



The Role of Facebook in Spreading Fake News Among University Students: A Field Study at the Faculty of Media and Communication, University of Algiers 3

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Abstract:

This study investigates the role of the social media platform Facebook in the dissemination and circulation of fake news among university students. A field study was conducted using a sample of undergraduate and master's students from the Faculty of Media and Communication Sciences at the University of Algiers 3. The research aims to examine students' usage patterns and behaviors on Facebook, with a particular focus on the platform's function in facilitating the spread and sharing of false information.

Furthermore, the study seeks to identify the underlying reasons and contributing factors behind the proliferation of fake news on Facebook. It also explores student-driven proposals particularly from those in media studies regarding potential strategies to curb the spread of misinformation on social media platforms, especially Facebook.

The overarching objective is to generate findings that contribute to mitigating the widespread phenomenon of fake news in the digital age. To fulfill these aims, the researcher developed a structured questionnaire to collect relevant data, address the study's central questions, and achieve its intended outcomes.

Keywords: *Fake News; Social Media; User; Facebook; New Media.*

Le rôle de Facebook dans la diffusion de fausses informations parmi les étudiants universitaires : une étude de terrain à la Faculté des médias et de la communication de l'Université d'Alger 3

Résumé :

Cette étude examine le rôle de la plateforme de réseau social Facebook dans la diffusion et la circulation de fausses informations parmi les étudiants universitaires. Une étude de terrain a été menée auprès d'un échantillon d'étudiants de premier cycle et de master de la Faculté des sciences de la communication et des médias de l'Université d'Alger 3. La recherche vise à examiner les habitudes et les comportements des étudiants sur Facebook, en mettant particulièrement l'accent sur le rôle de la plateforme dans la facilitation de la diffusion et du partage d'informations erronées.

En outre, l'étude cherche à identifier les raisons sous-jacentes et les facteurs contribuant à la prolifération des fausses informations sur Facebook. Elle explore également les propositions des étudiants, en particulier ceux qui étudient les médias, concernant les stratégies potentielles pour freiner la propagation de la désinformation sur les plateformes de réseaux sociaux, en particulier Facebook.

L'objectif général est de générer des résultats qui contribuent à atténuer le phénomène généralisé des fausses informations à l'ère numérique. Pour atteindre ces objectifs, le chercheur a élaboré un questionnaire structuré afin de collecter des données pertinentes, de répondre aux questions centrales de l'étude et d'obtenir les résultats escomptés.

Mots-clés : *fausses informations ; réseaux sociaux ; utilisateurs ; Facebook ; nouveaux médias.*



Introduction

Fake news has emerged as a significant factor influencing public opinion and individual attitudes, particularly in the context of unprecedented technological advancements that have facilitated its widespread accessibility. This proliferation is primarily driven by the accessibility provided through digital platforms, including the internet and various media and communication services.

Historically, fake news has functioned as a propaganda instrument utilized by communicators to exert psychological and cognitive influence by disseminating distorted information and ideas for promotional objectives. Notable instances include the propaganda campaigns conducted during the First and Second World Wars by the Allied Powers (United Kingdom, France, Russian Empire) and the Central Powers (German Empire, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ottoman Empire). These campaigns were characterized by the fabrication of crises and the exacerbation of conflicts.

The present study aims to elucidate the underlying causes and motivations behind the spread of fake news on Facebook, identifying the principal factors that drive its dissemination as well as the intentions of its promoters. Furthermore, the study investigates the role of Facebook in facilitating the propagation and circulation of fake news, with a particular focus on the engagement of students from the Faculty of Media and Communication Sciences. It also explores effective

strategies for countering and mitigating the impact of fake news.

In line with (Angers, 2004), who defines methodology as a systematic series of procedures designed to achieve specific objectives, this research adopts the survey method. Referred to in French as *La Méthode d'Enquête*, this scientific approach enables researchers to examine phenomena within their natural contexts by analyzing evidence, experiences, and documents to collect data and attain scholarly objectives (Mersli, 2010). The survey method was selected for its suitability in investigating digital phenomena such as fake news, which have expanded in tandem with the development of the internet and multimedia platforms. This approach facilitates descriptive analysis of the emergence, evolution, and dynamics of such phenomena..

