UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS SUGGESTIBILITY AND METHODS OF DEALING WITH RUMORS: A COMPARATIVE DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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Abstract

The study aimed to identify University students' attitudes towards methods of dealing with rumors: a comparative descriptive study by determining the level of attitudes of university students and identifying differences in suggestibility and methods of dealing with rumors according to several demographic variables, including (specialization and academic level). The study sample consisted of (300) Student of university students. A suggestibility scale was used to achieve the objectives of the study. Prepared by (Ashurbagy & Alharbi, 2016) And the measure of direction in dealing with rumors by Al-Harbi (1991)

The results of the study indicated that the level of suggestibility among university students came with an average degree (1.98), and that the level of tendency towards rumors among university students came with an arithmetic average (1.78) and that there were differences between all dimensions of the scale of dealing with rumors according to the variable of academic specialization in favour of scientific colleges, followed by humanitarian colleges, followed by Sharia colleges in all dimensions and the total degree of the tool, and the presence of differences in all dimensions of the scale of dealing with rumors according to the academic level variable in favour of the third level, followed by the fifth and sixth levels, There are differences between all dimensions of the suggestibility scale according to the variable of academic specialization in favour of scientific colleges, followed by humanitarian colleges and Sharia colleges, in favour of scientific colleges, followed by humanitarian colleges and finally Sharia colleges. There are differences between all dimensions of the suggestibility scale according to the academic level variable in favour of students in the sixth level, followed by the fifth and first levels, and differences have been shown in all dimensions according to the academic levels.

Keywords: student attitudes, suggestibility, dealing with rumors.

Introduction

Research into rumors and attitudes reveals complex dynamics in their spread and reception. Negative attitudes increase the likelihood of sharing rumors, mediated by cognitive motivation related to the issue (Lee et al., 2021). Rumors serve psychological needs for fact-finding, relationship strengthening, and self-enhancement, helping individuals understand uncertainty. (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007) Unlike stereotypes, rumors are not necessarily perverted or inaccurate; they are routine social acts that identify ambiguous situations. (Miller, 2005) Classifying information as "truth" or "rumor" affects belief, as "truth" labels produce more significant shifts in belief than "common" labels. However, suspicion generally prevails, and attitudes based on degrees of belief influence (Smith, 1947). Organizational rumors tend to be very accurate and are influenced by various factors, including employee trust in management. (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007) These findings challenge common assumptions about the spread of rumors and highlight the importance of understanding the complex social and psychological processes involved in transmitting and receiving rumors.

Students who pass Universities are at a critical stage of cognitive and social development, where their vulnerability may affect their responses to social stimuli, including rumors. Vulnerability is the degree to which external suggestions or societal pressures affect an individual's attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours. (Gudjonsson, 2013) College students are exposed to social media, peer-to-peer interactions and academic contexts.ᶦ This may make them more vulnerable, especially regarding rumors. In academic settings, personal networks and online communication tools spread informal rumors that are not quickly verifiable. According to extensive research (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007), Rumors can cause fear, misinformation and social unrest.

Cognitive and social factors such as Peer influence, authority bias, and lack of experience in critical thinking may make young individuals, and even college students, more vulnerable. Group standards can affect their attitudes and behaviours, including acceptance of rumors (Nekmat & Kong, 2019). The rapid spread of information on social media blurs the distinction between truth and speculationᶦ Which makes students more vulnerable to misleading or exaggerated claims. College students use many rumors management strategies. Social distancing from people or groups that promote rumors reduces exposure to misinformation. Students should also validate information before adopting or sharing it; critical thinkers and cognitively sophisticated people are more likely to validate information, which reduces rumors (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). The term vulnerability refers to the tendency of individuals to accept disinformation and incorporate it into their beliefs and memories. College students often exhibit different attitudes towards vulnerability influenced by Personality traits, social dynamics and cognitive patterns. Research suggests that students with higher levels of anxiety or a strong desire for social acceptance are more likely to have suggestive influencesᶦ (Smith, 1947). This can lead to acceptance of rumors and misinformation, especially in the high-stress environments typical of college life.

