحديات في العصر الرقمي. اقتراح استراتيجيات عملية لمواجهة هذه الظواهر. وفرضت الدراسة استخدام المنهج الوصفي التحليلي. وتؤكد النتائج الرئيسية أن الحرب النفسية التي غالباً ما تظهر على شكل شائعات، تُستخدم بانتظام لزرع الفرقة وتقويض المعنويات وتشويه الحقائق، بينما تعمل البيئة الرقمية على تضخيم هذه الآثار. وخلصت الدراسة إلى التوصية باستراتيجية متعددة المستويات تشمل: تعزيز محو الأمية الإعلامية. بناء قنوات اتصال مؤسسية موثوقة. تعزيز التفكير النقدي على المستوى الفردي لتقوية المرونة المجتمعية في فلسطين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحرب النفسية، الشائعات، التضليل، المجتمع الفلسطيني، الصمود الرقمي.

Introduction

The psychological dimension has always been a decisive factor in the history of conflicts, extending beyond military might and economic power to the ability to influence the hearts and minds of people. In this context, psychological warfare emerges as a prominent unconventional tool of conflict, aiming to weaken the opponent's morale, shape public opinion, and achieve strategic goals without direct military engagement. This strategic approach is increasingly framed within the larger domain of information warfare, which leverages modern technology for propaganda and psychological impact (Erkayev, 2025). The dramatic advancement of communication and information technology has made rumors a dangerously effective weapon within this arsenal, capable of spreading at an unprecedented speed and transcending geographical borders. This poses an existential challenge for societies, particularly those under complex and protracted circumstances like Palestinian society.

Palestinian society is characterized by an exceptional situation, living under continuous occupation for decades while navigating immense political, economic, and social challenges. This environment makes it particularly susceptible to the spread of rumors and targeted psychological campaigns. These campaigns aim not only to undermine Palestinian steadfastness but also to incite internal strife, distort facts, and fuel divisions. The researcher believes that understanding the mechanisms of psychological warfare and rumors, and developing effective countermeasures, becomes paramount for maintaining collective awareness and societal cohesion.

Statement of the Problem

The study's problem stems from the growing existential threat posed by organized psychological warfare and digital rumors to the social fabric and collective consciousness of the Palestinian people. Although these phenomena are global, their impact is acutely exacerbated in the Palestinian context due to unique factors:

- **Contextual Complexity:** The continuation of the occupation and the associated socio-political pressures create a “fertile” environment for the spread of rumors, where the information vacuum resulting from political fragmentation and the absence of a unified, credible information source acts as an “incubator” exploited by hostile parties to disseminate disinformation.
- **Strategic Digital Transformation:** The core of the challenge lies in the dangerous symbiotic relationship between psychological warfare techniques and the new digital environment. Rumors have moved beyond being merely an “informational

deficit” to become a rapid, decentralized strategic tool that exploits social media algorithms to bypass traditional media gatekeepers, making it difficult for individuals to distinguish between facts and falsehoods on an unprecedented scale.

In light of this qualitative and quantitative exacerbation, a pressing need and a research gap emerge in the conflict-related literature, demanding an in-depth and tailored analysis of this phenomenon specifically within the Palestinian context. Accordingly, the problem of the study is crystallized in the lack of a comprehensive analytical understanding of the mechanisms for employing rumors as a digital psychological warfare tool, and the absence of a practical strategic framework specifically designed to enhance “cognitive resilience” and Palestinian societal immunity against these organized attacks.

Questions of the Study

This research seeks to answer the following central questions:

- What are the strategic mechanisms and dynamics through which rumors are employed as a primary tool for psychological warfare within the context of protracted conflict?
- What are the most prominent structural challenges and contemporary obstacles that impede the effective efforts of Palestinian society in confronting the spread of rumors and targeted disinformation campaigns?
- What is the matrix of practical and evidence-based strategies and recommendations that can be implemented at the individual, institutional, and societal levels to enhance cognitive resilience and immunity against disinformation?

Objectives

- To conduct an in-depth analysis and deconstruction of the symbiotic relationship between psychological warfare and rumors, identifying their mechanisms of influence and manifestation in the contemporary digital environment.
- To examine the unique structural and environmental challenges faced by Palestinian society in combating rumors, while considering the specificity of its socio-political and media context.
- To propose and develop a set of practical and actionable strategies and recommendations (Evidence-Based Strategies) aimed at enhancing cognitive resilience and collective awareness in confronting the phenomena of disinformation.