Research Tools and Procedures

The primary data collection instrument utilized in this study was a questionnaire, designed to systematically gather scientific information from participants relevant to the research topic (Ahmed, 2007). The questionnaire comprised a series of carefully constructed items aimed at addressing the research questions and fulfilling the study's objectives. Distributed electronically, the questionnaire targeted a sample of students from the Faculty of Media and Communication Sciences at the University of Algiers 3. Of the more than 200 students contacted, 154 completed responses were obtained, constituting the study's sample. Following data collection, the responses were systematically organized into tables to



Soumission : 05/01/2025 Acceptation : 15/06/2025 Publication : 25/09/2025

facilitate quantitative analysis and interpretation through statistical methods.

Research Population and Sampling

Defining the research population from which data is collected constitutes a crucial step in the design of any scientific study. It is essential for researchers to clearly delineate the characteristics of the phenomenon within this population (Bouhafs, 1999).

In the present study, the population comprised students from the Faculty of Media and Communication Sciences at the University of Algiers 3. This group was selected due to its direct relevance to the subject matter, as well as its familiarity with social media platforms and new media technologies. Moreover, these students possess substantial knowledge of issues related to fake news, its implications, and the principles of professional journalism and media practices.

Given the substantial size and heterogeneous nature of the population, coupled with considerations of efficiency and resource constraints, purposive sampling was employed. This method was deemed most effective for obtaining a representative and sufficiently large sample. Consequently, the questionnaire was administered to a purposive sample of 154 students comprising both male and female participants drawn from the Faculty of Media and Communication Sciences at the University of Algiers 3.

1. Study Problem and Questions

Fake news has become increasingly prevalent in today's technologically advanced environment, which offers easy access and user-friendly interfaces, particularly through new media platforms such as citizen journalism and social networking sites. Among these, Facebook emerges as a prominent global platform for information exchange, where fake news constitutes a substantial portion of the circulated content.

The accessibility afforded by digital technologies has largely undermined traditional media censorship mechanisms, including those described by the Gatekeeping Theory and other conventional media and communication frameworks. This transformation has transcended editorial controls and vested interests, enabling the widespread dissemination of false, fabricated, and propagandistic content across multiple platforms.

While the information society presents advantages, such as dismantling the monopoly on news previously held by public and private media institutions under official authority, it has concurrently facilitated the proliferation of misleading and fabricated information. This challenge is compounded by a widespread lack of media literacy and ethical awareness among users, many of whom are unfamiliar with how to critically navigate and utilize these platforms effectively.

This study focuses on the phenomenon of fake news within the context of new media, with particular emphasis on Facebook's role in the dissemination and circulation of such content among university students.



It aims to analyze student engagement with fake news, identify the underlying causes of its propagation, and explore strategies for its mitigation. Through this lens, the research investigates Facebook's influence on the spread of fake news within the academic community.

The main research question is:

How does Facebook contribute to the dissemination and circulation of fake news among university students?

The following sub-questions arise from this primary inquiry:

- What is Facebook's role in spreading and circulating fake news?
- What are the underlying reasons for the proliferation of fake news on Facebook?
- How do students deal with fake news on Facebook, and what strategies can be employed to counter and combat it?

2. Definitions and Concepts

2.1 Key Terms and Definitions

2.1.1 Fake News

Fake news refers to fabricated accounts concerning individuals, groups, or nations, disseminated either orally or through media channels without credible sources or definitive evidence of authenticity. While some fake news may contain elements of truth, its underlying motives often span psychological, economic, political, and social domains, frequently aiming to produce adverse effects. As these narratives circulate, they are commonly subject to distortions,

including exaggeration or selective omission (Mohamed, 2021).

Stanford University defines fake news as intentionally false and verifiable news stories crafted to mislead readers. Similarly, Michael Radutzky describes fake news as falsified narratives with cultural resonance, consumed by millions.

According to the Ethical Journalism Network, fake news comprises:

"Deliberately fabricated stories published to deceive others, encouraging them to believe falsehoods or doubt verifiable facts" (Mohamed, 2021).

The New York Times characterizes fake news as a form of yellow journalism or propaganda involving deliberate misinformation or hoaxes, disseminated through traditional print and broadcast media as well as social networking sites (Darwish, 2021).

