IMPACT OF ELECTRONIC RUMOURS ON CONSUMER DEMAND FOR IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Bouguesri Sarra, Hassiba Benbouali University
Kelleche Abdellah, Hassiba Benbouali University

ABSTRACT

Our target to be reached through this research to measure the impact of the strength of electronic rumours circulating through social networking sites on the demand of the consumer for foodstuffs in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. For which purpose, analysis has been made for the dimensions of both electronic rumours and social networking sites, in addition to the demand for foodstuffs in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Besides, based on the field study using the questionnaire that has been distributed to a specific sample consisting of 394 consumers using one of the social networking sites, the study demonstrated the existence of a statistically significant effect of the electronic rumours on the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of such pandemic. More to the point, this study attributed that effect to three factors pertaining to the nature of the electronic rumours and the means of their distribution, in addition to factors relating to the consumer personality, and other factors associated with the environmental conditions created by the pandemic in terms of economic, social and psychological aspects. Furthermore, amongst the most important of such factors, we uncover: the relative importance of rumours with regards to the consumer, and the degree of ambiguity that distinguished the crisis period about the measures taken by government to cope with the crisis, along with the degree of credibility and confidence that the consumer allocates to those rumours, in addition to the spread of anxiety and stress resulting from the crisis in question.

Keywords: Electronic Rumours, Social Networking Sites, Demand For Foodstuffs, Covid-19 Pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites are considered one of the most important results of the information and communication technology revolution, which have created fabulous changes in the domain of communication between individuals, institutions and societies, namely in view of the features and characteristics they are differentiated with, through which they were able to change the form and nature of relationships between different individuals and entities. Therefore, any individual, regardless of his geographical location and social and cultural status, becomes able to get in touch with any party and at any time. Besides, the movement of information and news has been liberated from the captivity and constraint of laws, regulations, customs, traditions and social values, the fact of which has facilitated the production and circulation of information and news, regardless of their character, degree of credibility and objectivity, and regardless alike of the possibility of their social acceptance and the compatibility thereof with values and the social and legal restrains within societies, namely in light of the feature of the ability of assimilation of roles and characters, changing names and using cultural, scientific, historical and religious symbols so as to hide the real personalities; thus, this has contributed to the diffusion and circulation of news through various internet networks, in particular social media platforms, the fact of which has weakened the role of the government supervision and the possibility of achieving control and

regulation of the process of circulating rumours, to the extent that looks to pose a threat to societies, mainly in light of crises.

In the light of the facts set out above, and for the purpose of measuring the impact of the electronic rumours on the consumer demand for foodstuffs during crises, we will endeavour through this research to analyze the role of rumours being circulated throughout social networking sites in directing the consumer demand for foodstuffs during the Covid-19 pandemic; oh which basis, the main problem of our research can be formulated as follows:

What is the role of electronic rumours being circulated on social media in directing the consumer demand for foodstuffs during the Covid-19 crisis?

We are aiming through this research to measure the impact of the electronic rumours circulating through social networking sites on the demand of the consumer for foodstuffs in light of the Covid-19 crisis; which implies the role of such rumours in changing the consumer demand for foodstuffs in terms of the required quantity and quality, the time and number of request frequencies and the demand objective, all the way through knowing the extent of his use and his reliance on these sites alongside his influence by the information and news circulated therein and, subsequent to which, his response to the same; then measuring his behaviour towards the foodstuffs in light of this crisis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Rumours

Rumours have shown to be as old as the collective and social life of human being; they are not born today, but they have a historical extension across various civilizations and human communities. Nevertheless, they differ in terms of goal, purpose, form and type. The American Psychological Association provided definition to the same as "*an unverified proposal bearing a subject matter relevant to the persons involved in the circulation thereof*" (Kimmel, 2008); Mohammad & Turki (2021). More to the point, it has also been considered as information and news relating to ambiguous and officially unconfirmed events that are circulated from one person to another through various means of communication in the midst of social groups that correspond in terms of needs and interests, and the spread thereof represents the result of collective artificiality as an attempt to explain and elucidate a particular problem that stimulates through the individual's aspiration to obtain information about a particular issue relating to the same (Marina & Zheltukhina, 2016). We note that this definition has given new elements about creating and amplifying thee rumours and their dissemination. Besides, in addition to ambiguity, which is considered as the basic rule for the emergence and spread of rumours, we find the element of compatibility between needs and interests, as it represents alike the result of collective artificiality, which implies on the basis of contributions of individuals and groups that circulate those rumours and contribute to the crystallization and amplification thereof whenever it increases in terms of circulation and spread, the fact of which amplifies, as well, the enthusiasm and motivation of individual towards accepting and spreading those rumours is his aspiration to obtain information and an explanation of the issue that represents the focal point of his attention; however, this definition neglects other important elements in the issue of circulation and spread of rumours, which correspond to the goal and purpose of publishing; in the light of which, this is not always related to aspiration to obtain information, but it may be the result of achieving other purposes, in respect such as revenge and others.