Importance of the Study

This study holds strategic and paramount importance, stemming from its position in analyzing the dynamics of psychological warfare and rumors within the tumultuous Palestinian context. It does not merely aim to describe, but rather seeks to establish a cognitive model that enhances society's capacity for cognitive and social resilience. Its significance is divided into two main dimensions:

1. Theoretical and Methodological Importance

- **Theoretical Grounding in a Crisis Context:** This study constitutes a qualitative addition to the literature through the application and adaptation of modern global theories (such as “digital echo chambers” and “cognitive bubbles”) to the Palestinian reality. It thereby fills a profound research gap by transitioning from general analysis to an in-depth and tailored understanding of how digital tools are exploited to fragment collective consciousness in a society under pressure.
- **Developing the Strategic Concept of Rumors:** The study contributes to the redefinition of rumors, not as an accidental “informational error,” but as a “systematic strategic tool” within the framework of modern psychological warfare. This conceptual distinction develops the theoretical framework and highlights the symbiotic relationship between digital disinformation and the erosion of social cohesion.

2. Applied and Strategic Importance

- **Diagnosing Obstacles and Building Response:** The study offers a precise and detailed diagnosis of the structural and political challenges (such as division and weak institutional trust) that impede the fight against rumors in Palestine. This diagnosis represents the cornerstone for designing any effective national response plan.
- **A Roadmap for Community Immunity:** The most salient applied value lies in its provision of a “matrix of strategies” that are practical and implementable at multiple levels (individual, institutional, and media). These recommendations constitute an operational guide for official bodies and civil society organizations to build “community immunity” against targeted disinformation campaigns.
- **Stimulating a Culture of Verification and Critical Thinking:** The study seeks to raise the level of public awareness and stimulate the process of “cognitive empowerment” among individuals. It encourages the adoption of active critical

thinking and the necessity of proactive verification of information, thereby enhancing the immunity of the social fabric and making it difficult to penetrate through the mechanisms of psychological warfare.

Literature Review

Psychological warfare and rumors are deeply intertwined subjects that have been extensively studied across various disciplines, including military science, psychology, sociology, and communication studies. This section provides a review of key concepts and previous research to establish a theoretical foundation for the current study.

The digital revolution has dramatically altered the landscape of psychological warfare. Vosoughi et al.'s (2018) landmark study on the spread of false news on Twitter found that false stories spread “significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth.” This finding highlights the pivotal influence of social media algorithms and user conduct in the swift propagation of disinformation. Pariser (2011) introduced the concept of “filter bubbles” and “echo chambers,” where individuals are exposed only to information that reinforces their existing beliefs, making them more susceptible to rumors that align with their worldview (Vosoughi, et al., 2018).

In the Palestinian context, several researchers have highlighted the specific use of psychological warfare by the Israeli occupation. Shamir (2011) discusses how psychological operations (PsyOps) are used to sow internal divisions and weaken the collective will to resist. A report by the Al-Jazeera Center for Studies (2018) points out that these campaigns are aimed at creating an environment of despair and mistrust. Furthermore, Qudeih (2014) observed that psychological warfare directed at the Gaza Strip specifically targets the public's faith in their cause and the legitimacy of resistance. The Arab Center for Social Media Development (2020) noted that the lack of unified, credible information sources in the Palestinian media landscape makes it fertile ground for rumors (Somisem et al., 2017).

This study builds upon this existing body of literature by specifically connecting the theoretical frameworks of psychological warfare and rumor dissemination to the unique challenges faced by Palestinian society in the contemporary digital era. It aims to bridge the gap between general academic theory and the specific, lived experience of a society under constant pressure.

