

The Phenomenon of Defamation on Electronic Platforms: Causes and Effects

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Abstract:

*This study explores the phenomenon of **defamation on electronic platforms – its causes and effects**. This issue is considered one of the most prominent and complex **social and media phenomena** of the modern era due to the rapid technological development the world is witnessing. It is directly linked to the **information and communication revolution**, and has become a real threat to the **privacy of individuals and institutions** in the digital space.*

*The study finds that the main problem lies in the **widespread prevalence** of defamation crimes on social media and electronic websites, which cause various types of harm – **psychological, social, and otherwise** – to the victims.*

The most notable causes behind this phenomenon include:

- *The **desire for revenge** against individuals or institutions due to past conflicts.*
- ***Psychological and legal motives** pushing individuals toward such harmful behaviors.*

*Among the most significant consequences of electronic defamation are **psychological and social damage**, which can deeply affect both the individual and the community.*

Keywords: *Defamation – Electronic Platforms – Causes – Effects*

Le phénomène de la diffamation sur les plateformes électroniques : Causes et effets

Résumé :

Cette étude explore le phénomène de la diffamation sur les plateformes électroniques - ses causes et ses effets. Cette question est considérée comme l'un des phénomènes sociaux et médiatiques les plus importants et les plus complexes de l'ère moderne en raison du développement technologique rapide auquel le monde assiste. Elle est directement liée à la révolution de l'information et de la communication et est devenue une véritable menace pour la vie privée des individus et des institutions dans l'espace numérique.

L'étude montre que le principal problème réside dans la prévalence généralisée des délits de diffamation sur les médias sociaux et les sites web électroniques, qui causent divers types de préjudices - psychologiques, sociaux et autres - aux victimes.

Les causes les plus notables de ce phénomène sont les suivantes

- Le désir de se venger d'individus ou d'institutions en raison de conflits passés.*
- Les motifs psychologiques et juridiques qui poussent les individus à adopter de tels comportements préjudiciables.*

Parmi les conséquences les plus importantes de la diffamation électronique figurent les dommages psychologiques et sociaux, qui peuvent affecter profondément à la fois l'individu et la communauté.

Mots-clés : *Diffamation - Plateformes électroniques - Causes - Effets*

Introduction

The world today is witnessing a tremendous revolution in information technology, with its applications penetrating all aspects of life. Most societies have begun to focus on preparing digital citizens capable of understanding, engaging with, and even contributing to the rapid global technological development.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and MySpace, among others, are among the most widely used websites across all age groups—especially among youth of both genders—due to their ease of use and the wide range of options they offer. Gradually, these platforms have become an integral part of people's daily lives, asserting their presence in nearly every domain. Anyone with a personal account on these platforms can freely share their thoughts, images, and personal experiences with other users, without any regional, religious, or linguistic boundaries. Moreover, these platforms facilitate communication through free voice and video features

Despite the many advantages of these platforms and their role in facilitating communication among people around the world, they remain largely unregulated and lack sufficient oversight to ensure the safety and protection of all users. This absence of regulation has led to the emergence of numerous social issues, most notably *defamation*, which is often carried out with the intent of harming individuals' reputations and exposing their personal secrets.

Many people are shocked to find their photos and personal information published online without their consent, accessible to the general public. Such acts constitute a serious offense that can potentially destroy a person's life, strip

a family of its dignity, and even alienate it from society. In many cases, families subjected to such violations are stigmatized with lasting shame.

It is worth noting that the issue of defamation on social media platforms holds significant importance. Therefore, it is necessary to address this topic through explanation, analysis, and an exploration of the motives behind defamation and its consequences. This can be achieved by answering the central research question:

1. Definition of Concepts

1.1. Crime

Definitions of crime vary among scholars, depending on the perspective from which each approaches the concept. These definitions can even differ within the same academic field.

Some define crime as "any act that violates the law (Zerrara, Lakhdar, 2007/2008, p. 24) Others define it as a form of deviant behavior aimed at corrupting the existing social order. (Ibid., p. 27)

According to the Encyclopedia of Sociology, crime is defined as "a violation that extends beyond the personal sphere into the public domain, thereby infringing upon rules or laws that prescribe certain legitimate punishments or sanctions, necessitating the intervention of public authority." (Marshall, Gordon, 2000, p. 39)

From the foregoing, it is evident that crime refers to committing an act that is considered reprehensible and objectionable, as well as refraining from an act that is deemed desirable. The social definition of crime is "all criminal acts or behaviors that violate social norms and are subject to punishment due to the harm they cause to social interests." (Boulmain, Najib, 2007/2008, p. 38)

1.2. Defamation:

Linguistically, the root of the word *defamation* (in Arabic: *tashheer*) comes from the verb *shahhara*, which implies making something clear or apparent. It is also said to mean the exposure of something in a disgraceful manner, such that people become aware of it. For example, to “defame someone” (*shahhara bi fulan*) means to spread negative information about them. To “defame someone by something” means to associate them with that matter and make it widely known. Additionally, “I defamed him among people” means I made his disgrace public.