A rumour can be understood as an item of information that has not yet been verified, and hence its truth value remains unresolved while it is circulating. A rumour is defined as unverified when there is no evidence supporting it or there is no official confirmation from

authoritative sources (e.g., those with a reputation for being trustworthy) or sources that may have credibility in a particular context (e.g., eyewitnesses). (Arkaitz et al., 2018).

Defining the Social Networking Sites

The appearance and emergence of the social networking sites returns back to the appearance and spread of Internet, which have then included different regions of the world and included different segments of societies; thus becoming an important alternative to traditional means of communication and intercommunication, in view of the characteristics and advantages they have and that cannot be encountered in other means of communication. Besides, the term "*social network*" was first introduced in 1954 by "*Barns. A John*", a member of the Department of the Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester for the purpose of denoting and analyzing the patterns of relationships between individuals.

However, this term has developed to take connotations about communication and intercommunication through websites, and contribution has been underlined for many researchers in clarifying the connotations thereof. Since their introduction, Social Network Sites (SNSs) such as MySpace, Facebook, Cyworld, and Bebo have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices (Danah & Nichole 2008). Thus, it has been defined as: Services within Internet that allow individuals to build their own file and expose the same to all other users of their choice, as this being done within the framework of a specific electronic system that allows the individual to interact with others, allowing each individual to view the file and relations of the others. Further, one of the most famous social networking sites on the Internet is Facebook, which is considered the most popular platform in the list of social networking sites, in view of the size of the applications contained therein and that enable the user to interact with his friends, as the company launched the Chat option in 2018, and added camera and other additions that had a significant impact on the popularity of Facebook, mainly its acquisition of WhatsApp on 2014, until the number of subscribers reached about 2.45 billion active users, according to the statistics of 2020. Moreover, since it contains a number of integrated business tools for interaction between people and to promote products, pages or services, most institutions are compelled to operate through this site. Social networking sites (SNS) are a way for people in the offline world to stay connected regardless of geographical distance, difference in time, or other context-specific barriers. They are spaces of socialization for common communities, communities in practice, or those united by a shared interest Watermeyer (2012). Social networking services offer friends a space where they can maintain their relationships, chat with each other and share information (Vala & Ow, 2010). To conclude the most significant Social networking websites commonly used by the people especially by the youngster like, Friendster, Myspace, Facebook, Downlink, Ryze, Six Degrees, Hi 5, LinkedIn, Orkut, Flicker, YouTube, Reddit, Twitter, FriendFeed, Bharat Student and Floper (Ateeq et al., 2011).

Social Media Websites and Shopping Rumours

As for the impact of rumours on the consumer, we uncover that there are many consumers who have not been the victims because misleading and false information are so often provided, thus causing health and material damage to them, since they push them to bear mistakes in their purchasing decisions, in addition to those psychological impacts they may cause on the consumer. Further to the study conducted by which aimed to measure the psychological impact of rumours on social media sites on university students in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, it has confirmed that 58% of the interviewed individuals have psychologically been affected by such circulated information as they left negative feelings, in respect such as fear, anxiety, anger, loss of confidence and a sense of danger and threat; thus,

such fact has shown to be an evidence of the impact of such rumours on the consumer than the impact thereof on his purchasing decision, but extend to the psychological and health influence, and even on many aspects of his life; nonetheless, as for the impact on their purchasing behaviours, in takes place at different stages of the same, as follows:

1. Influencing the perception of need and desire in terms of quantity, quality and timing.
2. Influencing the stage of searching for information that appertain to the evaluation of products in terms of quantity and quality, their places and times of existence, their cost, quality, and the benefits and functions thereof.
3. Influencing the possibility to evaluate and indentify the obtainable alternatives.
4. Influencing the appropriate purchasing decision-making process.