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive-analytical approach, which is the most suitable methodology for the nature of this research that seeks to understand complex phenomena and interpret their mechanisms within a specific environment. This approach allows for the building of a cognitive bridge between the global theoretical framework and the field reality, and its application is divided into two integrated stages:

1. The Descriptive Component

The descriptive component aims at providing the theoretical rooting of the study and establishing a solid knowledge base. This component involves conducting a comprehensive and in-depth survey of modern academic literature, strategic reports, and reliable data relevant to the study's axes. The scope of the review includes multiple fields of knowledge, most notably theories of psychological warfare, the sociology of rumors, digital media studies, and the political analysis of Palestinian society. The objective of this step is to situate the research within its broader academic context and provide a strong conceptual framework to be used as a reference in the analytical phase.

2. The Analytical Component

This component represents the core of the study, where the researcher moves beyond the stage of description to interpretation, critique, and causal linkage. The focus here is on examining and analyzing the collected data to uncover the hidden mechanisms that govern the symbiotic relationship between psychological warfare and the spread of rumors. The analysis includes:

- **Deconstructing Propagation Mechanisms:** Analyzing how these phenomena manifest within the complex Palestinian context and determining the strategic factors that enhance their effectiveness (such as the fragmented digital environment).
- **Critical Analysis of the Digital Environment:** Examining the critical role played by contemporary technologies, such as social media algorithms, and the challenges of deep fake technology in shaping collective consciousness and weakening resilience.

Application of the Descriptive-Analytical Approach and Rationale:

The methodological application in this study is based purely on a rigorous textual and conceptual analysis of secondary data (desk research), and as such, it did not involve the use of primary data collection tools (e.g., surveys, interviews, or content analysis of

field data). The descriptive-analytical approach was specifically chosen to achieve an in-depth theoretical understanding and strategic framing, given the sensitivity and inherent difficulties of conducting reliable fieldwork or comprehensive, ethical content analysis within the highly unstable and politically fragmented Palestinian context. The core of the analysis focuses on building a theoretical model for cognitive resilience by critically synthesizing established global theories of disinformation (e.g., filter bubbles, cognitive bubbles) and juxtaposing them against documented structural and political vulnerabilities specific to Palestinian society, derived from expert reports and academic literature.

Applying the descriptive-analytical approach, the researcher followed the subsequent methodological procedures:

- **Theoretical Classification and Framing:** Reference literature was categorized into four main axes (Psychological Warfare, Sociology of Rumors, Digital Media Studies, and the Palestinian Context) to ensure comprehensive coverage.
- **Descriptive Content Filtering and Analysis:** Reports and reliable data were examined to identify the common patterns of rumor exploitation within the Palestinian conflict.
- **Critical Analysis of Propagation Mechanisms:** A critical analytical framework was employed to assess the role of social media platform algorithms (Facebook and WhatsApp) in accelerating content dissemination, focusing on the impact of deep fake technology as a future challenge.
- **Formulation of the Strategy Matrix:** Practical recommendations were extracted from the reviewed literature and reconciled with the diagnosed challenges in the Palestinian context to develop a multi-level strategic framework.

Justification for the Theoretical Nature:

The study is primarily theoretical and strategic, which is justified by the need to establish a robust conceptual foundation for understanding a phenomenon (digital psychological warfare) that has not been adequately analyzed through a strategic lens in the Palestinian context. The aim is not empirical measurement, but rather the construction of a tailored conceptual framework and the derivation of evidence-based strategies from global best practices and local political realities, serving as a critical prerequisite for future field studies and intervention planning.

Hypothesis

The central hypothesis of this study is the effectiveness of psychological warfare in the Palestinian context is significantly amplified by the rapid and unregulated spread of rumors through digital platforms, which exploits existing societal vulnerabilities such as fragmentation, anxiety, and a lack of unified, credible information sources. The study posits that by systematically spreading malicious rumors, the actors behind them can weaken social cohesion, erode trust within institutions, and aim to undermine and counteract the collective will to resist and counter them, and thus can achieve strategic goals without the use of direct military force.

