



## Social Security Challenges in Post-Conflict Societies: An Analytical Study of Rumour Dissemination on Kurdish Social Media

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### Abstract

This study examines the challenges to social security in post-conflict settings, focusing specifically on the proliferation of rumors and misinformation via Kurdish social media platforms. The pervasive use of social media (driven by its interactivity, accessibility, and rapid information diffusion) has transformed these platforms into potent vectors for the dissemination of falsehoods. Within the framework of fourth-generation warfare, such digital environments have increasingly been exploited as instruments of destabilization, aimed at fomenting unrest and undermining both national and communal security. Employing a descriptive-analytical approach, the research investigates the characteristics, mechanisms, and repercussions of rumor dissemination in online spaces. Findings indicate that social media has evolved from a medium of interpersonal communication into a complex ecosystem facilitating the widespread circulation of misinformation. The study categorizes various types of rumors, emphasizing the diverse motivations and socio-cultural gratifications underlying their propagation, which vary across different societal contexts. The detrimental outcomes include social fragmentation, erosion of public trust, and heightened collective anxiety, fear, and violence. Within Iraq and the Kurdistan Region societies, social media rumors have played a critical role in destabilizing civil peace, exacerbating internal conflicts, undermining confidence in public officials, and intensifying sectarian and ethnic divisions, thereby threatening national cohesion and social stability. The study advocates for the development of a proactive media strategy aimed at educating the public about the hazards of misinformation and its implications for social security. It further recommends that media organizations prioritize accuracy and transparency, foster inclusive public dialogue, and support the establishment of independent bodies dedicated to monitoring and analyzing rumors. Additionally, the enforcement of stringent legal measures against individuals who deliberately spread false information that endangers public security in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region is urged. Ultimately, the research underscores the dual role of social media platforms as a primary information source revitalizing public discourse, while simultaneously serving as a conduit for rumors that jeopardize institutional trust and societal stability in fragile post-conflict contexts.

**Keywords:** Social Security, Social Media, Rumors Dissemination, Post-Conflict Societies, Kurdistan Region

### 1. Introduction

The spread of rumors, misinformation, and fabricated news is not a new phenomenon; rather, it has been embedded within human communication since antiquity. These narratives have historically mirrored the psychological, socio-political, and economic conditions of the societies from which they emerged. In contemporary times, however, particularly in fragile and post-

COVID-19 pandemic, various actors leveraged social media platforms to question the transparency of the Kurdistan Regional Government concerning reported infection rates, alleging that lockdown measures were strategically implemented to suppress political opposition (Hussein *et al.*, 2025; Qaradakhi & Aivas, 2020; Karkari, 2020; Aivas, Saeed, & Khafoor, 2020) <sup>[35, 42, 17]</sup>. This phenomenon aligns with Aivas's (2021) critical analysis of journalistic narrative manipulation in transitional political contexts, wherein competing factions utilize digital media to advance particular agendas, frequently undermining social stability in the process. Within this framework, the current study seeks to investigate the nexus between the dissemination of rumors on Kurdish social media networks and their broader implications for social security. Drawing on Aivas's (2019) <sup>[20]</sup> conceptualization of media intrusion and the ethical voids in post-conflict journalism, the study systematically examines the typologies, origins, motivations, and societal consequences of digital rumors within the socio-political milieu of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. The significance of this study is twofold, encompassing both theoretical and practical dimensions. Theoretically, it addresses the critical issue of rumor propagation through social media, a process accelerated by rapid technological advancements, and the ongoing evolution of digital communication channels. The complexity of this phenomenon is compounded by the diverse objectives underlying rumor spread and the considerable difficulties associated with its regulation and verification. Additionally, the study emphasizes the pivotal role of social media in shaping public discourse in Iraq at large and the Kurdistan Region in particular. Recent statistics reveal an unprecedented increase in social media engagement among Iraqi citizens over the past two years, accompanied by growing reliance on these platforms as primary information sources. Practically, the study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how rumors circulate via social media (the most accessible and influential communication tools for broad segments of the population) and evaluates the subsequent effects on social cohesion, interpersonal trust, and societal stability. Furthermore, it aims to elucidate the fundamental nature, causes, and content of rumor dissemination while proposing viable strategies to mitigate its proliferation and address the attendant threats to security within both the Kurdistan Region and Iraq. Accordingly, the study pursues several core objectives: conceptualizing and contextualizing key terms such as rumors, social media networks, and social security; characterizing the defining features of rumors propagated online; classifying the various rumor types prevalent on social media; identifying principal sources of rumor origination; analyzing the mechanisms and processes involved in rumor generation and amplification; investigating the motives and intended outcomes behind misinformation spread; assessing the impact of rumors on social security and societal resilience; and recommending effective countermeasures to confront and manage rumor propagation within digital environments. Moreover, the research endeavors to address the following questions: How are rumors, social media platforms, and social security conceptualized and interconnected? What are the predominant characteristics of rumors on social media? Which types of rumors are most frequently circulated? What are the main sources contributing to rumor dissemination? Through what mechanisms are rumors constructed and

spread? What motivates the intentional distribution of rumors? How do rumors on social media affect social security and public confidence? And what interventions can be implemented to effectively counter the spread of rumors on these platforms?