One of the most important features of SM is the ability to quickly reach large numbers of web browsers and consumers through these sites, and to identify the needs and desires of existing or potential customers, prompting many companies to develop content on SM, to benefit from Marketing opportunities offered by SM. The great use of SM is an opportunity to promote rumors about organizations and their products. Hence, affect the purchasing decisions of consumers, Therefore, the promotion of rumors leads to the loss of many consumers, and thus the decline in sales, and the loss of competitiveness of organizations (Ali Ahmed & Hossam, 2021).

METHODOLOGY RESEARCH

Community of the Study

It consists of all consumers who use a social networking site, and we will be reviewing, for the purpose of learning more about the characteristics and nature of this community, the most important statistics on the use of internet and the social networking sites, according to a report issued on January 2020, as follows:

1. The number of Internet users: 22.71 million, or 52% of the population.
2. The percentage of increase in the number of Internet users for 2020: 12% compared to 2019.
3. Number of the mobile phone users: 49 million (using more than one line for one person).
4. Number of the active social media users: 22.71 million.
5. Number of Facebook users: 20 million, or about 88% of the total users of social networking sites.
6. Instagram users: 4.90 million, or 21.57% of the total users of social networking sites.
7. Number of Twitter users 846 thousand, or 3.72% of the total users of social networking sites.

Sample of the Study

The sampling was 394 consumers of the social networking sites, whereat distribution was made based on social networking sites and e-mail. The study sample is distributed according to the demographic variables as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1 DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE MEMBERS ACCORDING TO DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES			
		Repetition	Percentage
Gender	Male	%67,5	266
	Feminine	%32.50	128
Age	Under 30 years old	%14.70	58
	30to 40 years old	%53,6	211
	More than 40 years	%31.70	125
Educational level	Secondary or less	%27,9	110

	University	%72.10	284
	Facebook	%85.80	338
Most used sites	Twitter	%10,2	40
	Other	%4,1	16

Source: from SPSS.

Through the table 1, we notice that the distribution of sample members according to general data was irregular, as follows:

1. Regarding the gender variable, we notice that the percentage of males is greater than the percentage of females, thus reaching 67.5%, as for females, it was just 32.5%.
2. Regarding the age variable, we notice that the age group between 30 and 40 years has reached more than 53%, which is the most responsive to the questionnaire and interaction through the social networking sites, followed by the group over 40 years old, whilst the least group was the one under 30 years old..
3. As for the educational level variable, we notice that university students represent the largest percentage in the sample compared to the non-university persons, with a percentage of 72.1%, as this fact results from the fact that this category is more responsive to the study than others.
4. As for the distribution by the most used social networking sites, we notice that Facebook ranked first in terms of usage compared to the rest of the sites with a rate of more than 85%, and this percentage corresponds to the relative distribution of the study community, which was reported as 88% compared to social networking sites; however, this distribution is different from one country to another; as each community has certain social characteristics and requirements that make it more inclined to use a social networking site than the rest.

The Validity and Reliability of the Study Tool

The result of the stability analysis using the Cronbach coefficient, as shown in Table 2, showed that the tool has a high degree of validity and reliability, as the value of this coefficient for the questionnaire as a whole was 0.971, which is a high value Heetal et al. (2014). As for the questionnaire's topics, their values exceeded 80, which indicate the stability of the tool and the high probability of obtaining the same results in case the study would be subject to repetition under the same conditions.

Table 2 STABILITY COEFFICIENTS FOR THE STUDY TOOL		
Topic	**Number of phrases**	**Stability coefficient**
Reason and motive for using social media.	06	86.8
The degree of reliance on the social networking sites to obtain information and news.	07	88.4
The degree of confidence and credibility in the rumours circulating on social media.	06	90.2
The degree of vulnerability and interaction with rumours spread on the social media sites.	09	94.0
The power of electronic rumours circulating on social media.	28	95.8
The consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.	11	96.3
The questionnaire as a whole.	39	97.1

Source: from SPSS.