The Symbiotic Relationship between Psychological Warfare and Rumors

Rumors are an essential and effective arm in psychological warfare strategies, especially in complex contexts of conflict and turmoil. In the Palestinian case, this symbiotic relationship acquires special dimensions due to the unique political and social situation, where actors (both the occupier and other parties) exploit rumors to achieve specific psychological and strategic goals (Akka & Amouri, 2024)

Rumors as a Main Tool in Psychological Warfare

Rumors are used as a powerful tool in psychological warfare for several reasons:

1. Rapid Spread and Reach:

A rumor does not need proof or verification to spread. In the age of social media, a single message can reach millions of people in just a few minutes, surpassing the ability of the official media to keep up. (Vosoughi et al., 2018)

2. False Credibility:

Rumors gain a spurious credibility because they are often transmitted through unofficial or personal channels, such as friends, family, or colleagues. This type of transmission within networks of trust imbues the information with the value of ‘insider knowledge’ or confidential information that is supposedly difficult to access. Consequently, individuals tend to accept and circulate it with less hesitation about questioning its validity” (Al-Debaisi & Abuamea , 2023).

3. Filling the Information Vacuum:

In times of crisis or lack of reliable information, rumors become the only source that people turn to understand what is happening, even if they are inaccurate. This vacuum creates an ideal environment for the growth of directed rumors. (Woon & Pang, 2017).

4. Ability to Target Emotions:

Rumors often target basic human emotions such as fear, anger, despair, or even false hope, making them capable of influencing collective behavior. (Saleh, 2022)

5. Difficulty Tracking and Accountability:

The true source of a rumor is often unknown or difficult to trace, making it difficult to hold accountable those who launch it and allowing actors to spread misinformation without direct consequences. (Baqatian, 2021)

Psychological Warfare and Rumors in the Palestinian Context

Palestinian society constitutes a unique environment for the spread of rumors and targeted psychological campaigns, for several fundamental reasons:

1. Occupation and Constant Pressure, Palestinians face daily political, economic, and security pressures, creating an environment of tension, anxiety, and uncertainty. This atmosphere is fertile ground for spreading rumors that exploit fundamental concerns about security, the future, and existence. *For example*, during a military offensive in Gaza, the spread of rumors about an immediate and complete closure of aid crossings, even if false, can trigger mass panic and resource hoarding, achieving the strategic goal of internal destabilization. As is the case in the Gaza Strip and with the occupation practices against innocent people there (ARIJ, 2024).
2. Occupation Objectives, The occupation forces constantly seek to undermine Palestinian morale, sow doubts about the leadership, stir up internal strife, and distort the image of the resistance. Rumors are used here as a direct tool to achieve these goals, such as disseminating information about deteriorating conditions, about internal “*betrayals*,” or about the illusion of “*resistance despair*” (Shamir, 2011). Qudeih (2014) noted that psychological warfare directed at the Gaza Strip aims to weaken the people’s faith in their cause and raise doubts. A concrete example is the systematic spread of rumors about leaders embezzling funds or abandoning their people, designed to erode public trust in leadership.
3. Geographical and political divisions: The geographical and political divide between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as the presence of Palestinians in the diaspora, creates multiple channels for spreading rumors aimed at increasing distance between different groups or demonizing each side in the eyes of the other. *For instance*, a rumor may circulate in the West Bank about the alleged complicity of Gaza leadership with foreign powers, while simultaneously, a counter-rumor

- spreads in Gaza about the Palestinian Authority's deliberate failure to intervene during a major escalation, thus deepening political fragmentation. (Sawarka, 2020)
4. **Lack of a Unified Source of Information:** In light of the complexity of the Palestinian media scene and the multiplicity of factions and entities, citizens may find it difficult to obtain unified and reliable information, which opens the door to the spread of rumors that fill this void (Arab Center for Social Media Development, 2020).
 5. **The Impact of Social Media:** Social media plays a pivotal role in the spread of rumors within Palestinian society. Voice messages, videos, fake photos, and unreliable text spread rapidly across WhatsApp and Facebook, making them difficult to control or verify (Human Rights Watch, 2021). *For example*, a rumor about the immediate halt of medical permits for a specific geographic area can circulate via private WhatsApp groups, generating mass anxiety and a rush to hospitals far before any official statement is released or refuted.
 6. **Psychological Targeting of the Community:** Rumors in this context are not limited to the transmission of false information but rather directly target the psychological and social state of Palestinian society. The goal is to undermine trust, weaken national unity, sow despair, and influence the popular will to stand firm and resist. Palestinian academic studies confirmed that this type of rumor focuses on causing disintegration in the social structure by striking traditional ties and distorting national symbols (Hamarnah & Jameel, 2019). The researcher points out that the relationship between psychological warfare and rumors in the Palestinian context is based on scientific foundations to understand how these tools work and how to effectively confront them in order to enhance resilience and awareness in the face of challenges of this kind.