## 2. Research Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically anchored in Jürgen Habermas's Public Sphere Theory, initially articulated in his 1962 work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. The theory aims to conceptualize the development of public opinion and the socio-cultural factors influencing its formation (Aivas, 2017; Wu, 2005, p. 24) <sup>[19, 55]</sup>. Habermas defines the public sphere as a conceptual or virtual domain (rather than a fixed physical location) comprising individuals who, through shared characteristics, come together as a "public" to deliberate societal needs in relation to the state. This sphere is seen as the foundation of public opinion and requires the legitimacy of authority to facilitate democratic engagement. It is expressed through behavior and dialogue, emphasizing matters of public concern and serving as an ideal democratic model (Khidr, 2009, p. 8). Habermas further argued that the effectiveness of the public sphere depends on key democratic attributes such as inclusivity, accessibility, and autonomy. Citizens must be free from coercion, domination, and exclusion, and the public sphere must foster equality, mutual understanding, trust, and transparency in media communication within an enabling social environment. He outlined three defining features of the public sphere and its expressive mediums: (1) Open Participation: access must be universal and non-restrictive; (2) Equality among Participants: all voices must hold equal weight; and (3) Debatability of Issues: topics must remain open for discussion and contestation (Ismail, 2013, p. 60).

Historically, forums such as newspapers, salons, and books served as the primary mediums for public discourse. However, the advent of digital technologies has transformed these traditional arenas, enabling interactive engagement and public debate through new media platforms. This shift has given rise to the *virtual public sphere*, where discourse often unfolds beyond the reach of state control. The internet, in particular, has become a critical space for political participation and societal transformation evidenced, for example, by its role in the Arab Spring uprisings. Although the legitimacy of the internet as a public sphere is widely accepted due to its accessibility, affordability, and social impact, debates persist regarding its consequences for democratic governance.

On one side, proponents argue that the internet advances freedom and democratization. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) <sup>[24]</sup> contend that digital platforms serve as democratic tools that empower individuals to bypass traditional media gatekeeping, facilitating citizen journalism and alternative forms of public discourse—especially on issues marginalized by mainstream outlets. On the other hand, critics highlight significant limitations. The digital divide—the unequal distribution of internet access across regions, social classes, and education levels—renders the virtual sphere exclusionary and potentially elitist (Aivas, 2025a; Schäfer, 2015, pp. 322–328) <sup>[7, 48]</sup>. Moreover, the internet has facilitated the proliferation of misinformation, radical ideologies, and hate speech, transforming users into vectors of disinformation and undermining the democratic promise of digital participation

(Carothers, 2015; Aivas, 2025b) <sup>[27, 8]</sup>. Drawing on this theoretical foundation, the present study examines the dynamics of the virtual public sphere as shaped by internet technologies and, more specifically, social media platforms. It investigates how this digital space operates as both a facilitator of democratic expression and a conduit for manipulation. The research focuses on how rumors permeate the public sphere through social media, often enabled by features such as information overload, anonymity, and lack of regulation. These conditions create opportunities for malicious behavior, including blackmail, identity theft, defamation, and the dissemination of falsehoods and hate speech. Such practices erode the democratic function of the digital public sphere. Ultimately, the rapid spread of rumors within these virtual environments reshapes public opinion and threatens societal stability and security.

### 2.1. Conceptualizing of Rumor

Etymologically, the Arabic term for "rumor" (*الشائعة*) is derived from the phrase "*Sha'a al-khabar fi al-nas*", meaning that information has spread widely among people, becoming public and well-known. As explained in *Lisan al-Arab* by Ibn Manzur, the verb "to spread" indicates the circulation and public dissemination of information (Jalal, 2024) <sup>[37]</sup>. A statement referred to as a "widespread rumor" implies that the information has reached a broad audience and is no longer confined to a select group. In this sense, a rumor involves the diffusion of speech—often originating from a word, phrase, or brief message that is orally transmitted. As it circulates, individuals may alter or embellish it, transforming it into a more elaborate narrative that can incite suspicion, fear, or mistrust within a community (Al-Kayed, 2009, p. 19). Though, there is no universally accepted definition of the term "rumor," due largely to its historical roots, evolving nature, and varying interpretations across scholarly disciplines. One of the most frequently cited definitions in Western academic literature is offered by American sociologist T. Shibutani, who conceptualized rumors as fabricated information that originates through collective discussion (Kapferer, 2007, p. 20). In this sense, Mierli (2014, pp. 33–59) <sup>[40]</sup> described rumors as a form of human communicative behavior consisting of broadly circulated statements, typically lacking a verifiable source. These statements often involve misinformation or the deliberate spread of falsehoods. In addition, Kazienko (2015, p. 58) defined a rumor as unconfirmed information concerning a relevant local or contemporary issue, often intended to influence public perception positively or negatively. As a result, Dayani (2016, p. 422) <sup>[28]</sup> emphasized the unverifiable nature of rumors, noting that their dissemination depends on both a willing audience and a source seeking personal or strategic benefit. He argued that the spread of a rumor is contingent on the recipient's need for information and the source's motivation to manipulate that desire. In the realm of digital communication, Rudat (2015, p. 2) <sup>[45]</sup> referred to "electronic rumors" as misleading or false information circulated through digital networks, often designed to provoke shock or alarm. In Arabic academic discourse, Hammoudi (2016, p. 145) defined rumors as intentionally disseminated falsehoods, spread with the aim of achieving particular objectives set by the originator. Similarly, Shafiq (2014, p. 120) characterized rumors as fabricated or distorted news that gains rapid traction within