After distributing and collecting the forms electronically, and inputting the data into the statistical package program, the questionnaire results have shown to be as follow Table 3.

Table 3
MEAN OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE TOPICS

Topic	Mean	Standard deviation
Reason and motive for using social media.	3.8528	575060
The degree of reliance on the social networking sites to obtain information and news.	3.373	0.6957
The degree of confidence and credibility in the rumours circulating on social media.	3.1379	0.88935
The degree of vulnerability and interaction with rumours spread on the social media sites.	3.3593	0.84453
The power of electronic rumours circulating on social media.	3.3885	0.63943
The consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.	3.4327	0.64006

Source: from SPSS.

The mean of the independent variable, represented in the strength of the electronic rumours circulating throughout the social networking sites, was given an average value of 3.43, this implies that the sample members' reception of the electronic rumours published throughout the social networking sites, interaction with them and being affected by them, was average, namely since all the values of the topics of this variable were received medium

With regards to the dependent variable represented in the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of Covid-19 pandemic, it was reported with an average value of 3.03, whilst the values of its eleven statements ranged between 2.74 and 3.52, whereat the highest value was given to the share of the first statement, as this fact implies that the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic generated fears amongst the sample members that it will cause a scarcity of food, followed by the last statement regarding receiving information that provokes and stimulates the storage of foodstuffs, whilst the statement appertaining to the participation in queues received the lowest value.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

The First Main Hypothesis

There exists no statistically significant effect at the level of significance $\propto \leq 0.05$ for the electronic rumours spread throughout the social networking sites on the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 4
RESULTS OF THE FIRST MAIN HYPOTHESIS TEST

The study of the relationship between variables		Significance of the relationship between the two variables				Significance of the influence between the two variables		
		Calculated F-Test value	Probability value (SIG)	Pearson's correlation coefficient (r)	Interpretation coefficient (R^2)	Regression coefficient	(T-Test)	Probability value (SIG)
Independent variable	Dependant variable	452.146	0.000	0.732	0.536	Constant B_0	-0.537	-3.136	0.002
Electronic rumours	Demand or foodstuffs					Independen B_1	1.042	21.264	0.000

Source: from SPSS.

We note from Table 4 that the significance level is 0.00, which is less than 0.05, as this fact implies that the null hypothesis is rejected H_0 and the alternative hypothesis H_1 is

accepted, which states that there is a statistically significant effect at the significant level of $\propto$ ≤ 0.05 for the electronic rumours spread through the social networking sites on the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This enhances the value of the Pearson's correlation coefficient estimated at (0.732) and the coefficient of determination, which is equal to 0.536, meaning that 53.6% of the change in the demand for foodstuffs is due to the change in the strength of the electronic rumours circulating throughout the social networking sites; hence, from this point of view, the stronger the electronic rumours circulated throughout the social networking sites in terms of spread and strength of influence, the greater the impact on the demand for foodstuffs by 53.6%, whilst the rest of the percentage is subject to other variables outside the model, and consequently, according to the data of the previous table, the study model can be built in accordance with the equation hereunder:

The demand for foodstuffs (Y)=1.042 (the electronic rumours circulating throughout the social media sites)–0.537.

Whereat: (Y=Regression coefficient x+constant).

Test the first sub-hypothesis: There is no statistically significant relationship at significance level of $\propto \leq 0.05$ between the reason and motives of using the social networking sites and the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 5 **RESULTS OF THE FIRST SUB-HYPOTHESIS TEST**							
The study of the relationship between variables		Significance of the relationship between the two variables				Significance of the influence between the two variables		
		Calculated F-Test value	Probability value (SIG)	Pearson's correlation coefficient (r)	Interpretation coefficient (R^2)	Regression coefficient	(T-Test)	Probability value (SIG)
Independent variable	Dependant variable	27.507	0.000	0.256	0.066	Constant B_0	1.476	4.897	0.000
Reason and motives of use	Demand on foodstuffs					Independent B	0.068	5.245	0.000

Source: from SPSS.

