Fake News
FACTS

Fake News in Palestine:

Exploratory Research into the Content, Channels, and Responses

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Executive Summary

"Fake News in Palestine: Exploratory Research into Content, Channels and Responses" was developed by 7amleh - The Arab Center for Advancement of Social Media to respond to the growing, and unstudied phenomenon of fake news in Palestine. In recent months, since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, the internet has been flooded with misinformation and fake news about the coronavirus. This led 7amleh to urgently consider how to more effectively research and monitor the phenomena of fake news in Palestine and engage the public in a conversation about media literacy, misinformation and fake news.

To date, there is little to no research about the phenomenon of fake news in Palestine. At the same time, emergency legislation enacted by the Palestinian Authority during the coronavirus pandemic have included legislation to combat fake news by criminalizing people who post this kind of content. This kind of legislation did not necessarily make the environment more safe for Palestinians, as arrests and charges regarding fake news seem to be utilized as a way to censor people, further create a chilling effect in Palestine, and create a wide net where citizens can easily be made criminals. This made it even more important that 7amleh redirect some of its attention and resources to researching this topic and sharing it with local and international stakeholders.

This study provides an introduction to fake news in Palestine and depends on multiple and integrated research tools that are based on a comprehensive research sample that represents different Palestinian populations. The study relies on a literature review about fake news and three research tools: (1) three focus groups about the concept of fake news in Palestine (in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Israel); (2) a survey that includes 515 respondents; (3) interviews with five media experts and representatives of monitoring organizations for detecting fake news. The study analyses the respondents' ideas about which entities produce the most fake news (Palestinian, Israeli, private companies, secular political parties, Islamic political parties, security services, media outlets, social activists, political leaders, civil society, and religious leaders). The survey measures the percentage of fake news in Palestine in general, as well as the type of news most published (Palestinian, Arab, global, Israeli). It

also measures the percentage of fake news in traditional media (newspapers, radio, television), and the percentage of fake news in digital media (Facebook, Twitter, Tik Tok, WhatsApp, videos, websites, emails, pages with high numbers of followers and pages of celebrities) and the times in which fake news thrives. For example, in times of war or political division, the propaganda of political parties, marketing campaigns, disasters, economic recovery, and economic depression. Furthermore, the survey measures the political, economic, and social circumstances that are affected by fake news, and the best methods (applications, human interventions) to respond to the phenomenon of fake news in Palestine.

The main findings of the study are:

- **Linguistic and practical framework for the study of fake news:** The study introduces a practical linguistic framework for the concept of fake news, a breakdown of the types of fake news and recommendations about how to respond to the phenomena. The survey also deals with what several respondents in the focus groups identified as "general misleading conduct by the media," which the study defined as "misleading social communication."

- **Professional verification monitors:** Due to the growth of social media, and the digital transformation of traditional media, many monitors must be involved in combating fake news. More resources, expertise, and funding from local and international supporters is needed to achieve this goal and it is recommended that civil society institutions with professional, a-political boards of directors play a central role in this monitoring process. This includes monthly and annual reports that provide analysis of the information gathered from this monitoring work, and the development of proposed guidelines and standard codes of conduct for individuals and organizations, especially concerning fake news and social media. Also needed are partnerships between local and regional monitors, that are not only about sharing knowledge and expertise about reports management, but also about how to train people to respond to fake news, including verification methods, and media literacy education.

- **Inclusion of media literacy education in the Palestinian educational system:** The results of the survey indicate that 85% of the respondents think that fake news affects the education of the younger generations. The respondents also think that although many civil and governmental efforts were put into social media education in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Israel, the Palestinian Ministry of Education (PME) did not include sustainable structural changes that would indicate that they plan to include media literacy in the Palestinian curriculum and that the efforts of the PME were merely seasonal partnerships with civil society organizations.

- **Avoiding over-drafting laws and relying on self-organizing**: The past twenty years have proven that the tendency to enact media regulation laws has resulted in a backfire on the freedom of the press and the freedom of expression. Analysis of the results of the research shows that the best approach to combat fake news is self-organization -- developing codes of conduct and providing media literacy education for users of social media. These tactics can be carried out by civil society organizations, unions of journalists, or other organizations that include ethics committees or arbitration or complaint boards.

- **Research and academia regarding post-truth and fake news:** The results of the survey indicate that Palestinians spend most of their time on social media and use it for their news sources, despite knowing that it is where the highest amount of fake news is found. This realization requires researchers to direct future research to the phenomena known as 'post-truth journalism' and to branch off from more general research on fake news to include aspects like normalizing with poor information, yielding to social communication algorithms, or accepting catastrophic results caused by fake news.

Introduction

"Fake News in Palestine" is an introduction to a comprehensive research of fake news in Palestine, that relied on multiple and integrated research tools, in addition to a comprehensive research sample that represents different populations in historic Palestine (Jerusalem, occupied Palestinian territory and Palestinian Citizens of Israel). It was limited in its scope in that it does not represent all Palestinians, as many Palestinians continue to live as refugees or in the diaspora since the Palestinian Nakba, or catastrophe, in 1948. For the purpose of this study, fake news is news that intentionally or unintentionally presents or contains false information that is intended to mislead and cause harm. In addition to a literature review, focus groups were held, a survey of public opinion was conducted, and individual interviews were held. The following questions were drivers for the literature review and the focus groups about fake news: What entities are misleading and when? Who is responding to or 'combating' fake news? Who benefits from fake news? Who does fake news impact? What is the best mechanism(s) to respond to fake news? What are the methods and ethics to guide these responses? How can Palestinians get the necessary support and resources to address the issue of fake news in Palestinian society?

After analyzing the responses from the focus groups, survey and the interviews, the study found that the phenomenon of fake news in Palestine has characteristics that do not differ from the rest of the countries in the world, with some peculiarities presented in a later stage.

Fake news in Palestine: Concept and Phenomenon

The emergence of the enormous information mass, including user generated content, has led to the emergence of a large amount of fake news, which increased after the emergence of social media. Among the reasons for this increase is that individuals had control of information production, including texts, or visual content, and the ability to publish them in vast social networks. This kind of publication can be many times greater than a printed newspaper that is written by journalists, and journalistic organizations, which includes codes of ethics and oversight by editors and fact checkers. This communicative explosion has increased the flow of information and has resulted in a considerable mass of data that includes accurate, false, ethical, misleading, tolerant, and hateful data.

Palestine is no different from the rest of the countries of the world in that fake news increased in Palestine along with the waves of the development of social networks. However, due to the ongoing Israeli occupation and regional Arab-Israeli conflict, more fake news is produced about Palestine than other countries. The Palestinian community divides fake news, as the rest of the world, into two types of fake news. The first is disinformation, or news that depends on false information and includes an aim to cause harm in order to achieve goals such as distortion, political propaganda, sarcasm, bullying, hate, defamation, sparking rumors, misleading marketing, excitement, scorn, amusement, empty debate, and show. The second group is misinformation, or news that includes false information without aiming to cause any harm.

A Sample of Fake News in Palestinian Media

During the development of this study, Kashif - The Palestinian Monitor, published several pieces of fake news. For example, a fake article about the position of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in regards to Israel's annexation plans was published in the name of the American scholar Noam Chomsky (Screenshot 1);[1] A video that was edited using Tik Tok in which an audio file that contained verbal abuse was added to a video of a press conference held by the Palestinian Minister of Health (Screenshot 2);[2] false news about a death caused by the coronavirus in a village in the Nablus district, which later turned out to be a death in the southern West Bank (Screenshot 3).[3]

Screenshot 1

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1   Kashif (2020, July). The Thinker Noam Chomsky Denies the Validity of the Statement About the Annexation That is Attributed to Him. Kashif.

2   Kashif. (2020, July). A Fake Video of the Minister of Health, May Keila, Contains Verbal Abuse. Kashif.

3   Kashif. (2020, July). News Websites Reporting Inaccurate News About the Death of a Person with Coronavirus From Nablus. Kashif.

Screenshot 2

Screenshot 3

At the same time, Misbar, a regional monitoring outlet documented several examples of fake news. This included a fake statement, that was supposedly issued by the political leader, Azzam Al-Ahmad, in which he belittles the press conference held by Jibril Rajoub and Salih Al-Arouri about reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas (Screenshot 4);[4] False news about the resignation of the Minister of Health, May Keila (Screenshot 5);[5] and a fabricated picture of a painting by a Filipino artist in which the Israeli flag was planted on the face of an Arab boy in a group of pictures of children putting masks of their own countries (Screenshot 6)[6]; a fabricated picture of the Egyptian President, Abdul Fattah Al-Sisi, kissing the head of the Israeli Prime Minister at the peak of the talks about the Israeli plan to annex the Jordan Valley, in the occupied Palestinian territory (Screenshot 7).[7]

4   Misbar (2020, July). A fake statement in the name of Azzam Al-Ahmad about the joint conference between Fatah and Hamas. Misbar.
5   Misbar. (2020, July). The Palestinian Health Minister has not resigned from her position. Misbar.
6   Misbar. (2020, July). The picture of the occupying country on the mask of an Arab boy is fabricated. Misbar.
7   Misbar. (2020, July). A fabricated picture in which Al-Sisi is kissing Netanyahu's head. Misbar.

Screenshot 4

Screenshot 5

Screenshot 6

Screenshot 7

Responding to Fake News

The Palestinian experience in combatting misinformation does not differ greatly from the experience in the rest of the world, who has been working to respond to fake news through laws and self-regulation, including supporting the development of monitoring institutions and projects and formulating codes of conduct for professional journalism to reduce its numbers.

The Palestinian Authority's laws about the flow of information are limited to the Printing and Publishing Law from 1995, which is devoid of any mention of fake news,[8] and the Cybercrimes Law from 2017, which contains in its articles clauses to combat "falsification of information, lies, slander..."[9]. However, these laws were legislated from the standpoint of combating cybercrimes, rather than the information flow that produces fake news.

However, fake news in Palestine is also influenced by additional factors specific to the Palestinian context, such as the ongoing unlawful Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory, political division, weak governance structure and the absence of relevant laws. Additionally, the spread of the coronavirus has resulted in a huge amount of fake news added to the Palestinian information community.