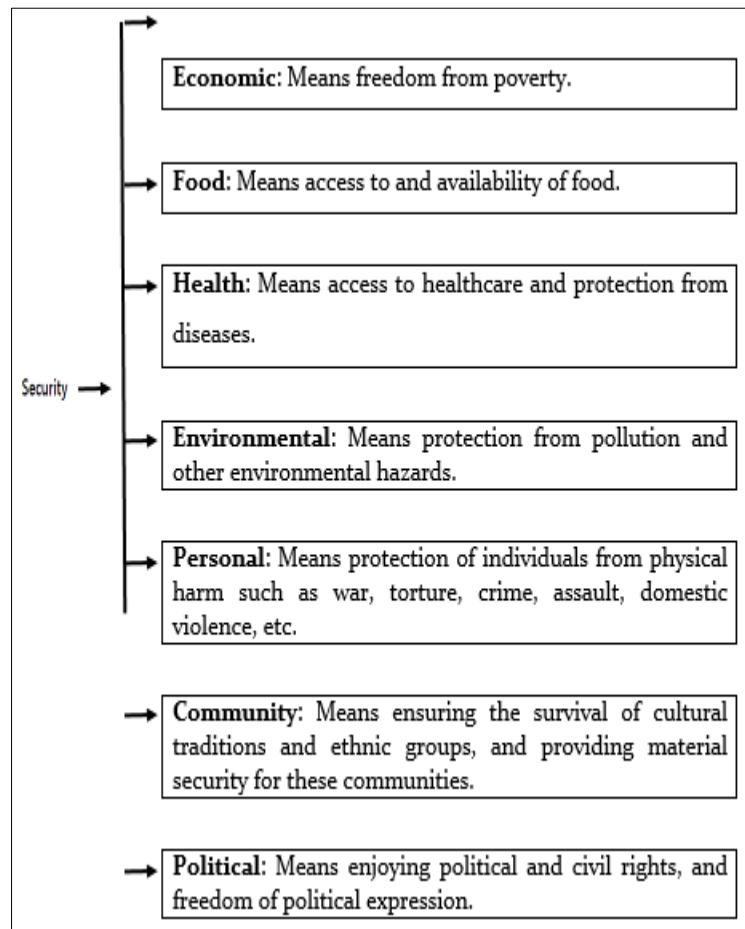
society, often perceived as credible and typically revolving around politically, economically, militarily, or socially significant themes. For that reason, Al-Harbi (2013, p. 21) offered a specific definition of electronic rumors as content (ranging from text and images to audio and video) disseminated through the internet, mobile devices, and social media platforms. These forms are drawn from various sources and tailored in structure and format to appeal to wide audiences. Despite the diversity in definitions, a shared understanding emerges: A rumor is commonly viewed as unverified or unverifiable information, often of unknown origin, and frequently manipulated by individuals or groups to serve particular interests. It typically involves the distortion or fabrication of facts, the spread of ambiguous yet impactful messages, and the strategic use of language and media to influence public perception. In this context, rumors are designed to evoke emotional responses, generate confusion, undermine trust, and shape attitudes in ways that benefit the source, whether politically, economically, socially, or militarily. Rumors propagate via various means, including oral transmission, written communication, traditional mass media, and increasingly through digital platforms such as social media. These messages may take the form of spoken statements, written texts, images, animations, or audiovisual materials. The overarching goal is to manipulate public opinion, prompting audiences to replicate and share the content, thus amplifying its impact in alignment with specific local, institutional, or global agendas (Aivas *et al.*, 2025a) <sup>[7]</sup>.

### 2.2. Conceptualizing Social Security

According to *Lisan al-Arab* by Ibn Manzur, the Arabic term for "security" (*الأمن*) is derived from the root words aman (safety) and amanah (trust), conveying meanings such as "to feel safe" or "to provide safety for others." The term stands in direct opposition to fear, as illustrated by the phrase "Amina fulan," meaning someone has found a sense of safety. It also denotes seeking refuge or protection (Ibn Manzur, n.d., p. 21). Linguistically, then, security signifies tranquility, the absence of fear, and is closely linked to faith and trust. In Islamic scripture, the concept of security appears repeatedly, often symbolizing spiritual assurance, trust, and divine protection. For example, the Qur'an references a city "secure and at ease" that ultimately faces hardship due to its ingratitude: "And Allah presents an example: a city which was secure and at ease, its provision coming to it in abundance from every place, but it denied the favors of Allah. So Allah made it taste the garb of hunger and fear because of what they used to do." (*Surah An-Nahl*, 16:112). Another verse affirms divine protection: "[He] who has fed them against hunger and made them safe from fear." (*Surah Quraysh*, 106:4) Hence, in a conceptual sense, security is a condition wherein individuals are safeguarded from danger or threats. More profoundly, it is not only an external state but also an internal experience of psychological assurance—resulting either from the absence of threats or from one's capacity to face them (Al-Yasiri, 2018, p. 13). Historically, the notion of security has been primarily approached through political and military frameworks. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, dominant scholarly and policy discussions centered on national security, positioning the state as the primary referent. However, this paradigm began to shift during the 1990s, with increased attention directed toward

individual-centered approaches. This gave rise to a broader conceptualization of security (particularly social security) as a critical concern, especially in response to widespread global insecurity and instability (Tawahriya, 2020, p. 626). In this sense, social security is a multifaceted and intricate concept that cannot be adequately explored without reference to specific indicators that reveal its practical expressions. For the purposes of this study, an operational definition is informed by key international research, notably the 1994 Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This landmark report was the first to articulate a comprehensive and human-centered perspective on security, placing strong emphasis on its social dimensions (Arafa, 2004, p. 203). For that reason,

the report outlines seven core dimensions of human security: Political Security, Economic Security, Cultural Security, Social Security, Health Security, Environmental Security, and Food Security. Among these, social security is highlighted as a foundational component. The end of the Cold War prompted a reconceptualization of traditional security, moving the focus away from military and nuclear threats toward human security, which prioritizes the protection of individuals and communities from socio-economic and political vulnerabilities. From this perspective, insecurity arises not only from warfare or state conflict but also from poverty, social exclusion, inequality, and the failure of institutions to meet basic human needs (Aivas *et al.*, 2025b) [8].