2.2 Operational Definition of Circulation

Circulation refers to the process of exchanging, sharing, and distributing ideas, information, and news in publishable formats via new media platforms such as Facebook. This process enables extensive user engagement, facilitating the widespread dissemination of content.

2.3 Electronic Publishing

Electronic publishing denotes the dissemination of traditional information through modern technologies, including computers and digital publishing software, used for the production and distribution of content (Barghel, 2012).



2.4 Operational Definition of Publishing

Based on the aforementioned definitions, publishing encompasses the processes of broadcasting, distributing, and sharing ideas, writings, and information across diverse formats, including print, written, electronic, visual, and audio media. Within the scope of this study, publishing is specifically defined as the dissemination and circulation of false, fabricated, and misleading news through modern communication technologies. This phenomenon has become pervasive and readily consumable among the general public and student audiences via social media platforms.

2.5 Social Media Platform "Facebook"

Facebook is widely regarded as a foundational social networking site that significantly fosters a culture of connectivity among individuals from diverse social classes, ideologies, and religious backgrounds worldwide. It facilitates user engagement through internet-based interactions and functions primarily as a platform driven by user-generated content, including opinions, personal blogs, and digital photographs (Belkhiri, 2014).

2.6 Operational Definition of Facebook

Based on the above definitions, Facebook is conceptualized in this study as an internet-based platform where individuals register by creating personal accounts, enabling interaction with other users and groups. It facilitates the publication, sharing,

commenting, and exchange of opinions and information. Specifically, this study defines Facebook as a platform through which university students at the University of Algiers 3 disseminate, circulate, and exchange various forms of fake news, including written, visual, audio, and multimedia content.

3. Study Data Analysis

Table 01: Environments in Which Fake News Predominantly Spreads According to Students

Environment	Frequency	Percentage
Family setting	6	3.90%
Traditional media	8	5.20%
Social media platforms	133	86.40%
Work and study settings	7	4.50%
Total	154	100%

Source: Prepared by researchers.

The table above reveals that, according to the students surveyed, social media platforms constitute the predominant environment for the dissemination of fake news, accounting for a substantial 86.4%. This is followed by traditional media at 5.2%, professional and academic settings at 4.5%, and family environments at a marginal 3.9%.

The data clearly indicate a consensus among respondents that social media platforms serve as the primary conduit for the spread of fake news. This dominance is largely attributed to the frequent misuse of these platforms for purposes that contradict factual



Soumission : 05/01/2025 Acceptation : 15/06/2025 Publication : 25/09/2025

accuracy. Furthermore, social media platforms are notably preferred by students over other environments for information exchange.

Table 02: Trust in Information Circulated on Facebook According to Students

Trust Level	Frequency	Percentage
High	5	3.20%
Moderate	82	53.20%
Low	54	35.10%
No trust	13	8.40%
Total	154	100%

Source: Prepared by researchers.

The table above indicates that the highest proportion of respondents 53.2% expressed a moderate level of trust in the information disseminated on Facebook, followed by 35.1% reporting a low level of trust. Responses indicating no trust accounted for 8.4%, while a high level of trust was the least reported at 3.2%.

These findings suggest that the majority of students maintain a moderate degree of trust in Facebook content. The notably low percentage of respondents expressing high trust reflects a prevailing skepticism, likely influenced by the increasing prevalence of misinformation and its pervasive presence across social media platforms.

**Table 03: Extent of Fake News Spread on Facebook
According to Students**

Extent of Spread	Frequency	Percentage
High	127	82.50%
Moderate	22	14.30%
Low	5	3.20%
None	0	0.00%
Total	154	100%

Source: Prepared by researchers.

The table indicates that a significant majority of students (82.5%) perceive the spread of fake news on Facebook to be extensive, responding with a "high degree." This is followed by 14.3% who indicated a "moderate degree," and 3.2% who reported a "low degree." Notably, no respondents selected "none" (0%), indicating unanimous recognition of fake news presence on the platform.

These results demonstrate that most students recognize Facebook as a primary medium for the dissemination of fake news. The absence of responses indicating no fake news underscores a categorical rejection of the notion that Facebook is free from misinformation.