The observers and monitors of fake news in Palestine do not only come from the government and civil society, but also come from media institutions, unions of journalists, as well as from political parties, universities and colleges teaching journalism, and social media companies. Taking into consideration how diverse responses to fake news are in Palestine, this study attempts to answer the following questions: Who is misleading and when? Who is fighting fake news? Who benefits and who is harmed by them? What is the mechanism for responding to fake news? What are its methods and ethics? How can it be institutionalized, funded, and transformed into a production that leads to cultivating public opinion in Palestine? What are the sources, tools, forms, and effects of its funding? Following answering these questions, the study suggests possible solutions and recommendations that enable combating the phenomenon of fake news and the problems that have resulted from the flow of information and opinions online.

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8   No author (Arabic). (1995, 25 June). Law no. (9) in 1995 about printing and publishing. Wafa.ps. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

9   Palestinian Authority (Arabic). (2018, 29 April). Law by presidential Decree. Law no. (10) of the year 2018 regarding cybercrimes. Palestinian Authority. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

Literature Review

The literature review for the "Fake News in Palestine" research was based on academic literature about fake news in the world, in the Arab region, and in Palestine. The literature review included academic materials about the phenomena of fake news and helped to provide background for the development of the other research tools utilized in this research.

Humanity has witnessed many forms of fake news, starting from ancient kingdoms and empires. For example, the Byzantine anecdotes written by the historian Procopius in secret manuscripts about scandals and immorality of the Emperor Justinian, or the "Pharaonic Rumors" engraved by sculptors and calligraphers that fabricate a fake victory of the forces of Ramesses II over the Hittites at the Battle of Kadesh in 1274 BC. Another historical form of fake news is the popular papers sold by a herald in the streets of France in 1780 about a giant monster in Chile, or any other news full of imagination for amusement, like the Soviet propaganda published in an article in Indian newspapers in 1983 claiming the AIDS virus is a biological weapon created by the United States.[10]

However, in recent years following the advent of the Internet and social media, fake news took new forms, motivations, and effects that have caused catastrophes. During the American presidential election campaign in 2016, fake news propagated by the American Republican party pushed 28 year old Edgar Maddison Welch to drive his car 350 miles from California to Washington DC to shoot at a pizza restaurant that he believed, as a result of fake news, was a base for a child molesting gang that was connected to the Democratic party candidate, Hilary Clinton. This incident was later called Pizzagate and provoked the court to redefine fake news as a legal fault instead of considering it to be merely false and irresponsible information.[11]

Throughout his election campaign, the United States presidential candidate Donald Trump repeated the term fake news countless times, describing everything and everyone who opposed him as spreading fake news, while lashing out against his opponents and ridiculing them in an unprecedented manner. One study by Vivian Bakir and Andrew Mcstay (2018) entitled "Fake News and the Economy of Emotions" suggests that Trump's victory is a result of a new phenomenon, fake news.[12] The study also indicates that the widespread

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10 Tipo, Olivie. (2018, 13 July). A Long History of Fake News Before Donald Trump. Times of Israel. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

11   David O. Klein & Wueller, Joshua R. (2017, April). Fake News: A Legal Perspective. Journal of Internet and Law, 20(10). 5-13. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

12   Bakir, Vian& McStay, Andrew. (2018). Fake News and the Economy of Emotions. Digital Journalism, 6(2). 154-175. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

emanation of this phenomenon started in 2010, when Facebook started privileging content that had high engagement to show up in users' news feeds. This feature was later utilized for Facebook's paid advertising, which further supported the spread of fake news, much of which was in support of Donald Trump's campaign for president of the United States.[13]

After the election in 2016, countless studies into fake news were conducted in the United States and the West that included the use of new methods for analyzing speech, texts, and media. These studies introduced new concepts into social media, like post-truth, alternative facts, misinformation, and disinformation.

Media studies about the phenomenon of fake news have emerged in the last decade. A study conducted by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) indicates that the content, goals, and concepts of fake news are not homogeneous. According to this study, there are three types of fake news (Figure 1).[14] These types are:

- Mis-information: sharing false information without intending to cause harm
- Dis-information: sharing false information despite knowing it will cause harm.
- Mal-information- sharing false information to cause harm by taking private information to the public sphere.

Figure 1: Forms of fake news according to Wardle and Derakhshan
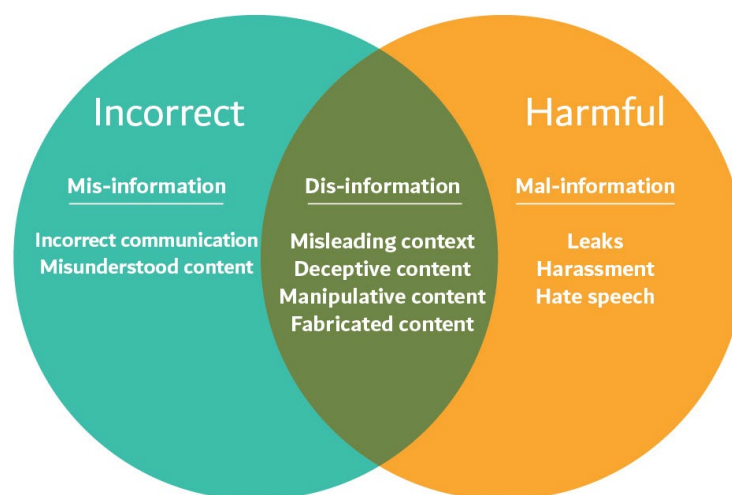
Simon Yates (2016)[15] deals with the phenomenon of fake news by focusing on analyzing the structure of traditional media and the structure of social

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13 Ibid.

14 Wardle, Claire & Derakhshan, Hossein. (2017, September 27). Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking. Council of Europe. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

15 Yates, Simeon. (2016, December 13). 'Fake news' – why people believe it and what can be done to counter it. The Conversation. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

media. In traditional media, the editor is usually responsible for assuring that professional codes of conduct are upheld. However, it is impossible to control what is published on social media, where the publication and dissemination of materials are connected to "the economy of companies that own social media"[16] which does not include editorial oversight, and can spread so quickly that mediators do not have the possibility to review, fact-check or withdraw content. This has created a new phenomenon of amplification of distribution. When fake news is spread by users of social media platforms, it becomes hard to stop, edit or erase because of the way the platforms are built. While many companies are utilizing artificial intelligence and fact-checking institutions to address this issue, after certain information gets tens of thousands of shares, it can be extremely hard to correct.[17]

Farkas and Schou (2018)[18] analyze the fake news that coincided with the election campaign of Trump using discourse analysis methodologies. They tried to answer questions such as: How has fake news become an element in the political conflict and a tool to control social reality in the public sphere? How does fake news manipulate the distinction between disinformation and misinformation? And how are concepts relating to the term battlefield used in the conflict of organizing social reality? The researchers claim that the discourse of fake news is summarized in three results: (1) The debate about how fake news served digital capitalism by increasing participation and decreasing evaluation of communication platforms and news websites; (2) The level of search for fake news via Google has risen dramatically in conjunction with the search for Trump's name, leading to more search results for Trump on platforms and search engines; (3) Trump gained power through his war against the media.[19]

Other studies analyzed how disrupting the flow of information is a tactic that can be used to enable the broadcast of fake news. This is most often done by private companies for the benefit of politicians, states, and political parties aiming to mislead the public opinion. In this context, Nawaf Al-Tamimi (2018) analyzes the political communication model used in the scandal of Cambridge Analytica, the international British political consulting firm, whose social media data and analytics led to Trump's victory and the success of the Brexit referendum. In his study "Cambridge Analytica Political Communication

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16 Revenue streams based on user relationships and their interaction with posts.

17 Yates, Simon. (2016).

18 Farkas, Johan & Schou, Jannick. (2018). Fake News as a Floating Signifier: Hegemony, Antagonism and the Politics of Falsehood. Javnost- The Public, 25(3). 298-213. Retrieved July 16, 2020

19 Ibid.

Model: Fabricating News and Engineering the Public, " he shows how Cambridge Analytical relied on the data bought by approximately 87 million users from Facebook in 2016 to engineer two methods of public opinion manipulation.[20] The first method focuses on psychographic profiling, a technique used in commercial marketing that divides the public into four categories: geographic, demographic, psychological, and behavioral. Based on this division, Cambridge Analytica collected and analyzed data using sophisticated algorithms and technical processes. The second method is the psychographic intervention, in which the content of advertisements and other content that is distributed billions of times on social media platforms is designed aiming to entice users to a specific party, thus, directly influencing their choices. Perhaps the most prominent example of the effectiveness of this model is the victory of the United States President Donald Trump in 2016.[21]

Post-Truth Perspective

Following Trump's victory, many studies examined the phenomenon of fake news from a post-truth perspective. This new term was added to the Oxford dictionary in 2016 and means "relating to circumstances in which people respond more to feelings and beliefs than to facts."[22] Fake news flourished in the post-truth stage, leading Trump to election victory, as well as to the referendum campaign of the British Republican party to exit the European Union (Brexit). Alex Law (2017)[23] posits that in the post-truth stage, fake news has an audience that is interested in hearing what they want, even if it delegitimizes accurate sources of information. Its value is based on how far it has spread instead of how factual it is, or what sources it is derived from. He also claims that the post-truth phenomena has transformed data into facts -- for example, the number of likes, comments, and shares, have become results in themselves that indicate to users their popularity. In addition, artificial intelligence in social media has warped people's viewpoints and over emphasizes the importance of the individual's opinion and emotion at the expense of the validity of information, thus allowing fake news to prosper and be spread globally.[24]

The post-truth stage was also legitimized by media institutions, who in attempting to develop new news dissemination methods on social media channels, started

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20 Al-Tamimi, Nawaf. (2018, 8 May). Cambridge Analytica Political Communication Model: Fabricating News and Engineering the Public. Al Jazeera Center for Studies. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

21 Ibid.

22 Oxford learner dictionaries. (n.d.). Post-truth. In oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

23 Law, Alex. (2017). Post-truth and fake news. Media Education Journal, 61. 3-6. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