**Fig 1:** Dimensions of Security in the Human Development Report Issued by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Within conceptualizing social security in scholarly and policy discourses, the concept of social security is intricately linked to the daily challenges individuals' face, such as: food insecurity, unemployment, rising crime rates, and various forms of inequality, including ethnic and religious discrimination. In this context, the United Nations (1994, pp. 22–40) [53] defines social security as: “*The assurance of the continuity of customs, traditions, and ethnic communities, as well as the provision of material protection for these groups.*” This definition reflects an expanded perspective that positions social cohesion, the preservation of cultural identity, and material well-being as foundational to achieving sustainable social stability and peace. In international academic literature, several scholars have offered nuanced definitions of social security. Tran (2017, p. 31) [52]

conceptualizes it as a fundamental human right arising from social protections and contributing directly to community welfare. This form of security encompasses access to housing, nutrition, healthcare, and overall quality of life throughout an individual's lifespan. Similarly, Burgess and Stern (2017, p. 45) define it as the collective protection granted by society to individuals and groups, ensuring essential services such as income security and healthcare. Expanding on this, Enof and McKinnon (2016, p. 122) [29] emphasize that social security constitutes a set of strategies adopted by both developed and developing societies to mitigate risks, protect the social fabric, and serve as a vital tool for sustainable development and economic progress. In Arabic scholarly discourse, social security is framed within a community-centered and institutional context. Al-Kilani

(2012, pp. 11–12) describes social security as a collective commitment to mobilize all available means to preserve societal stability and protect both material and moral achievements. He identifies three core pillars—justice, equality, and equal opportunity—as essential conditions for maintaining social security. Their absence, he notes, leads to its deterioration. Within this framework, social security is understood as a comprehensive concept encompassing individual and collective protection, as well as the safeguarding of national unity, religious and intellectual cohesion, public institutions, and shared societal values. In addition, Muhammad (2016, p. 37) further interprets social security as the sense of belonging that individuals feel toward social units such as families, communities, organizations, or ethnic groups. These affiliations not only offer members a cultural identity and value system but also function as sources of emotional reassurance and practical support. From this perspective, social security involves both protection from social risks and the psychological relief that results from knowing such protection exists. Given these definitions, the study proceeds by exploring the political dimensions of social security, emphasizing its structural and institutional underpinnings. It is evident that social security plays a critical role across all domains of human life. However, its realization does not stem solely from achieving abstract values such as equality or justice; rather, it requires institutional frameworks capable of embedding and sustaining these principles within society. In other words, while agencies such as the police help maintain security, they do not independently generate it. Security is created by institutions like a fair judiciary and an equitable education systems, which cultivate civic values and community trust. To ensure social security, legislative, economic, and social institutions must implement practical policies that address key challenges such as unemployment, and enforce laws and governance structures that promote equality and inclusion. Achieving this objective depends on the collaborative efforts of all state institutions, each fulfilling its role to create a shared sense of safety and belonging within society (Aivas *et al.*, 2025c) <sup>[9]</sup>.

### 2.3. Conceptualizing Social Media

Social media has been defined in various ways across scholarly literature, with a general consensus on its function as a digital environment enabling user interaction, content creation, and network building. Someone characterizes social media as internet-based services that permit users to construct public or semi-public profiles within a shared system. These platforms allow individuals to generate lists of connections, access other users' connection lists, and interact within interconnected social networks (Al-Laban, 2011:86). Similarly, others define social media as a system of electronic networks through which users create personalized web pages and link them to others who share common interests and preferences, forming virtual communities (Al-Rawi, 2012:96). From a broader perspective, some scholars describe social media as encompassing a wide array of online platforms, including sites hosting digital audio, video, and visual content. These platforms collectively constitute dynamic forums for communication, engagement, and multimedia sharing (Assimakopoulos *et al.*, 2017:55–77) <sup>[21]</sup>.

Among the most notable social media platforms are:

1. **Facebook:** Recognized as the most widely used social networking site globally, Facebook was launched in February 2004 by a group of Harvard University students. It facilitates global connectivity by allowing users to form social ties, interact with peers, and join interest-based communities. Users can subscribe to networks (such as schools, workplaces, or geographic regions) and engage with others within these spaces. As of 2022, Facebook had surpassed 2.9 billion active users worldwide, maintaining its position as the leading social media platform (Statista, 2022; Al-Azazi, 2015, pp. 5–59).
2. **Twitter:** Introduced in 2006 by the American company Obvious, Twitter functions as a microblogging platform that restricts posts (tweets) to 140 characters (now extended). Tweets can be posted directly via the platform or through SMS. They are displayed on the user's profile or homepage, making content easily accessible to followers (Shaqa, 2014, p. 75).
3. **YouTube:** Launched in 2005, YouTube is one of the most influential video-sharing platforms globally. Registered users can upload unlimited video content for public viewing. Viewers can engage through comments, discussions, and rating systems (likes/dislikes), fostering an interactive digital environment (Shafiq, 2010, p. 213).
4. **WhatsApp:** Developed in 2009 by Jan Koum and Brian Acton (former Yahoo employees) WhatsApp is a messaging application that enables the exchange of text messages, multimedia files, voice messages, and geolocation data. The app stands out for its ad-free experience, ease of use, and integration with users' phone contacts. It ranks among the top-grossing iPhone applications in 47 countries and has been notable for facilitating the viral circulation of political, religious, and economic content; both factual and misleading (Aivas, Jalal, & Aziz, 2025; Zamel, 2014, pp. 110–113; Al-Sharif, 2014) <sup>[9]</sup>.
5. **Instagram:** Launched in October 2010, Instagram quickly gained popularity due to its user-friendly features, including photo sharing and customizable digital filters. Users can share content across various social platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. Acquired by Facebook in 2012, Instagram has since become a key component of Facebook's broader social media ecosystem (Salomon, 2013, p. 408) <sup>[47]</sup>.