The findings suggest that students at the Faculty of Media and Communication Sciences possess a heightened awareness of the pervasive nature of fake news on Facebook. Respondents perceive the platform as heavily saturated with misleading information, to



Soumission : 05/01/2025 Acceptation : 15/06/2025 Publication : 25/09/2025

the extent that fake news increasingly competes with factual content across social media.

Table 04: Types of Fake News Prevalent on Facebook According to Media and Communication Sciences Students

Type of Fake News	Frequency	Percentage
Political	129	18.10%
Social	89	12.50%
Entertainment	95	13.30%
Sports	57	8.00%
Economic and Commercial	44	6.20%
Ethical	83	11.60%
Religious	43	6.00%
Health and Disease-Related	52	7.30%
Personal	121	17.00%
Total	713	100%

Source: Prepared by researchers.

The table above indicates that “political fake news” constitutes the largest category, accounting for 18.1%, followed closely by “personal fake news” at 17%. “Entertainment fake news” ranks third with 13.3%, succeeded by “social fake news” at 12.5% and “ethical fake news” at 11.6%. Meanwhile, “sports fake news” represents 8%, “health and disease-related fake news” 7.3%, and both “economic and commercial fake

news” and “religious fake news” register the lowest proportions, at 6.2% and 6%, respectively.

These findings suggest that political and personal fake news are perceived by students as the most prevalent types circulating on Facebook, whereas economic and religious fake news are considered the least common.

The predominance of political and personal fake news can be linked to the consequences of the Algerian popular movement and the ongoing political crisis within the country. These developments have intensified the spread of fabricated information targeting political figures, parties, individuals, and their families. As Khalid Habib Al-Rawi highlights in *Methods of Imperial Propaganda* (1973), political rumors frequently aim at political leaders and high-ranking officials, seeking to undermine their legitimacy through unethical allegations.

Conversely, the relatively lower incidence of economic and religious fake news may be attributed to a period of relative economic stability and the resolution of sectarian conflicts. The heightened focus on political issues during this time appears to have overshadowed these topics, resulting in Algerian Facebook content that prioritizes political discourse.



Table 05: Factors Contributing to the Spread of Fake News on Facebook According to Students

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of accurate information from original sources	95	16.60%
Weak government communication with citizens	69	12.00%
Public ignorance of modern methods used to fabricate news	70	12.20%
Prevalence of ambiguity and media blackout on certain issues	84	14.70%
Failure to verify the accuracy of information	82	14.30%
Distrust of officials and their statements	53	9.20%
Spread of hostility stemming from conflicting interests and ideologies	47	8.20%
Poor social and economic conditions	33	5.80%
Proliferation of crises (health, disasters, and societal changes)	40	7.00%
Total	573	100%

Source: Prepared by researchers.

The most significant factor contributing to the dissemination of fake news, as identified by students, is the "lack of accurate information from original sources," accounting for 16.6% of responses. This is followed by "ambiguity and media blackout on certain issues" at 14.7%. Additional notable factors include the "failure to verify information" (14.3%) and "public ignorance of contemporary techniques for fabricating news" (12.2%). The least frequently cited factor is

"poor social and economic conditions," representing 5.8%.

These findings indicate that students perceive the absence of reliable sources and media ambiguity as principal drivers of fake news propagation. This perspective aligns with the analysis of Ali Sultani Al-Atari, who emphasizes that ambiguity plays a critical role in facilitating the spread of fake news by fostering an environment conducive to misinformation.

Table 06: Objectives of Fake News Promoters According to Students

Objective	Frequency	Percentage
Shifting public opinion on societal, political, or economic issues	107	20.00%
Tarnishing a person's reputation among their audience	109	20.30%
Spreading fear and panic within society	72	13.40%
Undermining confidence in a product's quality or health impact	55	10.30%
Destabilizing public security and inciting anger toward authorities	63	11.80%
Entertainment or passing time	52	9.70%
Inciting division and hostility	49	9.10%
Instilling hope during times of crisis	29	5.40%
Total	536	100%

Source: Prepared by researchers.