University students are often exposed to several Myriad sources of informationᶦ Which makes them particularly vulnerable to being affected and spreading rumors. Vulnerability refers to the tendency of individuals to accept disinformation and incorporate it into their beliefs and memories, which can significantly affect their attitudes and behaviours (Rubin & Umanath, 2015)

This phenomenon is particularly relevant in university environments, where social interactions and peer influences are prominent. The portability To suggest critical psychological phenomena that affect the behaviour and decisions of individuals, especially in youth and Suggestibility refers to the extent to which an individual responds to external influences and content provided by others, suggestibility refers to the ability of individuals to accept thoughts, beliefs, and actions that are presented to them by others, whether these influences are positive or negative (Greely, 1998)The person who is able to To suggest they are more likely to adopt new opinions and beliefs based on external stimuli, susceptibility is affected To suggest several factors, including: Personal characteristics: such as intelligence, self-confidence, emotional orientation (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004)Social environment: includes social influences of peers and family, cultural context: culture plays a role in how individuals receive suggestions and directions (Hofstede, 2001)Portability can lead To suggest positive and negative effects on behaviour, they can be used to promote healthy and positive behaviours among students(Donnellan et al., 2015)They may lead to harmful behaviours or engage in negative social pressures, and to reduce adverse effects of susceptibility To suggest Must Adopting strategies to enhance students' critical thinking (Karlsson, 2016)

Research suggests that students with higher levels of anxiety or desire for social acceptance are more likely to exhibit susceptible behaviours, which may lead to the acceptance of unfounded allegations and rumors (Benedan et al., 2018). To address these challenges, Various methods can be used to help students deal with rumors and enhance their critical thinking skills. Moreover, for suggestibility, there is A crucial role in criminal psychology and legal contexts (Strika & Eglītis). Vulnerability research has evolved from early discussions about their nature as a unifying trait or multiple factors to more modern empirical and individual approaches. These approaches examine how they affect Misleading information on remembering and identifying personal characteristics associated with vulnerability (Strika & Eglītis, 2018). Enhancing media knowledge, encouraging open dialogues, and providing access to fact-checking resources are essential strategies that enable students to deal with the complexities of information in their academic and social lives. (Lewandowsky et al., 2017) By fostering a culture of critical evaluation and scepticism towards unconfirmed information, universities can better equip students to resist suggestive influences and reduce the impact of rumors on

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their beliefs and behaviours. A study indicated (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017) that College students are exposed to fake news or rumors on social media at least once a week, with 56% of respondents stating that they found it difficult to distinguish between accurate and false information. According to (Rosnow, 2001) ، 63% of college students admitted that they experienced adverse emotional reactions, such as fear, anger or frustration when they realized they were affected by false rumors. Emotional susceptibility is often associated with higher levels of suggestibility. As found (Johnson 2022), Students who participated in media literacy workshops aimed at critical thinking and fact-checking showed a 28% reduction in rumors exposure and vulnerability. In addition, 85% of survey participants reported feeling more confident in their ability to detect false information after attending these programs. The study aimed by (Osman et al., 2023) to identify rumors in the student community in the era of social networking sites and coping mechanisms and the research community included a sample of experts who used new media and descriptive and statistical approaches (interviews and questionnaires) was used to analyze and understand rumors through social networking sites and how to confront them, and the study reached the most important results: 62% of the research community believes that the use of students (youth) of news networks through social networking sites affects the spread of rumors, while 63% of the research community believes that the quality of social networking sites used by young people helps spread rumors, and 43% of the research community agree that technology users are primarily young people, which helps spread rumors (Bordia & DiFonzo, 2017)

College students' attitudes toward rumors are greatly influenced by their use of social media, the categorization of information, and their beliefs. The spread of rumors facilitates the quality and type of social media platforms used, and students' vulnerability increases during crisis events when official information is unavailable. Understanding these dynamics can help develop strategies to mitigate the spread of rumors and effectively manage public mood.

Mythology

Participants

The study sample consisted of (300) students enrolled in the bachelor's stage, whose ages ranged from (18-23) years according to several scientific disciplines, where the number of participants from humanitarian colleges (210) by (70%), Sharia colleges (73) by (24.3%) and scientific colleges (17) by (5.7%), and different demographic variables such as housing, income level, were selected randomly with multiple stages—the faculty of the university Who met the conditions for participation in the study.