In summary, social media platforms serve as powerful tools for communication, self-expression, and information dissemination. They play a central role in shaping public discourse, community formation, and the circulation of both verified and unverified content. As a result, this section is organized into three primary sections. The initial section explores the characteristics, classifications, and origins of rumors circulating on social media networks. The second section investigates the mechanisms through which rumors are formed, as well as the underlying motivations and objectives driving their dissemination on these platforms. The final section analyzes the consequences of rumors on social security and discusses strategies to mitigate their spread, concluding with key findings and recommendations.

### 2.3.1. Characteristics of rumors on social media networks

In terms of rumors characteristics with the progression of modern technologies, social media platforms have increasingly been utilized as channels for the dissemination of rumors. Research indicates that the prevalence of rumors correlates positively with advances in communication technology and the widespread adoption of social media among populations (Ghazi, 2016:30). Social media facilitates the exploitation of the digital space to distribute rumors in multiple formats, including newspaper excerpts, video clips, news reports, and caricatures, which are rapidly transmitted to extensive audiences (Al-Sharif, 2014:2). Several scholars, including Vu and Jung (2020)<sup>[54]</sup>, Murad (2018), Patil *et al.* (2020)<sup>[41]</sup>, and Hegazi (2018), emphasize that the primary driver of rumor propagation on social media is the accelerated pace of information flow. Unlike traditional rumors conveyed through private dialogues (where messages may be altered) social media enables instant transmission to large recipient groups, often with the mere click of a button. Abis (2021) notes that rumors disseminated via social media are characterized by their rapid spread and presentation of information frequently lacking clear sources, often ambiguous yet engaging, thus stimulating public curiosity and belief in their veracity. Rumors on social media possess distinctive features relative to other social phenomena, including (Al-Sharif, 2014, p.7): Speed: The dissemination occurs within minimal timeframes. Attractiveness: Rumors combine multimedia elements (sound, images, text, and movement) heightening public engagement. Wide Reach: They transcend national boundaries, posing greater risks due to their global accessibility. Low Cost: The financial burden of distribution is negligible or absent. Impact: Their influence often surpasses that of conventional rumors. Remote Interaction: Sharing is possible via voice messages, chats, or tweets. Global Reach: While not geographically confined, they may target specific demographics or groups. Modifiability: Digital rumors can be edited or manipulated post-publication, using video or image editing tools, in response to evolving events. In this sense, studies have identified certain platforms as predominant vectors for rumor dissemination. For instance, Al-Saida (2019) and Ishaq (2021) highlight Facebook as a major medium, while Al-Suwaidi (2022) identifies WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok as the most frequent channels. Within the Iraqi context, Harmoz (2021) finds Facebook to be the leading platform for rumors, followed by Twitter.

### 2.3.2. Types of rumors on social media networks:

Rumors manifest in various forms due to the complexity of social interactions and differing societal motivations. Categorization often depends on thematic content, as outlined by Al-Qaisi (2021, pp. 181–182):

1. Social Rumors: Related to societal issues, these rumors can undermine community cohesion by fostering hostility, especially within religiously diverse societies.
2. Political Rumors: Among the most perilous, these rely on exaggeration and sensationalism to sway public opinion and advance political agendas.
3. Economic Rumors: These emerge predominantly during financial crises, addressing matters such as price fluctuations, policy changes, or currency instability, aiming to influence economic conditions.
4. Religious Rumors: Designed to incite sectarian conflict

and destabilize social harmony, such rumors are prevalent in regions with religious tensions, e.g., between Muslims and Hindus in India or Sunni and Shia in the Middle East.

5. Security and Military Rumors: Targeting issues of national security and military affairs, these rumors seek to disrupt peace, erode social solidarity, and lower military morale.
6. Health Rumors: Concerned with public health topics, such as disease outbreaks or medication shortages, these provoke public fear and anxiety.
7. Scientific Rumors: Related to scientific findings or speculative topics, including apocalyptic narratives or unusual phenomena.
8. Entertainment Rumors: Frequently concerning celebrities and their personal lives, these attract widespread attention despite often lacking factual basis.

Within those types, empirical studies corroborate the diversity of rumors on social media. Research by Al-Suwaidi and Al-Amoush (2022) and Al-Saida (2019) reports social rumors as the most pervasive, followed by political and security rumors. Al-Toum (2017) classifies rumors spatially into local (limited scope and duration), national (affecting the broader community), and global (transcending borders). Al-Rawas and Al-Hays (2016) categorize rumors by target audience: individual (focusing on prominent persons), group (aiming to divide specific communities), and societal (impacting society broadly via external media). Zubiaga *et al.* (2018)<sup>[61]</sup> distinguish between long-term rumors that persist without verification and breaking news rumors linked to urgent, often misleading information. In Iraq, Harmoz (2021, p.25) identifies security rumors as the most prevalent, primarily concerning U.S. military presence, terrorism, ISIS activities, and fabricated crime reports aimed at generating fear. Political rumors frequently address foreign interference and domestic political dynamics, while social rumors focus on human trafficking, child exploitation, and related societal issues.