We note from Table 5 that the significance level is 0.00, which is less than 0.05, as this fact implies that the null hypothesis is rejected H_0 and the alternative hypothesis H_1 is accepted, which states that there is a statistically significant effect at the significant level of $\propto \leq 0.05$ between the reason and motives for using the social networking sites and the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. Besides, the Pearson's correlation coefficient was reported with a weak value not exceeding (0.256), and the determination coefficient was 0.066, which implies that 6.6% of the change in the foodstuffs demand was due to the change in the reason and motives of use of the social networking sites.

Test the second sub-hypothesis: There is no statistically significant relationship at significance level of $\propto \leq 0.05$ between the degree of dependence on the social networking

sites for the purpose of obtaining information and demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 6
RESULTS OF THE SECOND SUB-HYPOTHESIS TEST

The study of the relationship between variables		Significance of the relationship between the two variables				Significance of the influence between the two variables			
		Calculated F-Test value	Probability value (SIG)	Pearson's correlation coefficient (r)	Interpretation coefficient (R^2)	Regression coefficient		(T-Test)	Probability value (SIG)
Independent variable	Dependant variable	130.69	0.000	0.501	0.251	Constant B_0	0.829	4.195	0.000
Degree of accreditation	Demand on foodstuffs					Independent B_1	0.655	11.432	0.000

Source: From SPSS.

We note from Table 6 that the significance level is 0.00, which is less than 0.05, as this fact implies that the null hypothesis is rejected H_0 and the alternative hypothesis H_1 is accepted, which states that there is a statistically significant effect at the significant level of $\propto \leq 0.05$ between the degree of dependence on the social networking sites in obtaining information and news, and the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis; i.e. 25.1% of the change in the foodstuffs demand was due to the change in the reason and motives of use of the social networking sites.

Test the Third Sub-Hypothesis: There is no statistically significant relationship at significance level of $\propto \leq 0.05$ between the degree of confidence and credibility in the information and news circulating throughout the social networking sites and demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 7
RESULTS OF THE THIRD SUB-HYPOTHESIS TEST

The study of the relationship between variables		Significance of the relationship between the two variables				Significance of the influence between the two variables			
		Calculated F-Test value	Probability value (SIG)	Pearson's correlation coefficient (r)	Interpretation coefficient (R^2)	Regression coefficient		(T-Test)	Probability value (SIG)
Independent variable	Dependant variable	609.962	0.000	0.780	0.609	Constant B_0	0.531	5.026	0.000
Degree of confidence and credibility	Demand on foodstuffs					Independent B_1	0.799	24.697	0.000

Source: from SPSS.

We note from Table 7 that the significance level is 0.00, which is less than 0.05, as this fact implies that the null hypothesis is rejected H_0 and the alternative hypothesis H_1 is

accepted, which states that there is a statistically significant effect at the significant level of ∝ ≤ 0.05 between the degree of confidence and credibility in information and news circulated throughout the social media sites and the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the Pearson's correlation coefficient was reported with a strong value (0.78) and a coefficient of determination of 0.609; which implies that 60.9% of the change in the foodstuffs demand was due to the change in the degree of confidence and credibility in the information and news circulated throughout the social networking sites.

Test the fourth sub-hypothesis: There is no statistically significant relationship at significance level of ∝≤0.05 between the degree of vulnerability and interaction with the information and news circulated throughout the social media sites and the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 8
RESULTS OF THE FOURTH SUB-HYPOTHESIS TEST

The study of the relationship between variables		Significance of the relationship between the two variables				Significance of the influence between the two variables			
		Calculated F-Test value	Probability value (SIG)	Pearson's correlation coefficient (r)	Interpretation coefficient (R^2)	Regression coefficient		(T-Test)	Probability value (SIG)
Independent variable	Dependant variable	778.28	0.000	0.816	0.666	Constant B_0	0.085	0.775	0.043
Degree of confidence and credibility	Demand on foodstuffs					Independent B_1	0.880	27.89	0.000

Source: from SPSS.

We note from Table 8 that the significance level is 0.00, which is less than 0.05, as this fact implies that the null hypothesis is rejected H_0 and the alternative hypothesis H_1 is accepted, which states that there is a statistically significant effect at the significant level of ∝≤0.05 between the degree of vulnerability and interaction with the information and news circulating throughout the social networking sites and the demand for the foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the Pearson's correlation coefficient was reported with a strong value (0.816) and a coefficient of determination of 0.0.666; which implies that 66.6% of the change in the foodstuffs demand was due to the change in the degree of vulnerability and interaction in the information and news circulated throughout the social networking sites.