Other meanings of defamation include:

- **Clarity:** Defamation is the clarity or making something apparent.
- **Disgrace and belittlement:** For instance, to “defame someone” can mean to humiliate or disgrace them publicly. Disgrace here means being publicly known for something shameful.

Broadcasting and publicizing negativity: To “defame someone” also means to announce or spread bad news or slander about them. (Al-Abbar, Saad Khalifa, 2017, p. 4)

Defamation, then, is the act of spreading false information, allegations, or rumors with the intent to harm the reputation of the person or entity being defamed, whether an individual or an institution. It encompasses all forms of expression that wound the dignity of persons or organizations.

2.3. Websites:

Websites are defined as a collection of interconnected web pages that contain texts, animations, and possibly videos, providing information on a specific subject, which may be a

company, a government agency, an individual, or a research topic. All this content is organized within formatted pages, and the website carries a unique name that can be accessed via the Internet. (Badawi, Mohamed Karam, 2005, p. 24)

Websites are defined as a collection of pages that describe an organization or an individual, introduce them, and organize these pages hierarchically across different levels or sub-sites. These pages address a specific topic or focus on particular aspects of the interests and activities of the described organization or individual. They also allow users to select the content they need whenever required. (Al-Shazly, Islam Ahmed, 2013, p. 114)

“They are websites that allow users to participate and contribute by creating or adding to their pages easily.” These are websites that provide Internet-based applications offering their users the ability to create a personal page publicly displayed within a specific site or system. They also provide means of communication with the page creator’s acquaintances or other users of the system and offer services for exchanging information among the users of that site or system via the Internet. (Ibid., p. 24)

Social networks are generally defined as “a term referring to those websites on the Internet that emerged with what is known as Web 2.0, enabling communication among users within a virtual community environment that connects them based on their interests or specialties. This is achieved through direct communication services such as sending messages, participating in others’ personal profiles, and accessing the news and information they choose to display.” (Kanaan, Abdelfattah. 2014, pp. 169–170)

Some define social networks as new methods of communication in the digital environment that enable smaller groups of people to meet, gather online, and exchange bene-

fits and information. within your network, thus serving as a means of instant information exchange via the Internet.” They can also be defined as *“websites and electronic services that rapidly deliver information on a wide scale. These are sites that do not merely provide information but interact with you as you receive that information¹”*.

2. The Algerian Legislator and Defamation:

The Algerian legislator has given great importance to the personal privacy of individuals, ensuring that it is not subjected to any harm that undermines the dignity enjoyed by its owner. Consequently, the legislator intervened by imposing legal protection on this moral status and considered any violation thereof a crime affecting the victim’s status. The moral aspect is the most serious target of cybercrime in Algerian society. A crime of this nature is capable of destroying an individual’s life or causing a family to lose its dignity and even its social belonging, as many have been stigmatized with a mark of shame.

Some view defamation as a tool for character assassination or as leverage to exploit such information for extortion, a means to settle grudges, with the intent to harm reputation and spread personal animosity. Many people are shocked to find their personal photos and information published without their consent for public viewing.

The Algerian Constitution, in Article 39, states that the sanctity of the private life and honor of citizens shall not be violated and that these are protected by law. The confidenti-

¹ Ali Mohamed bin Fath Mohamed. *Social Media and Its Impact on Ethics and Values*. Master’s thesis, Islamic University, Madinah, Saudi Arabia, unpublished, p. 2.

ality of all forms of private correspondence and communications is guaranteed.