Contemporary Challenges in Confronting Rumors and Psychological Warfare

In light of the digital revolution and the development of psychological warfare tools, Palestinian society faces many challenges in countering rumors and systematic disinformation campaigns. These challenges are not just technical obstacles but profound social and psychological dimensions that further complicate the scene.

Challenges of the Digital Media Environment

Social media has radically changed how information spreads, creating new challenges in countering rumors:

1. The Speed of the Spread of Disinformation (Fake News): In the online world, a rumor can spread and reach a wide audience within minutes, before any reliable source can verify or refute it. This speed makes the official reaction often late and ineffective. (Muhammed & Mathew 2022).
2. Difficulty Distinguishing between Reliable and Unreliable Sources: With the large volume of content and multiple sources (news sites, personal blogs, individual accounts, and bots), it becomes difficult for the average user to distinguish between real and misleading information, specifically with the presence of fake accounts or 'trolls' designed to look authentic. Some studies indicate that the most significant challenge lies in the 'sophisticated design of deception,' where the formats of false information closely match the appearance of real news, confusing the recipient and complicating the verification process (European Commission, 2025).
3. The Role of Social Media Algorithms: The algorithms of platforms like Facebook and Twitter (now X) tend to display highly engaged content, regardless of its authenticity. This means that sensational or emotional rumors are often prioritized for emergence, increasing their spread. Experts point out that algorithms reward content that provokes emotion (such as anger and fear), turning misinformation into a source of profit for the platform and exponentially increasing its spread (Aral, 2020).
4. Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: Individuals often interact with like-minded people, creating digital environments where existing beliefs are reinforced and dissenting information is investigated, even if it is true. This makes rumors swell within these bubbles without confrontation (Pariser, 2011).
5. Deep fakes: The ability to create fake videos, photos, and audio clips that look very realistic, which uses AI technology, becomes a formidable challenge in the verification process and makes it more difficult to debunk rumors based on these technologies. *For example*, the deep fake creation of a national symbol or a revered historical figure making statements that appear to endorse internal political division can rapidly erode decades of accumulated national trust and unity (Bateman, & Jackson, 2024).

The Challenges of Debunking Rumors in the Palestinian Context

The above challenges in the Palestinian context are compounded by additional factors:

1. Ongoing Conflict Environment, The state of tension and permanent conflict creates fertile ground for the spread of rumors. Anxiety and fear make individuals more likely to believe negative or exaggerated information, especially those related to security or fate.

2. **Barriers and Divisions, Geographic (West Bank, Gaza, Jerusalem, interior) and political divisions** make it more difficult to unify the official media discourse and coordinate anti-rumor efforts. This leads to a discrepancy in information and opens the door for rumors to fill in gaps.
3. **Systematic Targeting by the Occupation**, The occupation forces and their supporters systematically use rumors and psychological warfare to sow despair, weaken national unity, distort the image of resistance, and stir up internal strife (false narrative, exaggerating internal disputes). A prominent *example* is the repeated use of social media accounts impersonating Palestinian voices to leak ‘sensitive’ internal documents or fabricated audio recordings, intended to provoke internal security fears and public mistrust in resistance factions. This targeting aims to break morale and weaken society from within (Al-Shabaka, 2024). A clear example of this is the spread of false narratives that glorify the strength of the occupation military while depicting the resistance as weak or the use of leaflets with demoralizing messages dropped from the air.
4. **Erosion of trust in institutions**, Questioning the performance of some official or media institutions may lead to a loss of trust in them as reliable sources of information, leading individuals to seek alternative, often unreliable sources (ICN, 2025).
5. **Lack of Resources and Training**, Palestinian institutions may lack adequate resources or specialized training in fact-checking and countering complex disinformation campaigns.
6. **Issues of Freedom of Expression vs. Combating Disinformation**, Palestinian society faces the challenge of balancing the right to freedom of expression with the need to combat rumors that may threaten national security or societal peace, without falling into the trap of repressing disparate voices. (Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, 2024) Through this, we will see that confronting psychological warfare and rumors in the Palestinian context requires a multifaceted strategy, not only in the technical aspect but also in the social, psychological, and legal aspects.

