

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SPREAD OF UZBEK RUMORS IN THE DIGITAL SPACE

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Abstract. This scientific thesis analyzes the process of rumor propagation in the digital space, its characteristics, and the factors influencing it within the Uzbek context. The primary objective is to determine the formation, distribution mechanisms, and socio-psychological impact of rumors on audiences in a virtual environment. The thesis pays special attention to media environment factors that cause word-of-mouth and information flows to spread rapidly and widely across social networks. The content, objectives, and pathways through which rumors penetrate youth and other audiences in the Uzbek segment are examined through specific examples. According to the results, rumors on digital platforms can rapidly influence social consciousness and are closely tied to the unique operational factors of the social media ecosystem.

Keywords: rumors, digital space, social networks, information dissemination, Uzbek society, internet communication, virtual environment.

Introduction & Theoretical Foundations

The increase in the speed and scale of information exchange in the digital space has shaped new communication environments. In this environment, rumors—informational, unverified, yet rapidly spreading messages—are diffusing widely across social networks, instant messengers, internet forums, and other digital platforms. In folkloristics, the term *rumor* usually refers to unverified information about a specific event or individual that is transmitted orally among members of a community. In the digital space, however, rumors expand traditional boundaries with the help of modern technologies, exerting a swift and effective impact on social consciousness and public opinion.

In Uzbek society, rumors have always played a key role in information exchange, social relations, and collective consciousness formation. Historical sources demonstrate the impact of rumors among the populace on political, economic, and religious processes, as well as their role in shaping public opinion about specific events or figures. Starting from the early 20th century, although the development of the press and other mass media influenced the form and speed of rumor propagation, the advent of the internet and digital communications radically transformed these processes. Nowadays, rumors spread not only orally, but also via text, audio, and video formats; their reach can extend to thousands or millions of users in just a few hours or even minutes.

Studying the characteristics of rumor propagation in the digital space primarily relies on modern methodologies from information virology, memetics, digital anthropology, and sociology. Factors influencing the creation, dissemination, and reception of rumors

include communicative processes, psychological variables, algorithmic filtering on social platforms, echo chambers, and bot activity. For instance, in Uzbekistan, the popularity of platforms such as Telegram, Facebook, and Odnoklassniki, along with levels of digital literacy and internet accessibility, directly affects rumor dynamics. The high speed of information flows, the swift spread of unofficial news via posts and comments, and the blurring boundaries between truth and falsehood, fact and speculation, personal opinion and social constructs further complicate the phenomenon of digital rumors.

Mechanisms and Formats of Rumor Dissemination

Uzbek rumors mainly spread across political, social, domestic, and economic spheres. Traditionally, their forms manifested through expressions like "gap" (talk/gossip), "so'z" (word), "eshitdimki" (I heard that), or "ko'rdimki" (I saw that). In the digital domain, these rumors appear in new formats like screenshots, audio recordings, and video clips. This can either increase the perceived credibility of rumors or, conversely, make detecting their falsity more challenging. Furthermore, digital rumors heighten the risk of panic, distrust, disinformation, and manipulation within social environments.

Analyzing the characteristics of rumor propagation in the digital space provides a deeper understanding of the laws governing information exchange, communication strategies, and the transformation of social consciousness in society. Therefore, this topic holds significant scientific relevance for researching modern Uzbekistan's information space and socio-cultural processes.

The spread of rumors in the digital space is studied as a distinct phenomenon of the modern communication landscape. While rumors in traditional Uzbek culture spread mostly orally within tight-knit circles, the development of the internet and social networks has enabled them to reach vast audiences. Analyzing this process requires examining the structural and thematic aspects of rumors, their origins, dissemination channels, and audience responses.

Digital rumors often spread through social media (Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok), messaging applications (WhatsApp, Telegram), and online publications. They offer instantaneous delivery, anonymity, combinations of visual and text content, and the capacity to reach massive audiences in minimal time. Uzbek-language rumors frequently relate to themes characteristic of the national mindset, socio-political issues, public figures, religious motives, and daily events. The dissemination mechanisms occur in stages: first, a suspicious, sensational, or intriguing message about an event or person originates from an unknown source; second, the message is rapidly shared, discussed, and reinterpreted in various contexts by numerous users.

In the Uzbek digital space, the spread of rumors often exhibits viral characteristics, with "like" and "share" functions playing a central role. For example, during the 2020 quarantine period, a rumor claiming that "a curfew will be secretly introduced in Tashkent" was shared by thousands across Telegram and WhatsApp groups in a short period. As a result, official sources were forced to issue prompt denials and clarifications.