24 Ibid.

to produce content that is unethical. As Hal Berghel presents in his article "Lies, Damn Lies, and Fake News," a matrix of new fake news characteristics emerged that includes sarcasm and satire, fabrication, unaccountable content, phishing, using pseudonyms, abusing anonymous sources (who admitted to shaming, slander and lying, and publishing hateful content), using unknown fabricated sources. Additionally, fake news sources often publish rumors, fabrications, and propaganda about political parties. Berghel says that these characteristics are inspiring developers to fight misinformation, and to design new applications that can identify these characteristics and expose fake news.[25]

According to another study, fake news and the post-truth stage disrupt the cohesiveness of nations and peoples. Jonathan Rose writes that the referendum that led to the exit of Britain from the European Union, and the circumstances of Trump's victory in the American election, established   divisions between the British and the American nations. Rose considers politics and politicians to be the primary producers of fake news and thinks that their campaigns are primarily responsible for the deterioration of social consensus and unity of the people.[26]

Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence and the algorithms that are used to manage and publish information on social networks are new factors that have entered fake news studies. The algorithms control what appears and what is excluded on users' news feeds and pages according to two methods: (1) by analyzing a matrix of user data on the previous behavior of users; (2) financing publications that appear on users' pages without having any previous relationship with them. With this feature, anyone who wants to spread fake news can easily publish it in social media networks.[27]

Burgess and Gambarato write that although the behavior and beliefs of users on social networks play a crucial role in the spread of fake news, user engagement directly alters the performance of content and the programming of content optimization algorithms. To analyze fake news, the behaviors of users is also important, as these users are essential for propagating fake news. In addition, verifying fake news publicly may create other intended consequences and

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25   Berghel, Hal. (2017). Lies, damn lies, and fake news. Computer, 50. 80-85. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

26   Rose, Jonathan. (2017, April 18). Brexit, Trump, and post-truth politics. Public Integrity, 19(6). 555-558. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

27   Zaitoun, Munaf (2016, 6 April). This is what Facebook Allows for You to Know and See. Raseef 22. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

further the spread of fake news -- this puts even more emphasis on the need for users to question the content and always look for accurate information.[28]

In addition to qualitative studies and analysis, quantitative studies included figures confirming that fake news has become the most prevalent issue affecting the media, the economy, and politics in most countries of the world. The annual survey carried out by the Center of International Governance Innovation in cooperation with IPSOS Center, conducted with 25,000 citizens in 25 countries, indicates that during the time the survey that was conducted (December 21, 2018 and January 10, 2019), 86% of the respondents were deceived by fake news.[29] Of these respondents, 65% said that they encountered fake news on social media; 44% on traditional media; 60% on websites, 60% on news websites, 56% on YouTube, 51% on television, 48% in videos, 44% in print media, and finally 41% on blogs.

Regarding the responsibility of the media for spreading fake news, 40% of the respondents blamed social media, 43% blamed Internet trolls, 30% blamed videos in general, 31% blamed social media users, 30% blamed traditional media users, 29% blamed right-wing parties, 28% blamed Internet users in general, 27% blamed foreign governments, 29% blamed left-wing parties, 25% blamed search engines, 28% blamed local governments, 23% blamed international organizations, and 22% blamed non-governmental organizations.

Arab Region

Based on this review of the general literature about fake news in the United States and the West, it is clear that there is a focus on the impact of fake news on the growth of right wing movements, ideologies and policies. As can also be seen in the research of Aziz Douai, focused on Arab media in the post-truth era, powerful political regimes, who have been using the Internet to spread fake news both before and in response to the Arab Spring and other uprisings, are continuing to produce and distribute false information to serve their political aims. When peoples revolted, authoritarian regimes again used fake news to encourage people to distrust independent media and to set the stage for repressive and undemocratic laws that limit usage of the Internet and social media, in order to control political unrest.[30]

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28 Borges, Priscala Monteiro & Gambarato, Renira Pampazzo. (2019). The role of Beliefs and Behavior on Facebook: A Semiotic Approach to Algorithms, Fake News, and Transmedia Journalism. International Journal of Communication, 13. 1-16. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

29 Centre for International Governance Innovation- CIGI. (2019). 2019 CIGI-Ipsos Global Survey on Internet Security and Trust. CIGI-Ipsos. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

30 Douai, Aziz. (2019). Global and Arab Media in the Post-truth Stage: Globalization, Authoritarianism and Fake News. IEMed: Mediterranean Yearbook, (2019). 124-132. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

In analyzing the impact of social media on the Arab Spring, Wolfsfel, Segev, and Sheafar argue that any successful analysis of social media in the Arab Spring must first analyze the political environment related to social media, as well as the willingness of people involved in uprisings to utilize social media for political purposes. It also requires taking a more holistic view of the phenomena, and examining the context in which social media is being used for political transition, instead of seeing each demonstration alone and analysing it on this basis.[31]

Unfortunately, there were no references regarding Palestine related to fake news available to date. We hope that this research will constitute a first contribution to this important topic.

Research Tools

This research explores the phenomenon of fake news in traditional and social media. It utilizes quantitative and qualitative research mechanisms to measure the phenomena of fake news in Palestine and to determine its features, size, and effects. Three research tools were used to measure this phenomenon in Palestine. The first was focus groups formed May - June 2020 and conducted remotely and were grouped according to where the participants reside -- the West Bank, Gaza or Israel.[32] Participants were asked preliminary and exploratory questions in order to learn about Palestinians' exposure to fake news. This includes questions like what is fake news? Where do you encounter it? What are the objectives of fake news? What are the effects of fake news? The second research tool consisted of a 24 question survey of 515 Palestinians throughout historic Palestine. The questions were developed and divided into five themes: (1) Characteristics of the respondents/data/personal data; (2) the prevalence of fake news in Palestine; (3) forms and channels of spreading fake news; (4) the effects of fake news; (5) methods to combat fake news. The third research tool used was expert interviews with experts who monitor Arabic fake news, are specialists in social media, and academics who teach media literacy and other branches of journalism and media. To engage the interviewees in conversation, the results of the survey were used and their interviews have been integrated into the section that includes the survey results.

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31 Wolfsfel, Gadi; Segev, Elad & Sheafer, Tamir. (2013). Social Media and the Arab Spring: Politics Comes First. The International Journal of Press/Politics (IJPP), 18(2). 115-137. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

32 In light of the instructions of the Ministry of Health and the related governments prohibiting gathering and instructing quarantine because of the Coronavirus, electronic meetings were organized for the groups participating in this study.

Focus Groups

This study uses focus groups as a main tool to explore primary information about the phenomenon of fake news in Palestine and provided a basis for the second research tool, the survey. Three focus groups were formed with distribution according to the examined areas of the research (West Bank, Gaza and Israel). Focus group meetings were held remotely in May and June 2020[33] and included twenty participants from different regions and occupations, excluding journalists, while considering gender balance among the participants, as shown in the table below.

Table 1: Participants' Geographic Location and Gender

# of participants	Area	Gender
6	The West Bank	3 men, 3 women
6	Gaza Strip	4 men, 2 women
8	Israel	4 men, 4 women

The language of discussion during the meetings was spoken Arabic. The three group meetings dealt with similar, previously prepared discussion themes. The same facilitator moderated the discussions in the three groups. The focus group participants also participated in planning and preparing the survey questions.

The West Bank Focus Group: Expanding the List of Misleading Entities

The focus group in the West Bank included six people from six districts. The meeting was conducted remotely on Wednesday, 13 May 2020. The occupations of the participants are divided as follows: a plastic artist, a teacher, a university student, a government employee, a children's literature author, a marketing employee.

The Concept

The first set of questions addressed the concept of fake news to identify a common ground to discuss the phenomena amongst participants. Initially, the participants discussed the adoption of the Arabic translation of the term and the extent of its acceptance and understanding both in the Palestinian context and in the Arab world. The group then discussed how to measure

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33 The meetings were held electronically in compliance with government instructions and quarantine due to the state of emergency to confront the emerging Coronavirus (Covid-19), which was in effect when preparing this research.

the term and what are the components of such measurement. The group members demanded that the measurement includes misleading media as well as fake news and considered this to be an elaboration of the concept of the phenomenon. As a participant stated, "Misinformation is not only misleading news and information. There is also misinformation in the style used by some sectors, misleading the public opinion and imposing political positions and ideas on the public by governmental media or civil society media… This has been happening since Oslo [the Oslo Accords of 1993] to this day."

Personal Experience

Members of the group recounted fake news they had been exposed to recently. Among such news were fake news about a suicide or murder of a young man in Jenin who was burnt to death in the street, and fake news about the Palestinian Authority's prior acceptance of a new Saudi Arabia state supported TV series, Um Haroun, which seeks to normalize relations with Israel by romanticizing historic relationships with Arab Jews.[34] In addition to a torrent of fake news about the number, place of residence, and names of people infected with the coronavirus.

Misleading Entities

The second set of questions deals with the misleading entities. When the facilitator offered focus group participants to identify the entities that produce fake news, such as the Israeli authorities, the Palestinian authorities, traditional media, social networks, and others, the participants suggested measuring additional entities including:

· Celebrities pages

· Activists pages

· Pages that represent villages and camps and that include the term "All of us…" at the beginning of the page title, like "All of us are Ramallah, All of us are Birzeit, All of us are Nablus, All of us are Birzeit, All of us are Nablus, All of us are Anabta…of which the page admin has political or regional affiliation.

· Pages bearing a journalistic character and ending in "Mix", such as Ramallah Mix and Nablus Mix, in addition to the pages of journalists who look for scoops with tens of thousands of followers of their pages, knowing that their content is unprofessional and contains a lot of misinformation.

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34 Hubbard, Ben. (2020, May 2). Jewish Characters Star in Saudi TV Show. NYTimes. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

- Pages, websites, and accounts supervised by local and foreign security and intelligence services. The participants did not mention their names.
- Pages of sects that often present hate speech or racist speech.
- Pages that follow up on the state of roads between cities, which tens of thousands of citizens follow, and provides needed content to the public about traffic jams and the state of external roads.
- Accounts of popular YouTubers who publish news or create fake news that reaches an audience of tens and hundreds of thousands.