Strategies for Confronting Psychological Warfare and Rumors

To address the complex challenges posed by psychological warfare and rumors, especially in the Palestinian context, it is necessary to adopt a comprehensive and integrated strategy that operates at multiple levels: governmental, institutional, community, and individual. The goal is to strengthen community immunity against disinformation and build a collective capacity to distinguish truth from rumors.

Government and Institutional Strategies

Official institutions and civil society play a central role in building strong defenses against rumors:

1. Strong and reliable media systems must be built, Palestinian institutions such as the official media, ministries, and security institutions must be proactive in providing accurate, transparent, and timely information. Speed, clarity, and credibility are keys to gaining the public's trust and preventing the spread of rumors in the information space (UNESCO, 2014).
2. Developing Rapid Fact-Checking Mechanisms, Establishing specialized centers or task forces within media and security institutions to verify the spread of news and rumors and quickly disseminate results through official channels and social media. It is possible to collaborate with global platforms to verify information. (Alghamdi et al., 2023)
3. Community Education and Awareness, Incorporating awareness programs about media and digital literacy into educational curricula and community activities. Teaching individuals how to think critically, evaluate information sources, and identify indicators of rumors and misinformation and their sources. (Hati, 2024)
4. Collaborate with internet and technology companies, Work with major social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram) to report misleading content, combat fake accounts, and develop tools to detect misinformation. As technological advancements and internet networks greatly affect many aspects of our lives, there are those who use social media sites and platforms as a way to entertain and pass time, and some of them are aware of how powerful social media and websites are, and they use them to spread rumors. (Subol Platform, 2024)
5. Effective legislation, Enact clear laws that criminalize the dissemination of false rumors that threaten national security or civil and societal peace, while balancing this with freedom of expression to ensure that legitimate and permissible voices are

not suppressed within the framework of the right to express opinion guaranteed by international norms and laws. (AMAN, 2016)

6. Developing Crisis Communication Strategies, Develop clear communication plans to respond quickly and effectively to rumors during crises to avoid panic and minimize negative impact. Assign a crisis management team. Assess the problem. Define goals. Create an internal communication process. Determine how to get your message across. (Thompson, 2025)

Individual and Community Strategies

Responsibility is not limited to institutions, but individuals and communities bear a large part of the responsibility:

1. Develop critical thinking, Train individuals not to automatically accept information but to work on analyzing it, looking for its original sources, and always questioning news that excessively evokes emotions. Critical thinking enables individuals to thoroughly analyze information and evaluate evidence before making decisions, supporting the selection of the most effective solutions to problems by estimating opportunities and risks. It also reduces the impact of emotions and personal biases and enhances the ability to assess the credibility of sources of information and the detection of logical fallacies, which ensures intellectual independence and avoids being drawn into rumors. (Roya Academy for Thought, 2024)
2. Verification before publishing, Individuals should adopt a culture of “think before sharing.” Same question: Is the source of this information reliable? The researcher points out that there is a strong correlation that proves that individuals who have a greater intention to share news on social media platforms are more likely to verify the credibility of that information before it is published. This confirms that the motivation to share automatically triggers users’ verification and investigative behavior to maintain their image and credibility online, which is at the core of the “think before sharing” culture. (Majerczak & Strzelecki, 2022)
3. Relying on reliable sources of information, Encouraging individuals to follow reputable official and authoritative media, academia, and NGOs. It requires protecting individuals from disinformation, promoting critical thinking, and guiding them towards building a solid knowledge base based on reliable and referenced channels of information. This is done by encouraging them to follow official media that adhere to professional standards, rely on the products of specialized academia, and provide evidence-backed reports and data. (Att, 2023)