The second main hypothesis: There exists no statistically significant effect at the level of significance ∝ ≤ 0.05 for the impact of the electronic rumours spread throughout the social networking sites on the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic, as being attributed to personal variables (gender, age, educational level, the most used social networking sites).

Table 9
RESULTS OF THE SECOND MAIN HYPOTHESIS TEST
(ONE-WAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE ANOVA F-TEST)

Variable	Contrast source	Total of squares	Freedom degree	Average of	Calculated (F) value	Statistical significance	Result at the significance

				squares			level of 0.05
Gender	Between groups	18.255	1	18.255	13.159	0.00	There are differences
	Within groups	308.046	392	0.3980			
Age	Between groups	1.452	2	0.7260	0.8740	0.4180	There are no differences
	Within groups	324.850	391	0.8310			
Educational level	Between groups	67.346	1	67.346	101.94	0.0000	There are differences
	Within groups	258.955	392	0.6610			
Most used social networking sites	Between groups	24.927	2	12.463	16.170	0.0000	There are no differences
	Within groups	301.375	391	0.7710			

Source: from SPSS.

First sub-hypothesis: Which states that there are no statistically significant differences at the significance level of $\propto \leq 0.05$ the impact of the rumours circulating throughout the social networking sites on the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic due to the gender variable; besides, as per Table 9, we note that the significance level is 0.00, which is less than 0.05; as this fact implies that there are differences between and within groups, the fact of which necessitates the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis, which states that there are statistically significant differences at the significance level of $\propto \leq 0.05$ for the impact of the rumours circulating throughout the social networking sites on the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic due to the gender variable. However, this implies that the gender variable affects the quality of the relationship between the study variables, whereat the differences were in favour of the male category with an average of 3.33 compared to 2.97 for the female category.

Second sub-hypothesis: Which states that there are no statistically significant differences at the significance level of $\propto \leq 0.05$ the impact of the rumours circulating throughout the social networking sites on the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic due to the age variable; besides, as per Table 9, we note that the significance level is 0.418, which is greater than 0.05; as this fact implies that there are no differences between and within groups, the fact of which necessitates the acceptance of the null hypothesis, which states that there are no statistically significant differences at the significance level of $\propto \leq 0.05$ for the impact of the rumours circulating throughout the social networking sites on the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic due to the age variable.

Third sub-hypothesis: There are no statistically significant differences at the significance level of $\propto \leq 0.05$ the impact of the rumours circulating throughout the social networking sites on the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic due to the educational level variable; besides, as per Table 9, we note that the significance level is 0.00, which is less than 0.05; as this fact implies that there are differences between and within groups, the fact of which necessitates the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis, which states that there are statistically significant differences at the significance level of $\propto \leq 0.05$ for the impact of the rumours circulating throughout the social networking sites on the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the

crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic due to the educational level variable. However, this implies that the differences were in favour of the non-university category with an average of 3.7 compared to 2.8 for the university category, as this can be attributed to the fact that the university category is more aware and able to distinguish rumours compared to the non-university category.

Fourth sub-hypothesis: There are no statistically significant differences at the significance level of $\propto \leq 0.05$ the impact of the rumours circulating throughout the social networking sites on the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic due to the variable of the most used social networking sites; besides, as per Table 9, we note that the significance level is 0.00, which is less than 0.05; as this fact implies that there are differences between and within groups, the fact of which necessitates the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis, which states that there are statistically significant differences at the significance level of $\propto \leq 0.05$ for the impact of the rumours circulating throughout the social networking sites on the consumer demand for foodstuffs in light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic, as being attributed to the variable of the most used social networking sites. However, this implies that the differences were in favour of the social networking site Twitter with an average of 3.47.