Instruments

Three tools were used in the current study

1. Moreover, the scale Multidimensional Suggestibility for university students Prepared by Alharbi, 2016) consists of (70) paragraphs distributed over six main dimensions, namely persuasibility, which includes (11) paragraphs; infection of temptation, which includes (9) paragraphs; psychological reaction, which includes (11) paragraphs; compatibility with comrades includes (12) paragraphs, psychological control includes (12) paragraphs, stubbornness and adherence to opinion include (15) paragraphs، to correct the scale, the answer to the paragraphs of the scale is to choose an alternative from the available alternatives, namely: (apply and give three degrees, apply to some extent and give two degrees, do not apply and give one degree). The instrument's psychometric properties were verified with an internal consistency coefficient of (0.710-0.824**), all statistically significant, and a total Cronbach stability coefficient (0.94).

2. A scale to measure the trend towards dealing with rumors prepared by Al-Harbi (1991), which consists of (36) items distributed over two main dimensions, namely, believing the rumor and including (17) paragraphs, and the second dimension repeating the rumor and includes (18) paragraphs. To correct the scale, the answer to the paragraphs of the scale is by choosing an alternative from the available alternatives, namely: (OK and given three degrees, neutral and given two degrees, disagree and given one score). The instrument's psychometric properties were verified where the internal consistency coefficient (0, 91-0.97**), all of which are statistically significant, and the overall Cronbach stability coefficient was (0.96).

RESULTS

1. Arithmetic averages and standard deviations of university students' attitudes are susceptible to suggestion and dealing with rumors.
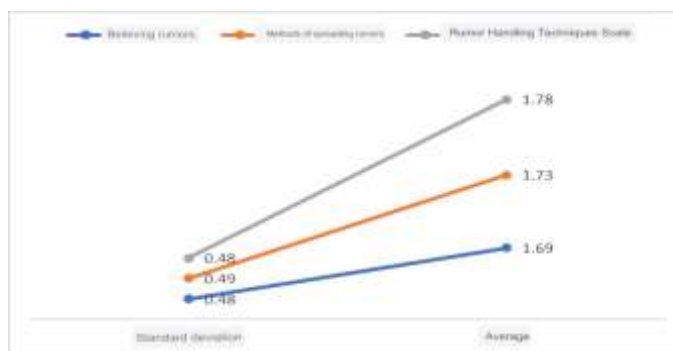
The results of Table 1 showed that the level of suggestibility among university students came with an average score (of 1.98), and after stubbornness and adherence to opinion in first place with an arithmetic average (of 2.16), and in last place after the infection of temptation with an arithmetic average (1.57). The following are the arithmetic averages and standard deviations of the scale dimensions.

Table 1. Arithmetic averages and standard deviations of university students' attitudes are susceptible to suggestion and dealing with rumors.

Dimensions	Average	Standard deviation
Persuasibility	2.09	0.38
Temptation infection	1.57	0.56
Psychological reaction	2.04	0.46
Compatibility with comrades	1.90	0.40
Psychosomatic control	1.98	0.43
Stubbornness and adherence to opinion	2.16	0.44
Suggestibility scale	1.98	0.33

Table 2.

Dimensions	Average	Standard deviation
Believe rumors	1.69	0.48
Rumour releasing methods	1.73	0.49
Scale of methods of dealing with rumors	1.78	0.48

Figure 1.

2. Arithmetic averages and standard deviations of students' attitudes in methods of dealing with rumors

The results of Table 2 showed that the level of believing rumors was average, as it came with an arithmetic average (1.69), and that the level of rumor repeating was average, where it came with an arithmetic average (1.73), and that the level of attitude towards rumors among university students came with an arithmetic average (1.78) (Figure 1).