Detection or Verification

When the group was asked to draw on their personal experience and to share the ways that they are exposed to fake news, most of them mentioned that they have some fact checking skills and regularly check the validity of news on news websites. However, no one had used an application for verification or verified with their friends on social media. This indicates an absence of a culture of fact checking among the public and their reliance on journalistic entities only.

Responding to Fake News

In the final question about responsible actors or mechanisms that can be used to respond to fake news, the debate became very heated over the mention of the government as an optional mechanism for responding to fake news. Some of the participants mentioned that the government is responsible for punishing and setting laws and that the punishment and deterrence may go beyond punishment for fake news, and include infringement on the freedom of expression under the pretext of combating fake news. The facilitator put forward additional options for responding to fake news, including tools that

can be used to verify the authenticity of news, applications, media education, codes of conduct, campaigns, civil society. Most group members agreed that these were applicable suggestions. However, it was clear from the focus group that the ability of Palestinians to respond to fake news is still very preliminary, and that there is work to be done to support individuals and institutions in addressing this issue in Palestine.

Gaza Focus Group: Fake News is Flourishing As a Result of the Siege and Political Division

The focus group in Gaza included six people from six districts in the Gaza Strip. The meeting was conducted remotely on Friday, 22 May 2020. The occupations of the participants are divided as follows: a psychiatrist, a government employee, a lawyer, an accountant, a social worker, and a computer science specialist.

The Concept

When the group was asked about the relevance of research, everyone agreed that the research is essential and noted how users and individuals contribute to the phenomena of fake news. The participants said that the importance stems from the extent to which Gazan people suffer from fake news due to the Israeli blockade, siege and Palestinian political division. In addition to fake news, when referring to the two sides of the division, Hamas and Fatah, the participants said the government is: "Defrauding people," "they are all liars," "It's our fault because we believe everything."

Personal Experience

Regarding personal experiences in which they were exposed to fake news, the participants listed news about Palestinian Authority salaries and news about coronavirus infections. Others preferred to answer the question by saying, "Sometimes we lose hope in light of the siege of Gaza, which makes us believe in fake news." Another answer was, "Our strong belief in the political parties makes us believe everything they say." The participants' answers indicate a rising level of general discontent about the situation in Gaza, the consequences of the political division, and sometimes self-flagellation due to the harsh circumstances there.

Misleading Entities

Regarding the entities that are responsible for the production of fake news, the participants repeated the same well-known list: Governments, parties, agencies, companies etc. However, one participant added "the clergy" as he believes that they are leading producers of misinformation and speak to large groups of people which can and does often contain fake news.

Responding to Fake News

When the group was asked about the ways in which fake news could be exposed, the majority repeated "by verifying information." One answer related to media literacy education and focused on the need to raise awareness in order to "get rid of fake news." The computer science specialist encouraged the establishment of fact checking organizations and learning how to use applications developed to reduce misinformation.

Palestinian Citizens of Israel Focus Group: The Problem is with Social Media Rankings

The focus group of Palestinian Citizens of Israel included eight participants from eight regions. The meeting was conducted remotely on Monday, 2 June 2020. The occupations of the participants are divided as follows: an employee, a social worker, a public relations employee, a lawyer, an engineer, a student, a social activist, a waiter.

The Concept

In response to a question about the power of the term fake news, the participants said that they are more inclined to the term fake news, but they added to its definition meanings related to making rumors, and the desire of content creators or users to obtain a higher rating for their posts and tweets. One of the participants added in a colloquial language, "Fake news is news that someone not so ok is behind, or someone with an agenda... this is it, frankly."

Personal Experience

Regarding their exposure to fake news, the participants told a story that had circulated about a young man from Al-Tira in Ramallah who had drowned in

Tiberias. Later it was revealed that he did not drown. More examples were pictures of animals or fruits with religious signs, a lion saying God is Great (Allahu Akbar), Arab lawmakers lying and news about a delay in imposing a law on turning car lighting on in winter.

Misleading Entities

When the participants were asked about parties that they believe are most involved in producing fake news, the answers were: governments, political regimes, the patriarchy, the clergy, ordinary people, social media influencers. Regarding the channels in which they encounter fake news, the participants were divided according to their ages and the type of social media websites they use. The older participants focused on newspapers and older social networks, like Facebook and Twitter, whereas the younger participants mentioned Tik Tok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube.

Responding to Fake News

When the participants were asked about methods for responding to fake news, their answers were: legislation, social accountability for individuals and institutions responsible for spreading fake news, censorship of journalists, developing the public's ability to employ media literacy and critical thinking, questioning the validity of every story, professional verification monitors, following trustworthy people to get correct news, making individuals accountable so that everyone is responsible in combating misinformation, encouraging commentary on the news by asking questions about news sources published on social media. This shows that participants are aware of different ways to respond to fake news.

The Survey: Results and Analyses

The First Axis: Characteristics of the Respondents

The third research tool was an opinion survey conducted via phone and carried out by Alpha International Institution for Research and Studies. The research sample included 515 respondents from different areas in Palestine, distributed as follows:

Table 2: Geographic Areas of Respondents

Area	Number and Percentage of Respondents
The West Bank	278 = 54%
Gaza Strip	134 = 26%
Israel	103 = 20%
Total	515 = 100%

Table 3: Gender and Age Groups

Age	Percentage of Respondents	
15-19	15%	
20-29	30%	
30-39	30%	
40-49	17%	
50-59	11%	
60+	6%	
Total	Men 49%	Women 51%

Table 4: Academic Education

Distribution of academic education	Percentage of Respondents
High-school diploma or less	40%
Diploma	10%
Bachelor's degree	43%
Master's degree or higher	7%
Total	100%

The Second Axis: The Extent of Prevalence of Fake News

In response to the question: "Have you ever been exposed to fake news?" The results show that 72% of the respondents claimed that they had been exposed to fake news, while 28% claimed that they were not exposed to fake news. The participants who were exposed to fake news were furthermore asked, "How did you know that the news was fake?". Respondents chose one of three options according to the frequency of their media use: 48% stated that they knew that the news was fake by verifying the information; 45% stated that they had read or heard from others that it was fake; 13% answered that they were warned by others that the news was fake; and 24% answered that they knew that the news was fake by taking action based on the information of the news, which turned out to be fake (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Known Exposure to Fake News
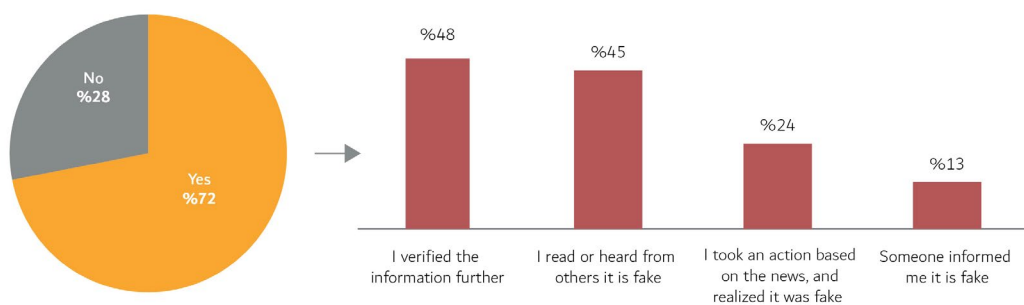
Percentage of exposure to fake news by the respondents and the way they knew it was fake

Analyzing the result of the respondents who have been exposed to fake news, we see that 48% of the respondents took it on themselves to verify the authenticity of the news, even though there are other ways to fact check. These results show how many Palestinians do not question the news and information that they receive and may fall prey to fake news, misinformation and other deceptive content. In addition, a significant percentage of the respondents (24%) had already taken an action related to the misleading information before they discovered that it was fake. This shows the need for Palestinians to engage in fact checking and verifying the news more rigorously.

When considering how much time had passed before respondents realized news were fake, the survey results indicate that approximately 80% of the respondents

verify the news within 24 hours and 40% realize that the information is fake after one hour of receiving the news. This points to an important requirement that all actors in the field of the flow of information adopt a set of practices related to the time for responding to fake news, especially since the first 24 hours after the news is published are crucial. This does not mean that news cannot be refuted later after it is published, however the longer that fake news stays online, the more likely it is to create negative repercussions.

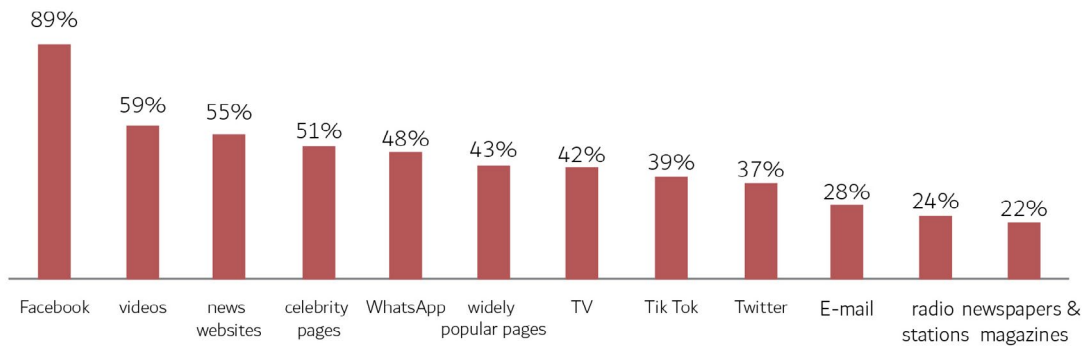**Figure 3:** Time that Passed Before Realizing News is Fake
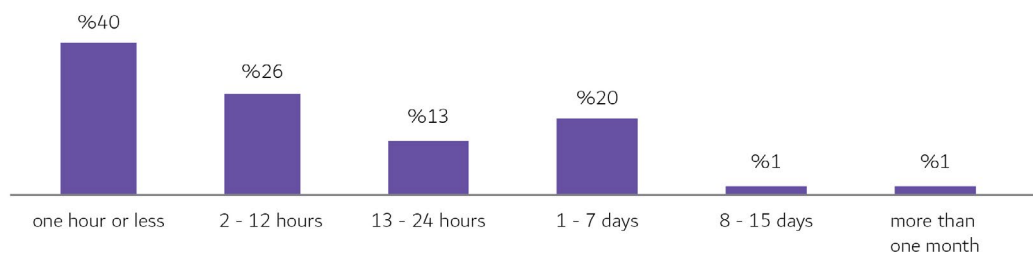
Distribution of the answers of the respondents about the amount of time that passed between when they saw fake news and when they realized that it is fake.