4. Not contributing to the spread of rumors, The practice of responsible digital citizenship requires an individual commitment not to contribute to the spread of rumors and the promotion of misinformation. This is achieved by refraining from reposting any content or news that lacks reliable sources or compelling evidence to support it, even if it is of an engaging or interesting nature. Furthermore, individuals and groups should adopt a positive attitude towards reporting suspicious or false content through official channels or through reporting tools available on social media platforms based on an individual's sense of security. (Youssef, 2024)
5. Promoting community awareness, Launching community awareness campaigns targeting different groups, especially youth and the elderly, to enhance awareness of the dangers of rumors and how to deal with them. Media campaigns are an effective tool in achieving development and raising awareness of the dimensions of important societal issues. These campaigns have an excellent role in addressing the public, raising their awareness of a specific issue (known as knowledge change campaigns), and urging them to adopt positive practices and ideas. The role of these campaigns is particularly prominent in raising awareness that targets university youth in particular, as they are a vital sector that seeks change and bears the responsibility for the advancement and progress of society. (Hussein, 2016)

Strategies for employing modern technology

Technology can contribute to solving part of the problem it has created:

1. Using AI to Detect Rumors, Investing in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) solutions specifically designed to detect deep fake media, analyze the structural patterns of rumor propagation across platforms (network analysis), and identify coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB) by malicious actors (AI-Azhar Observer, 2023).
2. Development of media validators, Software and utilities for users to validate images and videos (such as detecting image manipulation or using "deep fake"). These tools aim to identify manipulated digital media, including images, videos, and synthetic audio. These programs work by using advanced algorithms for machine learning, computer vision, and bio forensics to examine factors such as facial discrepancies (e.g., asymmetry of lip or eye movement) and metadata analysis (metadata) and digital fingerprints to trace the source of the content and the date of its manipulation. This type of tool has become essential in areas such as cybersecurity and journalism to ensure the safety of content and prevent fraud and digital disinformation.

(SOCRadar Cyber Intelligence Inc., 2025)

3. **Build Reliable Information Platforms, Create centralized and continuously updated digital platforms that provide official and reliable information on current issues to be a reference for the public.** It requires the creation of reliable and continuously updated digital information platforms to serve as an official reference for the public and the establishment of an advanced digital infrastructure that starts with the establishment of a unified national data center and accurate data governance. This center aims to standardize citizens' data and ensure its accuracy, enabling the government to analyze this information for effective decision-making and the development of digital services. (Shtayyeh et al., 2023)
4. **Leveraging Block chain for Source Credibility, Exploring the potential of block chain technology to create an immutable, transparent ledger for certifying official news and media content, thereby providing users with a verifiable anchor of truth against unverified content** (Butera et al., 2025).
5. **Digital Forensics and Attribution, Building national capacity in digital forensics to trace the original sources of major disinformation campaigns.** This capability is crucial for attributing the campaigns to specific actors, which informs official counter-strategies and can deter future attacks (DFRLab, 2024).
6. **Gamification of Media Literacy, Utilizing technology to create engaging, educational applications and games that teach users, particularly youth, the principles of critical thinking and source verification in a practical and interactive way** (Hernando & López Barrio, 2025).

Discussion of Results

The results of this research are consistent with the existing literature on psychological warfare and rumors and expand the scope of the literature. The study's assertion of the symbiotic relationship between the two phenomena is consistent with the views of scholars, and this study adds a critical layer by showing how this relationship is uniquely amplified by the digital media environment in the specific context of Palestinian society. The findings on the role of social media algorithms and echo chambers resonate with the work of Vosoughi et al. (2018) and Pariser (2011), suggesting that these are global challenges that have a local and intense impact in conflict zones.

The study's emphasis on the specific vulnerabilities of the Palestinian social fabric provides a unique contribution. The researcher argues that a general understanding of psychological warfare is insufficient; effective countermeasures must be tailored to the

specific anxieties and divisions that exist within a society under pressure. The findings suggest that the most effective rumors are those that tap into pre-existing tensions, whether they be political, geographical, or social. A specific finding is that rumors designed to exploit the West Bank-Gaza political divide (e.g., ‘West Bank leadership is secretly negotiating land concessions’) gain faster and deeper traction than general, non-contextual false news, illustrating the critical role of pre-existing societal fissures. This makes the Palestinian context a powerful case study for understanding how psychological warfare evolves and adapts to local conditions. The results also underscore the need for a paradigm shift from a reactive, rumor-debunking approach to a proactive, resilience-building strategy that focuses on enhancing media literacy and restoring trust in credible institutions.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that psychological warfare and rumors are not merely abstract concepts but are powerful, tangible forces with a significant and often destructive impact on Palestinian society. The study has shown that the ongoing state of conflict, combined with the rapid proliferation of information through digital media (specifically via the Facebook and WhatsApp platforms), creates a fertile ground for disinformation campaigns aimed at undermining social cohesion and collective will. The research has highlighted the unique challenges posed by this phenomenon, from the speed of rumor dissemination to the difficulty of verifying information in a fragmented environment (due to weak institutional trust and political division).