3. Differences in dealing with rumors according to the variable of scientific specialization

It is clear from Table 3 that there are differences between all dimensions of the scale of dealing with rumors according to the variable of academic specialization (scientific colleges, Sharia colleges, applied colleges). To identify the significance of the differences, the dimensional tests were calculated to detect the least significant difference (LSD) as follows:

It is evident in Table 4 of the dimensional comparisons that the trend of differences came in favours of scientific colleges, followed by humanitarian colleges and Sharia colleges in all dimensions and the total degree of the tool, and to identify differences according to the variable of academic level.

4. Differences in dealing with rumors according to the variable of academic level

It is clear from Table 5 that there are differences in all dimensions of the scale of dealing with rumors according to the variable of the academic level. To identify the significance of the differences, the post-tests were calculated to detect the least significant difference (LSD) and the differences came after repeating rumors in favours of the sixth level, followed by the fifth level, and after believing the rumors, the differences came in favours of the third level, followed by the fifth and sixth levels, the differences were represented in the total degree of dealing with rumors in favours of the first level, followed by the third, sixth and fifth levels.

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Table 3.

Dimensions of dealing with rumors	Contrast source	Sum of squares	D.F.	mean	F	Sig
Rumor echoing	Between groups	1653.78	2	826.889	12.955	0
	Inside groups	18956.4	297	63.826		
	Total	20610.2	299			
Believe rumors	Between groups	1827.13	2	913.565	12.314	0
	Inside groups	22034.5	297	74.19		
	Total	23861.7	299			
The overall score of the rumor–handling scale	Between groups	6946.2	2	3473.1	13.344	0
	Inside groups	77302	297	260.276		
	Total	84248.2	299			

Table 4.

Independent variable	(I) Specialization	(J) Specialization	Average	Standard error	Sig
Rumor echoing	Humanities Faculties	Sharia Colleges	4.38240*	1.12243	0
		Scientific Faculties	−5.68578–*	2.06928	0.006
	Sharia Colleges	Humanities Faculties	−4.38240–*	1.12243	0
		Scientific Faculties	−10.06818–*	2.22625	0
	Scientific Faculties	Humanities Faculties	5.68578*	2.06928	0.006
		Sharia Colleges	10.06818*	2.22625	0
Believe rumors	Humanities Faculties	Sharia Colleges	4.28107*	1.21013	0
		Scientific Faculties	−6.70757–*	2.23097	0.003
	Sharia Colleges	Humanities Faculties	−4.28107–*	1.21013	0
		Scientific Faculties	−10.98864–*	2.40021	0
	Scientific Faculties	Humanities Faculties	6.70757*	2.23097	0.003
		Sharia Colleges	10.98864*	2.40021	0
The overall score of the rumor–handling scale	Humanities Faculties	Sharia Colleges	8.66347*	2.26661	0
		Scientific Faculties	−12.39335–*	4.17866	0.003
	Sharia Colleges	Humanities Faculties	−8.66347–*	2.26661	0
		Scientific Faculties	−21.05682–*	4.49565	0
	Scientific Faculties	Humanities Faculties	12.39335*	4.17866	0.003
		Sharia Colleges	21.05682*	4.49565	0

Table 5.

Dimensions of dealing with rumors	Contrast source	Sum of squares	D.F.	mean	F	Sig
Rumor echoing	Between groups	1477.6	6	246.267	3.771	0.001
	Inside groups	19132.6	293	65.299		
	Total	20610.2	299			
Believe rumors	Between groups	2648.71	6	441.452	6.097	0
	Inside groups	21213	293	72.399		
	Total	23861.7	299			
The overall score of the rumor–handling scale	Between groups	7974.52	6	1329.09	5.106	0
	Inside groups	76273.7	293	260.32		
	Total	84248.2	299			

5. Differences in suggestibility according to the variable of scientific specialization.

It is clear from Table 6 that there are differences between all dimensions of the suggestibility scale according to the variable of academic specialization (scientific colleges, Sharia colleges, applied colleges) except for the first dimension (persuasiveness, the third dimension psychological reaction, the fifth dimension psychosomatic control, and the sixth dimension stubbornness and adherence to opinion). To identify the significance of the differences, the dimensional tests were calculated to detect the lowest significant difference (LSD) as follows:

Table 7 post–comparisons shows that the trend of differences in the dimension of seduction infection came in favours of humanitarian colleges, followed by Sharia colleges, and finally, medical colleges (applied). In contrast, the differences came after consensus with comrades in favours of scientific colleges, followed by humanitarian colleges and Sharia colleges, and about the direction of differences according to the total degree of the tool, the

differences came in favours of scientific colleges, followed by humanitarian colleges and finally Sharia colleges.