The next question was focused on where fake news was encountered by respondents in Palestine. According to the survey, 46% of respondents answered that the most significant percentage of fake news they encounter is in local news. However, local news does not mean the same for all of them. When asked about what they consider as local news, the Palestinian respondents from Israel answered that they consider news coming from the Israeli and Palestinin media as local: 23% answered that the most significant percentage of fake news is related to Israeli news; 16% mentioned that it is related to international news, and 12% indicated that fake news is related to news about Arabs.

It should be noted that the above percentages cannot be generalized or suggest that the public is accusing the local news of spreading fake news, and excusing global or regional news of doing the same. However, the answers reflect the priorities of the public regarding information with local news being most important, global news secondly, and regional news thirdly. These insights can help to inform efforts to respond to fake news and encourage initiatives that focus on fake news in the local media to gain further public support.

Figure 4: Degree Fake News is Present on Different Websites

89%	59%	55%	51%	48%	43%	42%	39%	37%	28%	24%	22%
Facebook	videos	news websites	celebrity pages	WhatsApp	widely popular pages	TV	Tik Tok	Twitter	E-mail	radio stations	newspapers & magazines

The next question (Figure 4) was related to which media applications and networks fake news is found in. According to the results, Palestinians were most often presented with fake news on digital platforms, primarily Facebook. These percentages are consistent with other surveys about Palestinian social media use, including the 2019 Social Media in Palestine report published by Ipoke.[35] It indicated in its annual report that the percentage of subscribers to social media sites in Palestine is as follows: 92.2% on Facebook; 72.3% on WhatsApp; 61.8% on Instagram; 60.7% on YouTube; 36.2% on Snapchat; 25.6% on Twitter; and 17.5% on Tik Tok. The survey was limited in its scope, but found that most fake news that is found on Facebook is being published from other sources. It is also important that these numbers reflect the prevalence of usage of platforms among the respondents.

Figure 5: Periods in Which Fake News Has Increased

%70	58%	50%	41%	38%	34%	22%
during catastrophes	during wartime between Israel & the Palestinians	during the peak of the division among Palestinians	during political parties' campaigns	during economic stagnation	during promotional and marketing campaigns	during economic recovery
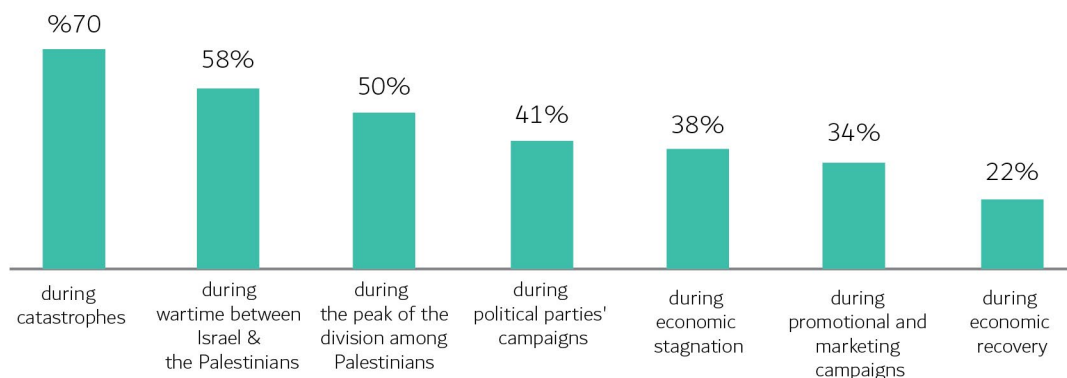
In your opinion, in which periods fake news is increased?

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35 Ipoke company website. (2020). Social Media in Palestine Report for the Year 2019. Ipoke. Retrieved July 18, 2020.

Another set of questions was focused on in what periods of time fake news prevalence increased (Figure 5). According to the opinion of the majority of the respondents (70%) disaster periods, such as the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, resulted in an increase in the spread of fake news; followed by increases in violence (58%); divisions among Palestinians (50%); election campaigns (41%); economic stagnation (38%); promotional and marketing campaigns (34%); and economic recovery (22%).

The increase in fake news creates an even more dangerous situation for Palestinians who are already some of the world's most vulnerable people. The production of media messages, whether from traditional media by journalists or from social media through what is called journalist users, is related to what may be referred to as panic, fear, and urgency in consuming informational messages during these times.[36] In these situations, both parts of misleading information thrive: disinformation and misinformation. It should be noted here that even fact-checking in times of war or disaster increases the frequency of fake news or rumors, and so-called fake news amplification occurs as soon as users start to question and verify the validity of the information. Therefore, recent years have witnessed the emergence of a sub-specialization category in journalism ethics that has come to be called verification ethics,[37] where theorists attribute paramount importance to reducing the prevalence of fake news through different stages of verification.

Politics (division and elections) ranked second after disasters and wars as a likely time for fake news to be encountered online. This is in line with most of the literature and the outcomes of the literature review, which indicate that politics, politicians and political processes increase the percentage of fake news online due to strategic aims related to the conflict, political money and partisan interests.

Lastly, the percentage of fake news increases during periods of economic stagnation and recovery (38%-22%) making an already difficult situation more challenging.

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36   Masharqa, Saleh. (2020 April 29). Media Panic. REFORM. Retrieved July 18, 2020.

37   Silverman, Craig & Wardle, claire. (No date). Verification: The Basics. DataJournalism.com. Retrieved July 16, 2020.

Figure 6: Objectives of Fake News Producers
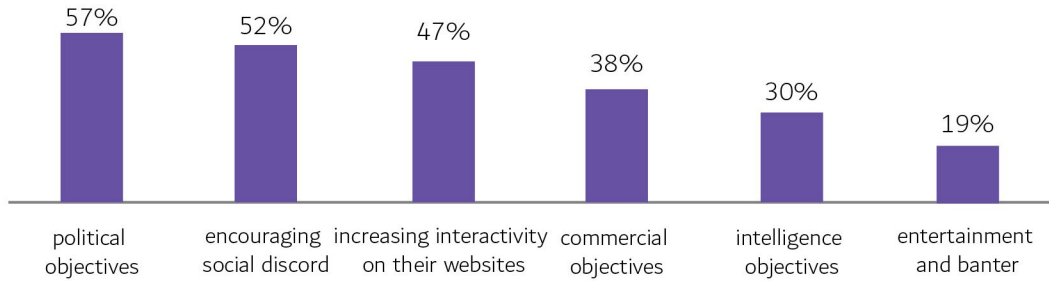
What are the objectives of fake news producers in Palestine? (choose more than one answer)

In regards to the objectives of fake news in Palestine (Figure 6), 57% of the survey respondents believe that the objectives of fake news are political. Secondly, 52% of respondents believe that fake news is designed to encourage social discord. Lastly, it is important to mention that 19% of respondents indicated that they believe the goal of fake news is irresponsible entertainment and banter, or to make people or organizations popular and to help them collect significant numbers of likes on posts and tweets. It is also important to note that respondents mentioned social media includes powerful marketing tools which are using advertising and commercial campaigns to spread misinformation and fake news.

In reflection to the responses of the focus groups and participants' thoughts on entities producing fake news (Figure 7), experts in media were interviewed. Dr. Nawaf Al-Tamimi, a professor of journalism at the Doha Institute, commented on the results of the previous question, and specifically on the three highest groups in producing fake news:

> It is not surprising that the Israeli authorities are at the top of the list of sources promoting false or fake news, especially since the approach of misinformation, lying and spreading rumors has been prevalent in Zionist media since before the establishment of the entity of Israel. Zionist propaganda relies on this type of activity to influence the public and to pass on the Israeli narrative.[38]

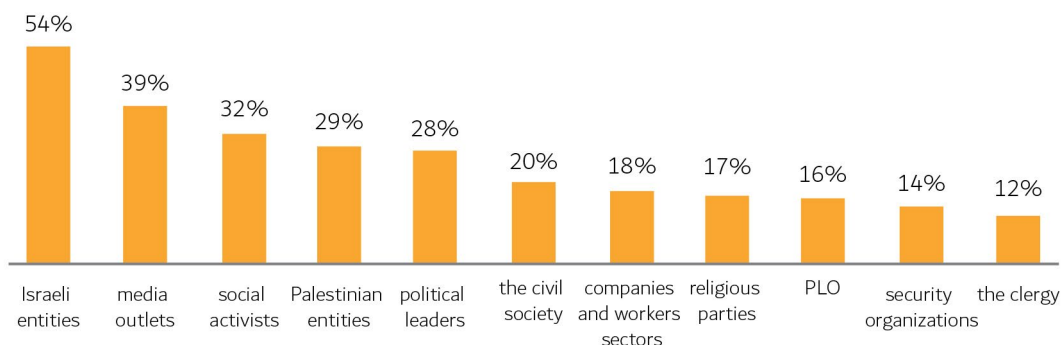38 Al-Tamimi, Nawaf. Personal interview. July 13, 2020.