### 2.3.3. Sources of rumors on social media networks:

Every rumor originates from a source (be it an individual, organization, media entity, political party, or state actor) though such sources often remain anonymous. The motivations behind rumor propagation vary, with significant sources including: Governments and Politicians: Some employ social media to disseminate rumors or misinformation for political or ideological objectives, intending to influence public opinion or alter political beliefs (Reese & Lewis, 2009)<sup>[43]</sup>. Individuals and Interest Groups: Financial incentives can motivate individuals or groups to create and circulate rumors, frequently via fabricated news websites or social media pages. For example, during the recent U.S. presidential election, certain Macedonian youths admitted producing fake news sites aimed at attracting Trump supporters and generating revenue from web traffic (Silverman & Singer, 2016, pp. 1–36)<sup>[49]</sup>. Subcultures: Lewis and Marwick (2017) identify three online subcultures that manipulate information: trolls, who provoke conflict through inflammatory comments; hate groups, which promote animosity against races or religions; and conspiracy theorists, who create and share content endorsing conspiracy narratives (Ting & Song, 2017, pp. 57–58)<sup>[51]</sup>.

### 2.3.4. Mechanisms of rumor dissemination on social media networks

Various strategies are employed in the fabrication and dissemination of rumors on digital platforms, as outlined by Mustafa (2018, pp. 102–103):

1. **Use of Archived Images:** Rumors are often supported by repurposed images from unrelated events or regions, for example, using flood images from one country to depict a fabricated disaster in another.
2. **Comment Manipulation:** False narratives may be propagated through fabricated user comments or repeated comments by the same individual, aimed at shaping public opinion by simulating widespread support or consensus.
3. **Temporal Distortion:** Misrepresenting the timing of events (such as presenting past events or outdated statements as current) can mislead the public and reshape the context to fit a specific agenda.
4. **Selective Editing:** Video or audio materials, such as interviews or speeches, may be edited to isolate specific segments, thus distorting the original meaning or intent.
5. **Deliberate Mistranslation:** Some actors intentionally alter translations in news articles or social media posts to shift the meaning significantly, capitalizing on language barriers or public disinterest in verifying the original content.
6. **Caricatures and Visual Satire:** Rumors may be conveyed through illustrations or cartoons that are easily understood and emotionally resonant, often transcending language barriers.
7. **Digital Fabrication:** Advanced editing software is used to manipulate photos or videos, creating misleading visuals that falsely place individuals in specific settings or scenarios. While once primarily used in tabloid journalism, such techniques are now more prevalent and accessible due to digital media tools.

### 2.3.5. Motivations and intentions behind rumor dissemination on social media networks

Rumors tend to flourish during periods of instability (such as crises, wars, or emergencies) when societal anxiety and psychological tension are heightened. These conditions, coupled with socioeconomic challenges like poverty and unemployment, create an environment conducive to rumor propagation (Al-Harbi, 2013, p. 83). Academic studies, including those by Ishaq (2021) and Al-Rawas & Al-Hays (2016), identify multiple motivations for rumor dissemination: Alleviating boredom or passing time; Gaining attention or recognition; Demonstrating knowledge or expertise; Creating confusion or conflict; Promoting ideological or political beliefs; Diverting public attention from key issues; Defaming or discrediting public figures; Gauging public opinion on controversial matters; Instigating societal division; Reinforcing previously heard rumors; Seeking revenge or retaliation. In this context, some motives, though less common, may have a seemingly positive nature such as: spreading reassurance, promoting benevolent messages, or assessing public sentiment. With regard to objectives, Ishaq (2021, pp. 1853–1854) outlines several key goals behind rumor circulation:

1. **Demoralization of Opponents:** Targeting the moral integrity or cohesion of specific groups or institutions.

2. **Fostering Division:** Inciting hatred and undermining societal unity, ultimately weakening collective morale.
3. **Political Manipulation:** Discrediting political actors, questioning governmental legitimacy, and sowing distrust among citizens.
4. **Crisis Exploitation:** Leveraging economic instability, inflation, or unemployment to erode confidence in state policies.
5. **Opinion Testing:** Using rumors as informal tools to assess public reactions and influence policy-making processes.

Al-Qanawy (2021, pp. 17–46) argues that a principal objective behind rumor proliferation is to undermine state legitimacy and destabilize national security. Ishaq (2021) emphasizes that fear-mongering, especially during crises or conflicts, is a core motivation. Additionally, some rumors cater to people's aspirations or circulate myths and superstitions aligned with cultural narratives. In the Iraqi context, Al-Qaisi (2020) notes that political rumors are especially prevalent, often targeting political leaders and parties to damage reputations and manipulate public perceptions. Rumors about government officials seek to delegitimize their performance, while those targeting military personnel portray them as serving foreign interests. Likewise, religious and social figures are often subjected to defamatory rumors aimed at altering public trust and societal standing.

### 2.3.6. Determinants of rumor dissemination on social media networks

Eungenis (2013, pp. 22–24) <sup>[30]</sup> identifies several variables that influence the spread of rumors via digital media networks, such as:

1. **Credibility of the Source:** The perceived reliability of the source significantly influences how users receive and share information. Attributing rumors to authoritative figures—even falsely—enhances their acceptance.
2. **Argument Strength:** The intensity and quality of discourse surrounding a rumor affect audience perception. When access to reliable information is limited, individuals are more likely to accept the misleading narrative.
3. **Confirmation Bias:** Rumors that align with pre-existing beliefs are more readily accepted and shared, as they reinforce the individual's worldview.
4. **Preconceived Attitudes:** Personal biases toward the subject matter influence how individuals assess and respond to rumors.
5. **Social Consensus:** The likelihood of accepting a rumor increases when there is a collective endorsement or perceived group agreement.
6. **Message Involvement:** The degree of personal relevance and psychological engagement with a topic affects how likely individuals are to interact with and propagate rumors. Opinion leaders within a community also play a key role in amplifying or containing rumor spread.