6. Differences in suggestibility according to the variable of academic level

It is clear from Table 8 that there are differences between all dimensions of the suggestibility scale according to the academic level variable. To identify the significance of the differences, the dimensional tests were calculated to detect the lowest significant difference (LSD), where the differences in the total degree of the suggestibility scale came in favor of students at the sixth level, followed by the fifth and first levels. The differences in all dimensions were shown according to the academic levels.

Discussion

The level of suggestibility (1.98) indicates that students have an average susceptibility to respond to external suggestions and influences, whether from their peers, the media, or other sources. They are not highly vulnerable, but they can be affected in some circumstances. The level of rumors trend

Table 6.

Dimensions of suggestibility	Contrast source	Sum of squares	D.F.	mean	F	Sig
(Persuasibility)	Between groups	91.889	2	45.945	2.607	0.075
	Inside groups	5233.63	297	17.622		
	Total	5325.52	299			
(flattering infection)	Between groups	1495.46	2	747.727	36.852	0
	Inside groups	6026.18	297	20.29		
	Total	7521.64	299			
(Psychological reaction)	Between groups	92.673	2	46.336	1.838	0.161
	Inside groups	7488.61	297	25.214		
	Total	7581.28	299			
(Compatibility with comrades)	Between groups	248.332	2	124.166	5.65	0.004
	Inside groups	6527.42	297	21.978		
	Total	6775.75	299			
Psychosomatic control	Between groups	18.492	2	9.246	0.346	0.708
	Inside groups	7939.79	297	26.733		
	Total	7958.28	299			
Stubbornness and adherence to opinion	Between groups	80.017	2	40.009	0.922	0.399
	Inside groups	12886.9	297	43.39		
	Total	12966.9	299			
Total degree of suggestibility	Between groups	6177.39	2	3088.69	5.886	0.003
	Inside groups	155842	297	524.719		
	Total	162019	299			

Table 7

Independent variable	(I) Specialization	(J) Specialization	Average	Standard error	Sig
(flattering infection)	Humanities Faculties	Sharia Colleges	0.8849	0.63285	0.163
		Scientific Faculties	–9.59805–*	1.16671	0
	Sharia Colleges	Humanities Faculties	–.88490–	0.63285	0.163
		Scientific Faculties	–10.48295–*	1.25521	0
	Scientific Faculties	Humanities Faculties	9.59805*	1.16671	0
		Sharia Colleges	10.48295*	1.25521	0
Compatibility with comrades	Humanities Faculties	Sharia Colleges	1.94329*	0.65864	0.003
		Scientific Faculties	–1.48853–	1.21426	0.221
	Sharia Colleges	Humanities Faculties	–1.94329–*	0.65864	0.003
		Scientific Faculties	–3.43182–*	1.30637	0.009
	Scientific Faculties	Humanities Faculties	1.48853	1.21426	0.221
		Sharia Colleges	3.43182*	1.30637	0.009
Total degree of suggestibility	Humanities Faculties	Sharia Colleges	3.71393	3.21827	0.249
		Scientific Faculties	–18.15539–*	5.93312	0.002
	Sharia Colleges	Humanities Faculties	–3.71393–	3.21827	0.249
		Scientific Faculties	–21.86932–*	6.3832	0.001
	Scientific Faculties	Humanities Faculties	18.15539*	5.93312	0.002
		Sharia Colleges	21.86932*	6.3832	0.001