As for the media being ranked as the second leading source of fake news, Al-Tamimi added:

> The percentage of inaccurate news on websites of media institutions has increased for several reasons, including the speed of work in electronic media compared to work in the printed press, and the attempt of journalistic and media institutions to achieve scoops or to keep up with breaking news, which leads to spreading fake or inaccurate news. The other reason is media polarization in the Arab world, which has pushed some media institutions to move away from credibility and spread fake news that distort opponents, and move toward spreading propaganda for the benefit of their funders.[39]

Al-Tamimi commented that it is expected that so-called social activists contribute to spreading false news:

> Because some of them strive to earn the most significant possible number of likes and clicks, to become what is called influencers, searching for fame and stardom and gaining money in exchange for publishing exciting news, similar to yellow press. Those who call themselves citizen journalists fall under the illusion of possessing tools of journalism, thus publishing false or unverified news frequently.[40]

Figure 7: Focus Group Participants' Thoughts on Entities Producing Fake News

Israeli entities	media outlets	social activists	Palestinian entities	political leaders	the civil society	companies and workers sectors	religious parties	PLO	security organizations	the clergy
54%	39%	32%	29%	28%	20%	18%	17%	16%	14%	12%

In your opinion: which are the primary entities that produce fake news? (more than one answer)

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39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.

The Third Axis: Forms of Fake News

The results show that according to the respondents, social media is most responsible for fake news. This is due to linking the emergence and increasing spreading of fake news with the emergence of social media platforms (Figure 8). However, written news, commercial advertisements, and videos are distributed in close proportions, and all three are produced by professionals and not by users or account holders on social networks.

Figure 8: Most Common Forms of Fake News
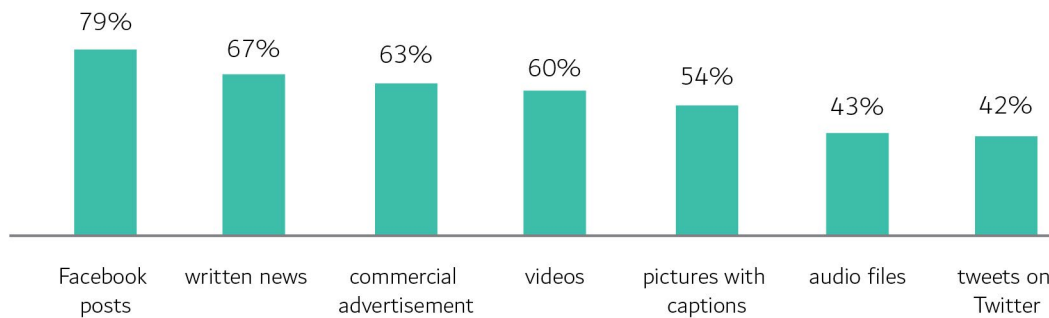
List the most common forms of fake news in Palestine from low to very high.

The results of the question related to the channels through which fake news can spread most easily (Figure 9) showed that 90% of people think it's easiest to spread fake news on social networks and only 6% of them think it is easy to publish fake news in print newspapers. This gap appears to be due to the difference in the editorial process that most print news goes through before it is published and printed vs the social media content management process. Fake news increases in many electronic publications, as fake news is easy to distribute in social media networks where the doors are wide open to publishing any content without any barriers or revisions and it can be easily shared and spread over a large network for free or little cost.

On the other hand, traditional media is still more adherent to the principles of ethics that have been historically associated with the production of news publications and editorial policies that control the validity of information, unlike modern media where social media networks are more important than

websites. As a result, there are new conditions that govern interactivity, and which also can cause major problems for accurate flows of flow of information, despite the need for freedom for expression.

Figure 9: Channels Through Which Fake News Can be Spread Most Easy
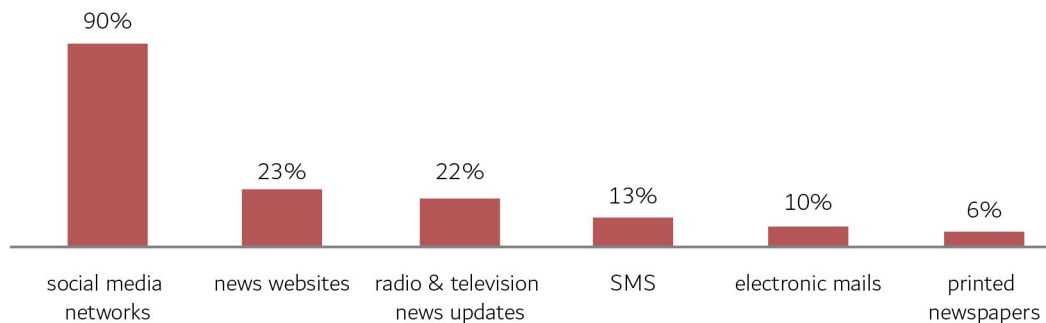
In which channels is it easier to spread fake news to a local audience? (choose more than one answer)

The Fourth Axis: Effects of Misleading Information

The questions about the effects of fake news on citizens show that 61% of the respondents think that fake news caused them to lose confidence in the media, while 55% answered it distracts their opinion on issues related to public opinion. The surprising answer to this question was that 35% of the respondents answered that fake news distorts their political affiliations. Comparing the results received in Figure 6, the respondents have identified the objective of deception as being to achieve political goals. Additionally, the public is very aware and perceptive and deals very carefully with political news.

The responses to the question about the impact of fake news on citizens (Table 10) shows how that the Palestinian public is afraid of negative effects of fake news on education, political identity, and their image. The two questions were separated to measure the impact on Palestinian individuals on the one hand, and on the Palestinians as a group on the other hand.

The effect of fake news on specific Palestinian issues (Table 11), ranked by the respondents, from very high effect to no effect. The above figures are a measure of the high and the very high degrees. Dr. Abeer Al-Najjar, a professor of media in the American University in Sharjah, comments on the answers provided in
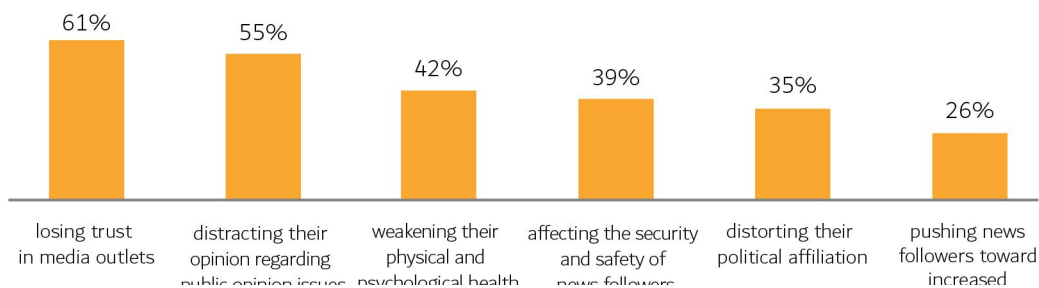
the last question:

> The results indicate an increase in the level of anxiety among Palestinians, thus, their awareness of the importance of two main issues, namely education and political division. Education is a Palestinian value that transcends generations and has always guaranteed a decent living to Palestinians and has been considered a safety valve to their pride and ability to survive. It is also considered the most important capital to the Palestinians who had lost large parts of their people, their property, their place, and were uprooted. As for the division, its importance stems from the suffering of Palestinians. For Palestinians, division means more calamities and defeats, and therefore it is important as it appears in the results.[41]

When Al-Najjar was asked about her opinion on the best ways to combat fake news in the top three categories (educating new generations, political division, and the image of Palestinians in the world), she said:

> It is important to combat fake news with a package of media, information, education and social policies and libertarian plans, because the individual now stands in the face of an avalanche of information, analyses, and images, that serve countries, systems, and companies the most, and rarely aims to provide service to the individual or citizen. What increases the complexity of facing fake news in Palestine is the Israeli informational blockade and occupation, which increases the scope of any policy or initiative to confront fake news.[42]

Figure 10: Effects of Fake News on Citizens

| 61% | 55% | 42% | 39% | 35% | 26% |
| losing trust in media outlets | distracting their opinion regarding public opinion issues | weakening their physical and psychological health | affecting the security and safety of news followers | distorting their political affiliation | pushing news followers toward increased |

How does fake news affect news followers? (choose more than one answer)

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41   Al-Najjar, Abeer. Personal interview. July 14, 2020.

42   Ibid.

Figure 11: Effect of Fake News on Palestinian Issues
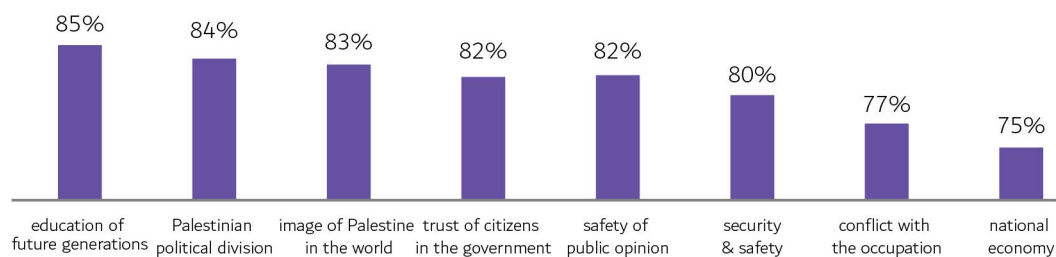
To what degree does fake news affect the following (political and social Palestinian issues)?

The Fifth Axis: Methods for Responding to Fake News

The respondents considered that the top three strongest ways to combat fake news (Figure 12) are verification of information, raising awareness campaigns and monitors (Figure 12). Muhammad Sheikh Yusuf, the director of Misbar, the regional platform for verification and monitoring of fake news, was interviewed. Sheikh Yusuf comments on monitors coming in third place and not in the higher ranks by saying, "In my opinion, the monitors came in third place because the idea of a monitor to verify news is still new in the Arab region. The monitor may need some time to earn the confidence of the public, and to introduce knowledge of work methods." Sheikh Yusuf thinks that the category that came in first place in the results, verification of information, "Is loose and does not clarify the method of verification, however, the recipient audience may think that it is the best way -- although it is not clear. In my view, monitors being in the third place is a progress in terms of public confidence, and the beginning of the spreading of this idea.[43]

Commenting on influencers lagging in the answers of the respondents, Sheikh Yusuf adds:

> The role of influencers has actually retrogressed on social networks when it comes to serious, societal and political issues. The last place reflects the opinion of the public of them and reflects that they are connected with products and commercial marketing, or with light or trivial issues mostly. This reflects a lack of confidence in influencers in important issues.[44]

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43 Sheikh Yusuf, Muhammad. Personal interview. 12 July 2020.
44 Ibid.