DISCUSSION

In the light of our field study, we uncovered that the behaviour of the consumer was highly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, in view of the changes generated by this crisis. However, this has affected the entirety of activities and sectors, thus compelling governments to undertake preventive measures so as to prevent the spread thereof, inclusive of home quarantine, which has forced many individuals to stay at home and not to get mixed with people for a long period of time, namely in light of the growth and development of this pandemic, which necessitated the strict adherence to the requirements to fight such pandemic, being represented in various measures subject to approval of the government, in respect such as home quarantine, prohibition of gatherings and social interactions, cessation of the activities of markets and various scientific, cultural and sports events, suspension of some economic activities, suspension of flights, temporarily release of some workers and reducing working hours, stopping various means of transportation such as taxis and mass, air, sea and trains transportation, imposing protective masks and social distancing, forcing merchants and shop owners to take arrangements and measures for protection purpose against the epidemic, closing schools, mosques and universities.

The electronic rumours circulating throughout the social networking sites cannot affect the consumer's demand for foodstuff in terms of quantity and quality; nonetheless, the latter has a willingness and vulnerability to be affected by the same, which alike enjoys high confidence towards the same and inclination to faith therein; in addition, such news should be important for him and should illuminate part of the issues he is facing. Subsequently, the impact of the electronic rumours circulating through the social networking sites on the consumer demand for foodstuffs can be traced back to three types of factors. Such factors can be summarized as follows:

The degree of credibility and confidence that the consumer places in the circulated information and news, which is determined by the psychological connotations and indications contained in the circulated information, either in form or in content, along with the names and symbolism of the traders; i.e. the names of their electronic accounts, in addition to the psychological, social and even objective indications contained in the circulated information.

The degree of uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding the issue, which is determined by the scarcity of official information and the weakness of the means of communication and the

official traditional media in communicating information and addressing issues, alongside its weak ability to achieve satiation and respond to the requirements and needs of individuals compared to the modern means of communication.

The general anxiety and tension pervading the social environment generated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The psychological, mood and emotional states that characterize the consumer during the Covid-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

Social networking sites have provided important advantages and privileges in the domain of communication and intercommunication between individuals and economic institutions, and as a means of shopping and enhancing consumer experiences, all the way through the volume of information, news and knowledge that can be made available to the users thereof; besides, it has at the same time caused many problems and crises, and contributed to fuelling them, given the volume of rumours that are being circulating via these platforms, namely in light of the crises, the fact of which requires thinking of ways and mechanisms to confront and combat all forms of circulated information, in such a way that enables society and individuals to benefit from useful information and news, and to avoid destructive circulated information having a negative impact on the individual, institutions and society; within the scope of which, it has shown possible for use to present the following recommendations and suggestions:

1. Carrying out awareness-raising programs and campaigns for citizens about the dangers of spreading and distributing rumours and the need to ensure the authenticity of the news and information circulated before proceeding to the acceptance and publication thereof, in an objective scientific way away from subjectivity and rush based on confidence in the names that circulate information and news or confidence derived from the literary formulation method and the suggestive power of phrases and others; as there are some countries have taken an advanced stage in the awareness-raising campaigns in this regards, throughout banners and advertising posters.
2. Carrying out systematic awareness and guidance programs and campaigns, which aim at eliminating the various irrational behaviours and conducts that have been associated with the behaviour of the Algerian consumer during crises, mainly the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic, and using the same in various educational and religious associations and institutions?
3. The necessity to promote positive collective values, in respect such as the spirit of solidarity, synergy and cooperation among members of society, and for the purpose of combating all forms of discrimination and negative behaviours based on self-interest, by framing society based on supporting and strengthening the role of associations and various civil society activities and mosques.
4. Framing and directing activities throughout the social networking sites, and gaining the confidence of users, with the aim of promoting positive constructive values and combating negative destructive behaviours, by means of designing and producing appropriate pages on social networking sites that fit the crisis period, and act to provide correct and useful information to consumers, along with contributing to meeting their needs and satisfying their desires under the supervision of a group of specialists and experts.
5. Awareness-raising and training of individuals and institutions on the way in which we safely deal with electronic rumours circulating throughout the social networking sites, and giving a role in this regards to the educational, social and religious institutions of the community by means of adopting programs and procedures that will raise awareness in relation to the dangers and harms of spreading rumours, in particular for adolescents and youth, with the help of opinion leaders.
6. The need to set rules and controls for the practice of activities, derived from an ethical and legislative system that regulates relations and activities throughout such sites, and to impose penalties in opposition to anyone who deliberately spreads and circulates rumours, namely those having a negative impact on individuals, institutions and society.

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