In such instances, rumors tend to escalate during times of social anxiety or when trust in official information sources is lacking.

Socio-Psychological Factors and Media Dynamics

Among the drivers of rumor propagation in digital environments, psychological and social motives hold a prominent place. When people experience high uncertainty, anxiety, or a need for sensation, rumors spread faster. For instance, rumors such as *"the exchange rate will fluctuate drastically"* or *"religious holidays will be canceled"* reflect underlying anxieties regarding economic and religious stability. Analysis reveals that passing rumors to one another as trusted information is widespread among Uzbek social media users, largely because many lack information verification mechanisms or do not feel the need for them.

Another key feature of digital rumors is their enrichment with visual content. Rumors are frequently accompanied by images, videos, screenshots, or memes. Fake statements attributed to celebrities or political figures, along with fabricated videos, spread quickly and are accepted by audiences as real events. This situation is attributed to insufficient levels of digital literacy. Comparative analysis shows that rumors in the Uzbek digital space are more deeply tied to local socio-economic and cultural contexts than those in other countries. For instance, while rumors in Russia or Kazakhstan may center more around political and international affairs, in Uzbekistan they lean closer to daily life, local economics, and religious topics.

Influencers and local bloggers also play a significant role in rumor transmission. Due to their large follower bases, any rumor shared or discussed by them quickly acquires a mass character. For example, if a prominent blogger voices a speculation or suspicion about an event, it is swiftly re-shared by other users as unverified facts. Such occurrences lead to rumors being accepted as "facts" on social platforms.

Mechanisms to counter rumors in the digital space have also emerged. Official state entities and mass media are expanding practices of fact-checking and rapid debunking. Channels like "StopMish-Mish" on Telegram, alongside the National News Agency and other official channels, attempt to neutralize rumors by providing swift explanations. However, if the audience's level of trust in official information remains low, halting the spread of rumors becomes difficult. Simultaneously, digital platform algorithms facilitate the spread of rumors, as highly shared and discussed content is automatically displayed to a broader audience.

Scientific research offers several models and theoretical approaches to rumor propagation. For example, according to the "climate theory," rumors intensify during periods of social stress and unrest. The "information cascade" model explains how a rumor can be accepted as truth by a broad audience when it appears to be validated by several seemingly credible sources. The operation of these models in the Uzbek digital space can be observed through analytical monitoring of social media. For instance, during the 2022 energy crisis, rumors like *"gas will be completely shut off"* or *"electricity will only be provided at night"* spread widely, heightening the public's need for official information and fueling discontent.

In summary, the characteristics of rumor propagation in the digital space are inextricably linked to technological capabilities, psychological needs, information technology literacy, local cultural/social contexts, and network algorithms. A deep scientific analysis of this process is crucial for creating a stable information environment and developing effective approaches to counter rumors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The spread of rumors in digital space within Uzbek society reveals distinct trajectories in social, cultural, and communicative processes. Research indicates that rumors spread most rapidly and en masse on social platforms like Telegram, Facebook, and Instagram. High audience numbers, ease of distribution, and relative anonymity on these platforms create fertile ground for rumor popularity. Moreover, the large volume of Uzbek-language information consumers, combined with a strong oral tradition and trust in informal information, accelerates this phenomenon.

The findings demonstrate that rumors frequently center around collective anxiety, political events, healthcare, economic issues, and social conflicts. Rumors spread with greater force in situations where official news sources are lacking or deemed untrustworthy. This underscores the need to improve the efficiency of official information policies and communication strategies. Key distribution mechanisms identified include rapid reposting, information sharing in private groups, leveraging opinions of public figures or bloggers, and utilizing visual media (memes, videos). In terms of dynamics, rumors typically originate in small closed groups before reaching wider audiences via public channels and social networks.

Based on the findings, practical recommendations include:

- Increasing the openness and speed of official information sources.
- Establishing systems for prompt and grounded responses to fake or unverified news.
- Developing targeted media literacy programs.
- Cultivating a culture of fact-checking among social media users and engaging communities in combating fraud and rumors.
- Utilizing modern technologies, including artificial intelligence and big data analytics, as a promising direction for monitoring rumor dynamics.

Future research should focus on deeper analyses of rumor propagation patterns, assessing their impact on society and public psychology, and continuously adapting information policies to meet modern demands. This will foster greater information reliability, social stability, and an informed decision-making culture within society.

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