Figure 12: Strongest Ways to Combat Fight News

| 97% | 96% | 94% | 92% | 88% | 80% | 76% |

validation of information | through raising awareness campaigns | by establishing monitors to validate news | media literacy for users of social media networks | through social codes of conduct | through civil society interventions | through influencers
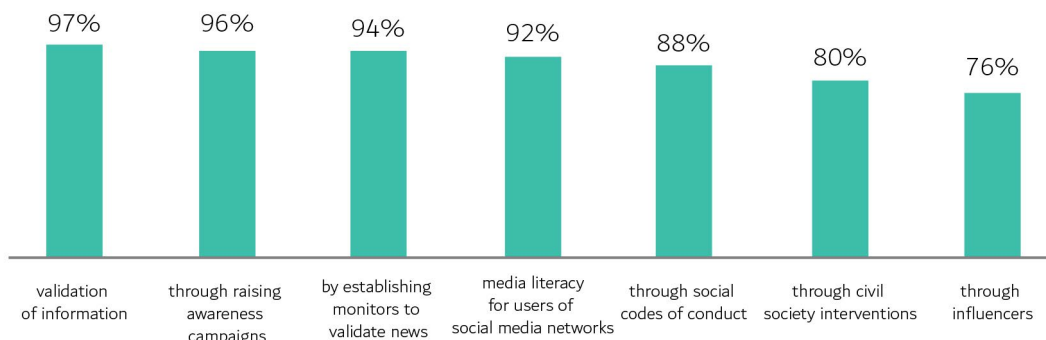
Which of the following ways is stronger for responding to fake news?

In response to a question about what is required for regional monitors, such as Misbar, or local monitors, such as Kashif, to become stronger and more widespread, Sheikh Yusuf says:

> What is required now is a cooperation between these monitors and building bridges and networking to cover and verify the most significant possible amount of news, in addition to raising awareness about the role of these monitors and enhancing public comprehension [of the monitors]. In addition, the public must take part in monitoring and verifying the news, and to send their findings to the monitors, so that the public will have a role and be a partner in verifying information on a permanent basis while adhering to the highest standards of accuracy, transparency, and impartiality.[45]

In response to the question, "Are you aware of technologies launched by social networks (Facebook and Twitter) to reduce fake news?" (Figure 13), the results show that 42% of the respondents are familiar with these technologies, while 58% of are not, despite public statements by Facebook and Twitter which refer to technologies developed by the two companies to reduce the spread of fake news. It seems that the public is not aware of these technologies and it is not clear to what extent the companies policies and tools are accessible to the Palestinian public (i.e. in Arabic). Therefore, companies should work to promote them to users in a better manner.

In response to the question, "To what degree do you think the verification techniques of Facebook and Twitter are effective?" (Figure 13), 58% of the respondents familiar with the techniques answered that their efficacy ranges from little to very little, or that it is not effective.

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45 Ibid.

Figure 13: Awareness on and Effectiveness of Techniques to Fight Fake News
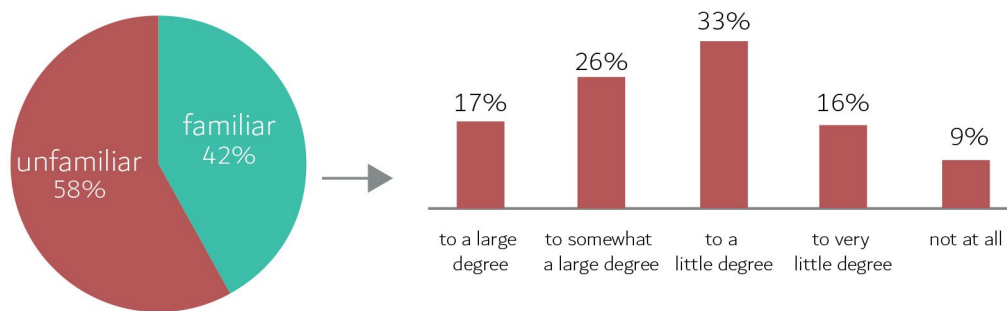
Respondents answer questions related to awareness of techniques to fight fake news

In response to the question, "On who do you rely more to expose fake news in Palestine? (choose more than one answer)" (Figure 14), more than a third of the respondents rely on official agencies to combat the phenomenon of fake news, such as media and government institutions, which they previously mentioned as entities that contribute to fake news (Figure 9).

Figure 14: Responsibility to Fight Fake News
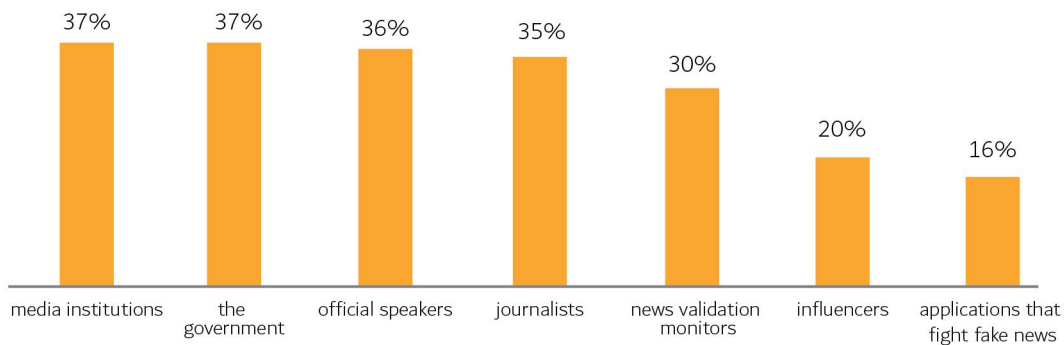
Who do you rely on for exposing fake news in Palestine more? (Choose more than one answer)

Baker Abdul-Haq, the founder and editor-in-chief of Kashif monitor, was interviewed to comment on these results and asked the question, "In your opinion, why did the respondents choose the top four entities that may fall into producing fake news?" Abdul-Haq comments:

The attitudes of the respondents are a natural reflection of the chaos in publishing and the abundant flow of fake and inaccurate information in light of the Coronavirus pandemic witnessed in social media platforms. The result, it seems, reflects regaining confidence in media institutions, official sources, and professional journalists, based on the public's need for correct and accurate information in times of disaster and crisis. This result also reflects the extent of the impact that misleading content has had on the public, and thus its reliance on the system of traditional media in the face of the chaos witnessed in new media in the midst of the pandemic.[46]

When asked about monitors being in the last place according to the survey, Abdul-Haq said:

This result does not necessarily diminish the impact of the verification of the newly established monitors and applications fighting fake news. Traditional media systems received increased follow-up rates during the pandemic, especially in the first months. Traditional media remained adherent to some extent to the gatekeeping and best journalism practices, on top of which are accuracy and objectivity. Perhaps the news-verification monitors have also contributed to enhancing the public's inclination towards traditional media and official sources, through the verification and detection of fake news that the monitors provided to their followers. This is how Kashif monitor has been working during the first 90 days of the pandemic.[47]

Regarding the unpopularity of the monitors among the general public, Abdul-Haq says:

Our news is primarily followed by the elitist public concerned with the validity and credibility of facts, who has a sufficient degree of awareness of media education practices. I admit that the monitors need more time to gain the interest of a wider range of users. One can realize this by the comments of users on the platforms of the verification monitors. These comments are not without skepticism, reducing the importance of the verification material, and refusing criticism of unprofessional practices in publishing.[48]

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46 Abdul-Haq, Baker. 13 July 2020. Personal interview.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study is an introduction to exploring the phenomenon of fake news in Palestine. Three research mechanisms were used to explore fake news: focus groups and opinion surveys. The results of the survey were presented to specialists from the field of media and responding to fake news. In conclusion, the study discusses the presented results and compares them with what was stated in the literature review mentioned earlier. In the end, the survey concludes the suggested conclusions and recommendations that may contribute to alleviating this phenomenon.

Practical Framing of the Concept of Fake News

The literature review and the survey results show that there is a need for a more comprehensive definition of the concept of fake news and for a better understanding of everything surrounding and related to fake news to be developed so that it will be possible to create policies and practices that limit this phenomenon.

The study proposes to divide fake news into two types according to the platform in which they are promoted; traditional and social media. This division is based on the institutionalization of regulation and control in the two proposed divisions. For decades, traditional media adopted means of control and principles of work and self-regulation when publishing any news item, while social media is still in the process of being institutionalized at the individual and group levels. Perhaps the features of interactivity and connectivity separate social media from traditional news media. Based on the aforementioned fake news has been subdivided to include:

- Fake news
- Fake social media

Fake News

The effort of Claire Wardle and Hussain Derakhshan in describing the shape of fake news[49] inspired this study in formulating types, shapes, and attributes of fake news. From the accumulated results and analyses in this study, it is evident that suggesting different labels to reflect the meaning and structure of fake news is needed. Therefore, we suggest dividing fake news as follows:

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49 Wardle, Claire & Derakhshan, Hossein.Ibed.

1. False News: Unintentionally false, caused as a result of a haste to publish, or to get a scoop. Unverified information and sources causing harm despite good intentions in publishing.

2. Fake News: Badly intended news, carries fabricated content and sources, its data has been subjected to intentional manipulation and modification, and it is published with bad intentions with intent to cause harm.

3. Deceptive News: News with bad intention, its content is manipulative and its sources are intently incomplete, questionable identity, carries manipulative leaks, information, or data, with the aim of deceiving the public and influencing their positions.

Figure 15: Types, Shapes and Attributes of Fake News

Faulty News

unintentionally wrong caused because of haste or seeking a scoop. Unvalidated information and sources. Causes harm unintentionally.

False News

badly intended, contains fabricated content and sources. its data is manipulative and adjusted. Published with bad intends aiming to cause harm.

Deceptive News

badly intended, contains semi-professional content. Intently missing resources and questioned identity. Contains manipulative information aiming to deceive the public.

Illustrates the forms of fake news in Palestine

Misleading Social Media

The results of the survey conducted in the framework of this research demonstrate that the greatest effort required in combating fake news must focus on combating misinformation that is published and spread on social media networks, due to the fragile boundaries between social and traditional media, and the overlapping forms of communication and interaction between the two types. Therefore, fake news in social media should be divided into misinformation in traditional media with a slight modification.