Within those variables, rumors are frequently utilized by extremist groups and ideological movements to disseminate content that contradicts societal norms and values, thereby posing a broader threat to cultural cohesion and social order.

### 3. Research Data Collection

This research is classified as a descriptive study, which seeks to depict and analyze social phenomena. Specifically, it employs the descriptive-analytical approach, aiming to explore and delineate the features and dimensions of the phenomenon under investigation. Through systematic data collection and factual examination, the study seeks to objectively analyze how rumors proliferate on social media platforms and assess their implications for social security.

### 4. Research Data Analysis

This section provides an analytical examination of research data concerning the influence of rumors disseminated via social media on social security and explores strategies to mitigate their effects.

#### 4.1. The Impact of social media rumors on social security

Media functions as a critical intermediary between citizens and policymakers, facilitating constructive dialogue and reflecting public concerns in the decision-making process. It contributes significantly to social cohesion by safeguarding national unity and supporting democratic accountability through oversight of executive and legislative actions. Furthermore, media ensures public access to information concerning governmental processes, advocating for rights, freedoms, and collective welfare (Al-Dulaimi, 2009, pp. 190–193). With the advent of digital technologies, social media networks have emerged as a dominant communication tool, allowing widespread interaction across diverse societal segments. These platforms enable users to exchange ideas, express opinions, and participate in discussions on social issues in ways that surpass traditional media capabilities (Jain *et al.*, 2012, pp. 36–43) <sup>[36]</sup>.

#### 4.2. Risks of rumor proliferation via social media networks

Despite their advantages, social media platforms pose considerable risks when misused. Technological features such as image manipulation, video fabrication, anonymous account creation, and limited governmental regulation make verifying information difficult. These characteristics have been exploited by terrorist organizations and other malicious actors to disseminate misinformation, destabilize internal security, and cause harm at the individual, institutional, and national levels. Research underscores that rumors can have extensive negative repercussions. Rheingold (2013) <sup>[44]</sup> outlines several dimensions of these impacts:

- **Psychological:** Undermining public morale and eroding trust in societal norms.
- **Cognitive:** Distorting factual knowledge and weakening credibility of information sources.
- **Personal:** Influencing poor individual decision-making, with adverse effects extending to families and communities.

From a political standpoint, rumors can damage reputations and instigate hostility toward public figures, while attempts to refute them often lead to wider dissemination (Starbird & Palen, 2013) <sup>[50]</sup>. Socially, rumors generate fragmentation, incite fear, and promote misleading ideologies that encourage deviant behavior, ultimately threatening societal stability and cohesion (Al-Madani, 2017). Zaino (2017, p. 31) highlights how the viral spread of fabricated information on social

media—especially in times of crisis—has aggravated public anxiety and disrupted social order.

#### 4.3. Impact of rumors on community and intellectual security

Amin (2019, pp. 201–202) reveals that social media has adversely affected multiple areas of community security—particularly political, social, economic, religious, and media sectors. Key concerns include:

1. Encouraging sectarianism and promoting unconstitutional attempts to undermine state authority.
2. Facilitating cybercrimes such as blackmail and harassment through gender-based interactions.
3. Compromising cultural values and encouraging ideological infiltration.
4. Supporting extremism through recruitment, funding, and ideological dissemination by terrorist groups.
5. Circulating distorted religious interpretations and promoting sacrilegious narratives.

Studies on intellectual security, such as those by Aziz & Aivas (2025), Al-Qanawi (2021) and Al-Sharbini (2020), affirm that online rumors disproportionately impact young people. They promote radical ideologies, reduce national loyalty, weaken civic engagement, and diminish moderation by presenting views incompatible with legal and cultural frameworks.

#### 4.4. Impact of Rumors on Iraq's Social Security

In the Iraqi context, several researchers have identified the detrimental role of rumors in exacerbating national insecurity. Al-Hafidh (2020) notes that, although social media contributes to shaping public opinion and influencing decision-makers, it also facilitates the dissemination of destabilizing rumors during periods of rapid political change. Al-Qaisi (2020) attributes the rise of harmful rumors to a lack of effective regulatory oversight, especially in times of crisis. These rumors often aim to intensify internal divisions, undermine trust in leadership, and erode social cohesion. Al-Badri, Al-Khafaji, and Al-Sayed (2019) point out that while social media has helped introduce global cultures into Iraqi society, it has also provided a platform for extremist ideologies, particularly targeting youth, thus threatening Iraq's internal security. Al-Rawi (2012) further cautions that misinformation about individuals, beliefs, or nations incites public unrest and destabilizes social order. Al-Hamdani (2020) emphasizes the role of rumors in inflaming sectarian tensions and undermining national unity.

#### 4.5. Rumor dissemination in the Kurdistan region of Iraq

In the Kurdistan Region, rumors significantly influence public perception and regional security. Their spread—especially in environments where public awareness is low—generates fear, obscures facts, and confuses interpretations of events. These rumors erode morale, foster social division, and weaken the collective sense of Kurdish unity.