The most frequently reported objective of fake news promoters is "tarnishing an individual's reputation," accounting for 20.3% of responses, closely followed by "shifting public opinion" at 20%. "Spreading fear and panic"



Soumission : 05/01/2025 Acceptation : 15/06/2025 Publication : 25/09/2025

ranks third at 13.4%, while the least cited objective is "instilling hope during crises," representing 5.4%.

These findings highlight the inherently manipulative nature of fake news, with primary aims centered on character defamation and the diversion of public attention from more substantive issues. As Ali Sultani Al-Atari observes, fake news is often instrumentalized to exacerbate conflicts, dilute public discourse, and advance concealed agendas.

Conversely, the relatively low emphasis on "instilling hope during crises" reflects a lack of strategic focus among fake news disseminators on this dimension. This concept, commonly referred to as "therapeutic rumors," aims to alleviate despair, as described by (Al-Kayed, 2009).

Table 07: Students' Perspectives on Fake News Encountered on Facebook

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Attempting to verify their authenticity	68	45.30%
Ignoring them due to skepticism about their validity	37	24.70%
Refuting them and working to reduce their spread	23	15.30%
Sharing and spreading them on Facebook and in real-life settings	16	10.70%
Believing them immediately without verification	6	4.00%
Total	150	100%

Source: Prepared by the researchers.

The table above shows that 45.3% of respondents reported "attempting to verify the authenticity" of information, followed by 24.7% who indicated they "ignore such content due to skepticism about its validity." The third most common response, at 15.3%, was "refuting the information and limiting its dissemination," while 10.7% admitted to "sharing and spreading it on Facebook and offline." The smallest proportion, 4%, indicated that they "believed the information immediately without verification."

These findings suggest that the majority of students at the Faculty of Media and Communication Sciences demonstrate a cautious approach toward fake news. This prudence likely stems from their awareness of the potential hidden agendas behind such content and recognition of its associated risks. Consequently, they prioritize verifying information sources to evaluate credibility before acceptance or dissemination.

Table 08: Students' Reactions After Realizing They Shared Fake News

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Retracted the information and clarified to others that it was false	20	33.30%
Apologized for not verifying the information	19	31.70%
Ignored it, believing others had also shared it	13	21.70%
Felt embarrassed and remained silent	8	13.30%
Total	60	100%

Source: Prepared by the researchers.



Soumission : 05/01/2025 Acceptation : 15/06/2025 Publication : 25/09/2025

Among the respondents, 33.3% retracted the misinformation and clarified to others that it was false, while 31.7% issued apologies for failing to verify its accuracy. A smaller segment, 21.7%, chose to disregard the matter, citing that they were not the sole disseminators of the false information. The smallest group, comprising 13.3%, reported feelings of embarrassment and consequently opted for silence.

These findings indicate that the majority of students demonstrated a sense of accountability by either retracting the misinformation or apologizing. In contrast, a minority exhibited avoidance behaviors, either by ignoring the issue or remaining silent.

Table 09: Sources for Verifying News Authenticity on Facebook

Source	Frequency	Percentage
Official websites of the concerned authorities	56	41.50%
Official pages of the individuals targeted by the fake news	41	30.40%
News websites	22	16.30%
Traditional media (e.g., television, newspapers)	16	11.90%
Total	135	100%

Source: Prepared by the researchers.

The table reveals that the largest proportion of students (41.5%) rely on "official websites of the relevant authorities" to verify the authenticity of news. This is followed by 30.4% who consult the "official pages of individuals targeted by the fake news."

"News websites" constitute 16.3% of responses, while the smallest percentage, 11.9%, depend on "traditional media."

These findings indicate a preference among students for direct and credible sources, such as official websites, coupled with a diminished reliance on traditional media. This reduced dependence may reflect perceptions of limited transparency and competitiveness of traditional outlets compared to new media platforms.

Table 10: Students' Suggestions to Avoid Fake News on Facebook

Suggested Measure	Frequency	Percentage
Verifying the source, analyzing credibility, and adopting critical thinking	105	68.20%
Reporting fake news to specialized authorities	17	11.00%
Collaborating among media outlets to present facts promptly	12	7.80%
Avoiding defamation of individuals	12	7.80%
Using online tools to verify manipulated images and videos	8	5.20%
Total	154	100%

Source: Prepared by the researchers.