Social media provides news and opinion, either together or separately. Opinion,

in this division, means the opinions of individuals as individuals and not as journalists and analysts who adhere to the foundations of professional journalism. Therefore, opinion refers to clarifying what fake social media is. This clarification of the terminology may help to combat fake news and misleading opinions further, therefore the following division of misleading opinion on social media has been used:

1. Faulty Opinion: An opinion that is unintentionally wrong and issued within considerations that are not responsible for the correctness and accuracy of the flow of information and opinion, relying on unexamined social interaction and relationships, ending up unintentionally causing harm.

2. False Opinion: An opinion that is based on false information and on fabricated sources and data with the intent to cause harm and mislead. It contains bullying, hate speech, discrimination, and prejudice. It also contains rather high amounts of clear or easily distinguishable slander, shaming, contempt, and defamation.

3. Deceptive Opinion: An opinion that is based on subjective information, and therefore is a subjective opinion, which uses manipulative data and carries bad objectives. It contains satire, insult, prejudice, and hate speech, and it contains somewhat small amounts of slander, shaming, contempt, and defamation, in a not easily identifiable form (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Forms of Misleading Opinion on Social Networks in Palestine

Faulty opinion

unintentionally wrong, not responsible for the correctness and accuracy of the flow of information and opinion, relying on unexamined social interaction and relationships, ending up unintentionally causing harm

False opinion

based on false information and fabricated sources and data with the intent to cause harm and mislead. It contains bullying, hate speech, discrimination, and prejudice. It also contains clear and; distinguishable amounts of slander, shaming, contempt, and defamation

Deceptive opinion

based on subjective information, uses manipulative data and carries bad objectives. It contains satire, insult, prejudice, and hate speech, and it contains hazy and not easily identifiable forms of slander, shaming, contempt, and defamation

Illustration of the forms of misleading opinion on social networks in Palestine

a. Professional Verification Monitors

The growth of social media and the digital transformation of traditional media in Palestine requires the provision of control tools to limit the phenomenon of fake news. This should be accompanied by the presence of more than one monitor to combat fake news that has an a-political board of directors and a civic identity, such as a civil society organization, and financial support and investments. Also needed are monthly and annual monitoring reports and proposals of standard codes of conduct, especially concerning social media. Lastly, partnerships between local and regional monitors are needed, shifting the focus from reports managing to reports media literacy training activities.

b. Introducing Media Education into the Palestinian Education System

Palestinian civil society organizations working in the media made remarkable efforts in media education. In 2019, the Media Development Center (MDC) at Birzeit University issued a student guide in media literacy,[50] and a second guide for teachers of media literacy with the support of Sida - The Swiss International Development Agency, and in partnership with the Palestinian Ministry of Education.[51] In 2018, the MDC Birzeit also issued a guide in cooperation with the Finnish Foundation for Continuing Education on the same topic.[52] In 2016, Pyalara - The Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation, issued the Media Education Guide for Teachers.[53] Other civil society organizations conducted several training workshops in media education and media literacy with the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education and at public and private schools, and with university students. However, the field of fake news in Palestine still needs much more research and education, as indicated by the verification monitors in Palestine, such as the local monitor Kashif, the regional Arab monitor Misbar, and other monitors.

The result of the survey about the conditions that affect fake news showed 85% of the respondents think that fake news affects the education and upbringing of new generations. The results of this survey and other research in media education demonstrates the importance of seriously introducing media education in the Palestinian education system. It was found that the Palestinian Ministry of Education did not carry out any independent and sustainable work

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50 Khalil, Naela; Hallen, Johanna; Floyd, Carmelia. (2012) Media Literacy- Students Guide. Ramallah: Media Development Center at Birzeit University. Last retrieved on (17/7/2020).

51 Ibid.

52 Media Guide for Ethical and Professional Practices (2018). Ramallah: Media Development Center and the Finnish Institution for Continuing Education..

53 Pyalara - The Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation. (2016). *Media Education Guide for Teachers.*

in developing the structure of the Palestinian curriculum. Rather, the previous efforts consisted of seasonal partnerships with civil society organizations.

Given that Palestinians have multiple duty bearers, one should also think about media education which would target 1.5 million Palestinians in Israel, as this group was not included in the Israeli media education plan launched in the early 1990s. At this time, the questions and discussions of Israeli media education revolved around the nationalization of media education or ridding it of Americanism. In its political manifestations, there was a heated debate in the Israeli education system between the Likud party (right-wing), the majority government and the media from 1977-1993, and the Israeli leftist parties, who dominated the media after the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. Even though the leftists and the right-wingers agreed on the importance of media education in the Israeli education system, the discussions about the political identity were intense, and thus the Israeli media education in the founding years did not consider colonial history or occupied Palestinians.[54] Although media education was introduced to PCI schools years later, media education for PCI students concentrated on teaching media as a technique for production and did not express the Palestinian or Arab identity nor the cultural and social context of the Palestinian people and their experience of displacement, colonization, occupation and settlement.

To find out about media education provided by the Israeli government in Israel, Kholoud Massalha, director of I'lam Media Center, was interviewed about the type of media education Israel provides to PCI. According to Massalha:

> Palestinian schools are almost devoid of media education. I'lam Media Center initiated several projects in this context, but these projects targeted only five schools a year, while the number of Palestinian schools exceeds 300 schools. This means that we have reached only 15 schools since the beginning of our activity.[55]

When asked about the extent to which what is offered by the Israeli media education in PCI schools matches the identity of Palestinian students, Massalha clarifies:

> There is almost no link between the programs offered and the Arab Palestinian identity. Courses presented in this context are concerned with

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54 Lemish, Dafna, & Lemish, Peter. (1997). A Much-debated Consensus: Media Literacy in Israel (pp. 213-228). In Robert, W. Kubey (Ed.). *Media Literacy in the Information Age: Current Perspectives* (Vol. 6). Transaction Publishers.

55 Massalha, Kholoud. Personal interview. 18 July 2020.

providing the student with mechanisms for dealing with the Internet and the virtual reality. However, education for identity through media is almost absent from Arab schools, not to mention that this subject is considered a risk for the teaching staff that is afraid of Israel and of the penalties of the Ministry of Education in case this type of education is taught.[56]

In her response about the differences between the Israeli media education curriculum provided by the government to Jewish and PCI schools Massalha continues:

> The differences are very large. Unlike the Arab student, the Jewish student gets a full course in media education, including warnings in dealing with virtual reality, critical media consumption, the media role in building and strengthening identity, etc. For Jewish students, the course is usually enriching, reaching the point of becoming able to accurately analyze Israeli films, as well as analyzing the reality and the myth of Israel, in their view.[57]

Concerning the features of media education required for Palestinian students in Israel, Masalha says:

> The expected media education for the Arab student should include education about the risks and positive features of the virtual world, the boundary between incitement and freedom of expression, digital security, and the role of media in strengthening the identity and creating role models, critical media consumption, analyses of the contents the media tries to transmit to the consumer, and realizing the general influence of the media on building a reality.[58]

c. Avoiding over-drafting laws and relying on self-organizing

The Palestinian media is dominated by the Palestinian Authority's propensity to enact laws in order to avert crises. This includes five draft laws that have been proposed since the last legislative council was held in 2006 until now, including: (1) A draft law on the right to information; (2) a draft law of the Supreme Media Council; (3) organizing the audiovisual draft law; (4) a draft law of the Palestinian Journalists Union; (5) an amendment draft law of the Press and Publications Law. Despite the merit of these drafts, the Palestinian Authority enacted only one law, the Cybercrime Law, which was rejected by journalists and civil society

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56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.

and suspended in its first year (mid 2016 - mid 2017) due to concerns about a number of articles that could easily be misused.

It seems that after years of experience, media activists should stop demanding the enactment of laws, because, eventually, these laws will be designed to suit the interests of authorities, not the interest of society and the public. Also, these laws may not express concepts, values, and professional standards as media activists believe they should. Here, self-regulation or self-organizing can be presented as an alternative to legislative or governmental regulation, with regard to everything related to media, including the phenomenon of fake news, in which the reins of work cannot be handed over to the authorities, who will return to trials of a traditional array of crimes, which are defamation, slander, denunciation, insulting speech, etc. Even though fake news is a new phenomenon in the Palestinian media, it should not be considered approached through attempts to criminalize perpetrators, especially with felony punishments. A self-regulation approach that includes ethics committees in unions and arbitration boards, which arise from unions, syndicates, higher councils for media sectors and complaints councils, remains the best approach to combating fake news in the long term. This combat is not based on punishment, but on modifying media behavior in traditional media and in social media by updating the codes of conduct for journalists registered in the unions, by creating a code or codes of conduct for social communication, and by broadcasting permanent media education about fake news on traditional and new platforms.

d. Academia regarding post-truth and fake news

4,159 Palestinian students study in the departments of journalism and media in 15 universities and three colleges that provide students in the West Bank and Gaza Strip with bachelors and diploma degrees.[59] In addition, there are seven universities that offer master's degrees in media. According to the teaching programs of these universities and colleges, only Al-Quds Open University has taught a course on fake news, and only during a summer course of the 2019 - 2020 academic year. The plans of other universities and colleges are still devoid of this course or this concept, noting that there has been successful work done to bring fake news to the academic journalism field after UNESCO issued a course on fake news.[60] This course can be included in teaching plans, given that it includes educational units on the concepts of disinformation, information

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59 Masharqa, Saleh. (2020). Economic Journalism. Ramallah. The Media Development Center in Berzeit University.
60 Ireton, Cherilyn; & Posetti, Julie. (2020). Journalism, Fake News & Disinformation. Amman: UNESCO & Friedrich Neumann.

disruption, verification, and the impact of technology on the news industry. It is very important to teach it to students of journalism and media.

There is much that can also be included in the field of communication in academia in universities and colleges. The era of post-truth has changed the face of research and studies, and opened the door wide for further review and requires a shift from research in traditional media to research in digital media, and specifically an effort to try to understand research variables related to digital media.