#### 4.6. Countering the spread of rumors on social media

A body of scholarly work, including studies by Bondielli & Marcelloni (2019), Al-Qanawi (2016), and others, advocates for a comprehensive framework to combat rumors on digital platforms. This framework consists of: Organizational Measures: Establishing defined goals and action plans to

address misinformation. Preventive Strategies: Creating environments that are resilient to rumor proliferation. Corrective Mechanisms: Developing tools and procedures for rumor detection and response. Moreover, specific tactics proposed by Ahmad & Aivas (2025)<sup>[9]</sup>, Xu *et al.* (2016)<sup>[57]</sup>, Osman (2019), Ahmed (2015), and others include:

1. **Promoting Accurate Information:** Disseminating reliable and verifiable news.
2. **Fact-Checking:** Validating the accuracy of digital content and media.
3. **Utilizing Technology:** Employing digital tools to trace sources and track rumor spreaders.
4. **Rapid Response:** Addressing false narratives promptly to reduce their impact.
5. **Collaboration:** Fostering cooperation between digital users and security institutions.
6. **Public Education:** Enhancing media literacy and critical thinking skills.
7. **Legal Enforcement:** Enacting and applying laws against rumor-mongering and monitoring platform usage.
8. **Platform Regulation:** Identifying and removing suspicious or malicious accounts.

Other scholars (e.g., Aivas & Abdulla, 2021; Osman, 2019; Zhu & Zhang, 2019; Liu *et al.*, 2019)<sup>[13, 60, 39]</sup> stress the need for continuous surveillance of emerging media platforms to detect and mitigate rumor campaigns at early stages.

#### 4.7. State–Civil society collaboration

Amin (2019) emphasizes the necessity of coordinated efforts between governmental institutions and civil society organizations to reduce the adverse effects of social media. Recommended measures include:

- **Legislation:** Enacting laws to govern digital communication practices.
- **Media Outreach:** Utilizing conventional media to raise awareness about misinformation.
- **Pragmatic Solutions:** Implementing realistic strategies to minimize harm from digital platforms.
- **Security Involvement:** Assigning law enforcement agencies to address serious online offenses without infringing constitutional freedoms.

#### 4.8. Efforts to counter rumors in Iraq

Studies by Shbib and Salem (2018) reveal that Iraqi media organizations have actively sought to counteract rumors via official channels and digital platforms. Recommendations include:

- **Public Awareness Initiatives:** Educating citizens on the dangers of digital misinformation.
- **Monitoring Digital Spaces:** Tracking accounts and websites that regularly disseminate falsehoods.
- **Legal Interventions:** Suspending media outlets and accounts implicated in rumor propagation.
- **Expert Involvement:** Engaging religious leaders and subject-matter experts to strengthen public trust and national cohesion.

#### 4.9. Lessons from the Mosul crisis

The Iraqi government's strategy during the 2014 fall of Mosul to ISIS provides an instructive example of rumor management. According to Hassan (2016), authorities

responded swiftly by holding daily briefings, issuing updates, and urging citizens to refrain from sharing unverified content. Temporary shutdowns of social media and mobile networks were implemented in some areas, and coordinated efforts with Egypt and Jordan helped block foreign channels spreading extremist propaganda. In terms of legal and policy-based measures, Al-Azazi (2016) stresses the importance of a comprehensive legal framework as part of national security strategies aimed at rumor control. Such strategies should involve coordinated efforts among media outlets, security agencies, and legislative bodies to disseminate factual information and counter false narratives. In line with this, Shbib and Salem (2018) recommend increasing penalties for individuals and entities engaged in spreading rumors with malicious intent. In addition, Hamadi and Rahim (2022) further argue for criminalizing the act of rumor dissemination, advocating for legal deterrents as essential components in safeguarding public security and preserving societal stability.

### 5. Research Conclusion

This section briefly outlines the key findings, recommendations, and proposed directions for future research.

#### 5.1 Research Findings

The study finds that social media has emerged as a dominant source of news and information, significantly shaping public discourse and revitalizing the public sphere. However, it has also become a fertile ground for the rapid dissemination of rumors, which undermines trust in institutions and poses threats to social security, particularly in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. Key findings include: Social media, especially Facebook, is the primary medium through which rumors are spread due to its widespread use and technological affordances. Rumors shared online are characterized by rapid diffusion, vague origins, and emotionally provocative content, which encourages belief formation based on misinformation. The technological features of social media (such as image and video manipulation, account anonymity, and minimal state control) facilitate the unchecked spread of rumors. Social, political, and security-related rumors are the most prevalent, with intentions ranging from inducing fear and panic to inciting social division and conflict. The dissemination of rumors during crises disrupts social cohesion, weakens national unity, and threatens internal security. In the Kurdistan Region and Iraq, such rumors have amplified societal fragmentation, diminished public trust, and intensified sectarian and ethnic tensions. Combating this phenomenon requires legal accountability, reliable information dissemination, and stronger regulatory frameworks.

#### 5.2 Research Recommendations

To mitigate the risks posed by rumors to national security, the study recommends:

1. **Developing Preventive Media Strategies:** Launch public awareness campaigns through credible media outlets to counteract misinformation and reinforce social trust.
2. **Promoting Civic Engagement:** Encourage public, especially youth, participation in constructive media dialogue to reduce susceptibility to rumors.
3. **Institutional Support:** Empower both governmental and

non-governmental organizations to maintain active and responsive social media channels.

4. Establishing Monitoring Centers: Create independent institutions to track, analyze, and respond to rumors and assess public sentiment.
5. **Reinforcing ethical and legal frameworks:** Draft and enforce media ethics codes and legal regulations to hold rumor-mongers accountable and safeguard social stability.

### 5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

In conclusion, this study recommends further research into the impact of rumors on social cohesion across various social media networks. It also calls for an examination of how political and social elites strategically employ social media to disseminate misinformation, as well as an analysis of the relationship between media manipulation, conspiracy theories, and their effects on public attitudes and behaviors.

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