(1.78): This low average also indicates that students are not very inclined to believe or spread rumors. However, having this level may mean that there is still a category of students who could be affected by rumors under certain circumstances, especially if the sources are reliable or widely circulated. (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Ashurbagy & Alharbi, 2016; Lee et al., 2021; Miller, 2005; Osman et al., 2023). He explains apparent differences in how university students deal with rumors based on their major. Students in scientific faculties performed best when dealing with rumors. This is usually due to the nature of their study, which relies on critical thinking, analysis, and verification of information. These skills make them more cautious in accepting unreliable information. Students in humanitarian faculties came in second. They usually have a good background in analysis and criticism but to a lesser extent than in science colleges. They may be more affected by rumors if they relate to social or humanitarian aspects that interest them. (Benedan et al., 2018; Curran, 2024; DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007; Gudjonsson, 2013; Johnson, 2022; Lariscy et al., 2009) Differences in the dimensions of the rumors handling scale by academic level indicate that students in the third level showed a better ability to deal with rumors, followed by students of the fifth and sixth levels. Third–level students

have acquired the basics of critical thinking and analysis while remaining highly motivated to learn and interact. While advanced–level students have more experience, they may be more preoccupied with subspecialties, making them less likely to be directly affected by rumors compared to students in the level.

Lowest (Lewandowsky et al., 2017; Miller, 2005; Osman et al., 2023; Pennycook & Rand, 2019). The differences in the dimensions of the suggestibility scale according to the academic specialization indicate that students of scientific colleges are the least affected by suggestion, followed by students of humanitarian colleges and then Sharia colleges. This disparity reflects the nature of study in scientific faculties that focus on critical thinking and information verification, which enhances students' ability to resist external influences. On the other hand, students of humanitarian faculties show greater susceptibility to suggestions due to the nature of their studies, which may be more interactive with social and psychological aspects. In contrast, students of Sharia faculties are most affected by suggestion, perhaps because of the focus on values and beliefs that may make them more open to external influences related to the religious or moral field.

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Table 8

Dimensions of suggestibility	Contrast source	Sum of squares	D.F.	Arithmetic mean	F	Sig
(Persuasibility)	Between groups	856.745	6	142.791	9.362	0
	Inside groups	4468.78	293	15.252		
	Total	5325.52	299			
(flattering infection)	Between groups	1626.88	6	271.147	13.477	0
	Inside groups	5894.75	293	20.119		
	Total	7521.64	299			
(Psychological reaction)	Between groups	1074.84	6	179.141	8.067	0
	Inside groups	6506.44	293	22.206		
	Total	7581.28	299			
(Compatibility with comrades)	Between groups	1446.35	6	241.058	13.253	0
	Inside groups	5329.4	293	18.189		
	Total	6775.75	299			
(Psychosomatic Control)	Between groups	989.973	6	164.995	6.938	0
	Inside groups	6968.31	293	23.783		
	Total	7958.28	299			
(stubbornness and adherence to opinion)	Between groups	1119.39	6	186.565	4.614	0
	Inside groups	11847.6	293	40.435		
	Total	12966.9	299			
Total degree of suggestibility	Between groups	32961.1	6	5493.51	12.472	0
	Inside groups	129058	293	440.47		
	Total	162019	299			

(Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Rosnow, 2001; Rubin & Umanath, 2015; Smith, 1947). Differences in the dimensions of the suggestibility scale by academic level indicate that sixth-level students are the most affected by suggestion, followed by fifth-level and first-level students, reflecting the impact of academic experience and academic stage on students' susceptibility to external opinions and ideas. This may result from students at the advanced levels being preoccupied with graduation requirements and academic pressures, making them more likely to suggest when making decisions. On the other hand, first-level students also show high aptitude, perhaps due to a lack of experience and intellectual maturity at the beginning of their university career, which makes them more open to external influences. (Strika & Eglītis, 2018; Zubiaga et al., 2016)

Recommendations

1.   I am preparing awareness programs to develop students' critical thinking skills to evaluate information before believing or publishing it.

2.   Encourage students to rely on reliable sources to verify information and avoid spreading rumors on social media.

3.   Include educational materials on how to deal with rumors and understand suggestions to enable students to make informed decisions.

4.   We are organizing awareness campaigns within universities to curb the spread of rumors and teach students how to distinguish between truth and falsehood.

Acknowledgments

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Revista Iberoamericana de Psicología del Ejercicio y el Deporte. Vol. 20, nº 1 (2025)

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