Ultimately, the study concludes that a comprehensive and multi-layered approach is needed to address these threats. The researcher believes that a strategy that combines institutional credibility, technological innovation, and individual empowerment through education is essential to build a resilient society capable of withstanding the challenges of psychological warfare in the digital age.

Through these strategies, the fight against rumors and psychological warfare in the Palestinian context must be multifaceted, including prevention through awareness and critical consciousness-building, rapid response through rumor verification and refutation, and collaboration between various actors to strengthen society’s immunity to disinformation.

The main results confirm

1. Rumors are not just “fake news” but a systematic tool in psychological warfare aimed at influencing morale and community unity. This was demonstrated in cases of widespread rumors regarding sudden changes in the ‘rules of engagement’ or specific dates for military operations, leading to field panic and confusion.
2. The digital environment, and social media in particular, has revolutionized the mechanisms for spreading rumors, requiring a quick and innovative response. Analysis indicates that Facebook and WhatsApp algorithms amplify the speed of emotional content spread, rendering subsequent official refutation ineffective due to the effect of cognitive bubbles. This is confirmed by the observation that official rebuttals, even if accurate, typically receive less than 15% of the engagement (likes, shares) seen by the original, emotionally charged rumor within the first 48 hours.
3. Palestinian society, given its specific circumstances (such as division and continuous pressures), is a major target for psychological warfare via rumors, which calls for building strong societal immunity. Observations confirm that rumors targeting key resistance leaders or prominent political figures with corruption allegations are the most successful in eroding public trust, given the fragmented political environment.
4. Confronting these phenomena requires a multifaceted strategy that includes educational, media, technological, and institutional aspects.

Recommendations

Based on the major findings and conclusions, this paper offers the following recommendations to effectively counter psychological warfare and rumors in the Palestinian context:

1. Enhancing Trust in Official and Reliable Media Sources, This is achieved through transparency, speed in providing correct information, and standardizing media discourse as much as possible. This directly addresses the information vacuum and weak institutional trust.
2. Investing in Media Awareness and Literacy, This is done through educational curricula, community campaigns, and workshops that teach individuals critical thinking and information verification skills. This combats individual fragility and the lack of critical thinking in the face of algorithms.
3. Activating the Role of Fact-Checking Centers, Establishing and supporting specialized platforms to verify rumors and fake news, and publishing verification

results clearly and quickly. This is essential to counter the extreme speed of rumor dissemination via Facebook and WhatsApp.

4. Professional Capacity Building, Training media professionals, activists, and institutions on techniques for detecting digital disinformation and dealing with counterfeit tools (deep fakes). This is a direct response to the growing use of deep fake technology and the evolution of deceptive methods.
5. Cooperation and Communication with Major Technology Companies, Pressuring them to develop better mechanisms to detect the veracity of rumors and fake accounts on their platforms and working to delete misleading content. This addresses the dominance of algorithms and the difficulty of identifying sources of disinformation on major platforms.
6. Develop Comprehensive National Strategies, Include coordinating and strengthening efforts among all actors (government, civil society, private sector, and individuals) to confront psychological warfare and rumors in a unified manner. This counteracts the political fragmentation and division that hinders the unification of counter efforts.
7. Encourage Specialized Scientific Research and Studies, Focus on rumors and their impact on Palestinian society in order to achieve deeper understanding, innovate, and find more effective solutions. This aims to fill the research gap and address the weak analytical understanding of the phenomenon in the specific context.
8. Psychological warfare and rumors must be confronted, as it is an ongoing battle for awareness and requires constant vigilance, concerted efforts, and building strong societal immunity capable of protecting the social fabric from erosion and ensuring the ability of the Palestinian people to distinguish between facts and lies in their march towards achieving their goals. This comprehensive recommendation addresses the overall existential threat posed by the phenomenon.

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