The majority of respondents (68.2%) identified "verifying the source, assessing credibility, and applying critical thinking" as the most effective measures to combat fake news. Reporting misinformation to specialized authorities was the next



most common strategy, endorsed by 11% of participants. Both "collaboration among media outlets to promptly present accurate information" and "avoiding defamation of individuals" were selected by 7.8% of respondents each. The least favored approach, at 5.2%, was the "use of online tools to verify manipulated images and videos."

This distribution underscores students' prioritization of critical thinking and source verification, reflecting their heightened awareness of the challenges posed by fake news. The relatively low reliance on digital verification tools may indicate limited familiarity or knowledge of such resources.

Collectively, these results suggest that students in media and communication demonstrate proactive engagement in addressing fake news by applying their academic expertise and cognizance of its societal implications.

Conclusion:

This study, focusing on the role of Facebook in the dissemination and circulation of fake news among university students, has yielded several key findings:

- Usage Patterns of Facebook: A substantial portion of students utilize Facebook primarily for entertainment purposes (30.5%), alongside academic (23.6%) and media-related activities (27.6%). This preference is attributed to the platform's extensive availability of games and

- entertainment applications, as well as its broad spectrum of general and scholarly information.
- Environment for Fake News: Respondents perceive social media platforms as the principal environments for the dissemination of fake news. This perception is linked to the pervasive misuse of these platforms for deceptive objectives and the transition from traditional to modern media, propelled by advancements in communication technologies.
 - Reliance on Facebook for Information: A significant proportion of students (58.4%) report occasional reliance on Facebook as an information source, while 31.2% use it frequently for this purpose. This dependence is primarily driven by the scarcity of freely accessible information, restricted sources, and media blackouts enforced by traditional outlets under governmental mandates. Conversely, 10.4% of students seldom rely on Facebook for informational needs.
 - Prevalence of Fake News on Facebook: The majority of students perceive fake news as highly prevalent on Facebook, viewing the platform as saturated with false and fabricated information.
 - Common Types of Fake News: Respondents identified fake news related to individuals, political affairs, and entertainment as the most widespread on Facebook. This trend is associated with the heightened dissemination of such content amid the current socio-political



Soumission : 05/01/2025 Acceptation : 15/06/2025 Publication : 25/09/2025

- climate, including its influence within the university environment.
- **Factors Contributing to the Spread of Fake News:** Students attribute the propagation of fake news on Facebook to multiple factors. Approximately 16.6% cite a lack of accurate information from original sources, while 14.7% highlight ambiguity and media blackouts on specific issues. Additionally, 14.3% believe the failure to verify information contributes significantly. Other factors include public ignorance of advanced fabrication techniques and ineffective governmental communication with citizens.
 - **Objectives of Fake News Promoters:** A significant proportion of students believe that the primary objective of fake news promoters is to damage an individual's reputation and shape public opinion on societal, political, or economic matters. A smaller segment attributes the intent to fostering fear and panic among the population.
 - **Exposure to Fake News:** A majority of students (61%) reported encountering fake news related to their social environment, whereas 39% indicated no such exposure.
 - **Students' Responses to Fake News:** Most students endeavor to verify the authenticity of fake news encountered on Facebook. Additionally, they either ignore such content or actively refute it to curb its dissemination.

- Sharing of Fake News: While the majority of students reported not having shared information later identified as fake, 31% admitted to doing so. Their responses included retracting the misinformation, clarifying its inaccuracy to others, and apologizing for the failure to verify it.
- Techniques Employed in Fake News: Students largely perceive fabricated narratives and manipulated images as the most commonly employed techniques by fake news disseminators.
- Verification Methods: Students predominantly verify information on Facebook through official websites of relevant authorities and the official pages of individuals targeted by fake news. These sources frequently issue statements refuting false claims via their official channels.
- Recommendations to Avoid Fake News: A significant majority (68.2%) advocate for verifying information sources, assessing credibility, and applying logical and critical thinking when engaging with news. They emphasize the necessity of thorough analysis before accepting any information as true.

These findings highlight the critical awareness and proactive strategies adopted by students to navigate the challenges posed by fake news within the digital and social media environment.



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