As for the penalties imposed on offenders, Article 303 bis stipulates that anyone who intentionally infringes on the sanctity of individuals' private lives, by any means or technology, shall be punished by imprisonment for a period ranging from six (6) months to three (3) years and fined between 50,000 and 300,000 Algerian Dinars. This includes:

1. Capturing, recording, or transmitting private or family calls or conversations without the consent or permission of the parties involved.
2. Capturing, recording, or transmitting images of a person in a private place without the consent or permission of the person concerned.¹

Defamation has several types, including economic defamation, which occurs between commercial institutions as a result of unfair competition. Some individuals or organizations spread false information to harm a commercial entity, reducing its chances and benefits, while the defamer gains material profit. There is also political defamation, which occurs in some societies between the government and the opposition or between political entities. Then, there is social defamation, which takes place through social media platforms by means of insults, slander, images, expressions, or the release of true personal information aimed at undermining certain individuals, social figures, or others.

¹ <https://tribunal.dz.blogspot.com/le> : 14.01.2019.

3. Causes and Motivations of Defamation on Electronic Platforms:

There are many reasons and motives that drive individuals with criminal tendencies to engage in defamation through social media and electronic platforms, such as the desire to harm others and tarnish reputations, in addition to the pursuit of profit and other diverse motives. Some of these are listed below:

- The ease of spreading information via social media and reaching large numbers of people, contrasted with the difficulty of identifying or preventing the defamer.
- Some individuals use defamation on electronic platforms as a way to take revenge on people with whom they have prior enmity or for various other reasons. It may also be revenge against a certain institution, company, or product by spreading false information that causes public avoidance. Social life is full of many examples where the perpetrators' motive was the desire for revenge.

Some criminals deliberately engage in defamation through social media to harm specific individuals or entities. Many court cases today involve extortion of young women after unlawfully obtaining and publishing their personal photos on these platforms to cause harm. Sometimes, a girl may share her photo with a young man or in a chat room that initially seems private, but criminals exploit these photos, especially if they are compromising. In other cases, someone might publish information or photos about a family because they refused to marry their daughter to him, trying to influence her by defaming the girl and her family as a

form of revenge on social media. (Sa'id bin Salem et al., 2016, p. 29)

The reasons behind defamation may be to achieve financial gain and profit. Some resort to publishing false information or attempting to blackmail certain individuals or their photos to obtain financial sums if the individual refuses to publish such information or photos. Therefore, some people resort to socially unacceptable means to achieve socially acceptable goals. The desire for wealth is difficult to achieve through socially and legally acceptable means. Therefore, some resort to the crime of defamation via social media to achieve their goals of financial gain.

Fourth: Effects and Consequences of Defamation:

The phenomenon of defamation via social media is considered one of the most prominent negatives of the Internet. These crimes, which are reported daily by the media about members of society, have increased in frequency, aiming to harm them and damage their image in the eyes of others. Anyone who harbors a grudge or vendetta against someone defames them via social media, leading to negative effects and consequences as a result of this crime, some of which we mention below. The image of the targeted person is affected and shaken in the public mind. This is because we live in an age where images are circulated more than anything else and reach the largest number of people across all classes, positions, fields, and environments. This generates a form of violence and counter-violence, escalating into a form of verbal warfare. Violence begins in the mind before it reaches the body.

- Defamation doesn't harm a specific person as much as it harms an entire family, threatening its stability. The indi-

vidual is connected to the family and is influenced by it, which in turn is influenced by them.

- It becomes clear from defamation that it can cause material damage, such as harming a particular company or product by disseminating false information that causes the public to turn away from it. This negatively impacts the company or commercial institution, causing it to incur significant financial losses, generally amounting to or exceeding millions of dollars or more. Defamation causes moral damage, such as contempt for a particular ideology, doctrine, reputation, or political discredit. People's perspectives on the effects and consequences vary, with some favoring the moral aspect over the material. On the other hand, the effects (results) may be short-term or long-term. Defamation has a profound psychological impact on the victim, causing them to feel inferior and may tend toward isolation, withdrawal, and social weakness.

Conclusion:

Defamation through electronic platforms refers to the act of publishing false or misleading information about an individual or organization with the intent to harm their reputation. This may involve the use of social media, forums, or other websites. These crimes represent a significant challenge in today's digital age, as the ease of publishing and sharing content has exacerbated the negative impacts of attacks on personal or institutional reputation.

As a crime that violates the moral rights of individuals, defamation is no longer confined to a limited scope—it has become a transnational phenomenon, due to the global nature of social media and online platforms. Consequently, its

effects on victims are profoundly felt on psychological, social, and even economic levels.

Combating online defamation crimes requires a multi-dimensional approach, including the reinforcement of deterrent legislation, the development of technologies to monitor violations, and the enhancement of societal awareness regarding the ethics of digital communication.

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