



# Fake News and Social Stability



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حقوق الطبع © 2021. جميع الحقوق محفوظة لبرنامج الأمم المتحدة الإنمائي في لبنان. لا يجوز إعادة إنتاج أي جزء من هذا المنشور دون إذن مسبق. التحليلات والتوصيات الواردة في الكتيب لا تعكس بالضرورة وجهات نظر برنامج الأمم المتحدة الإنمائي أو شركائه.



## Introduction

Fake news is nothing new. It has been around for a long time and has been largely used as a means of misinformation particularly in wars, because of its ability to twist facts and influence public opinion. With the rapid rise of smartphones and social media, fake news is travelling fast and becoming more prevalent at the same time, making it difficult to trace the source. Because this type of news is often aimed at provoking feelings and spreading fear, people tend to circulate it without going that extra mile to validate. This is particularly true because citizens often rely on mainstream media, more so on social media, as a source of news and information.

In Lebanon, the widespread and circulation of fake news stirred up problems, fear, tensions, and conflicts among families and sects within the same region or across the country. These problems have often evolved into violence, thus putting social stability and civil peace at stake. A lot of examples can be drawn from Lebanon in this regard.



As we strongly believe in the role of the youth and their ability to make an influence and drive change, and within the framework of the “Mechanisms for Stability and Local Development” (MSLD) developed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Dawaer Foundation has organized training workshops for 40 young men and women from 10 Lebanese villages: Damour, Choueifat, Aley, Amioun, Chekka, Tripoli, Qobb Elias, Riyaq, Haret Saida, and Magdoucheh. The workshops come within the framework of a project entitled “Countering Fake News” which aims at raising awareness on fake news and its impact on social stability as well as providing best practices on verifying news in general. The ultimate purpose is to launch media campaigns to raise awareness on fake news. The project is implemented by Dawaer Foundation in partnership with United Nations Development programme (UNDP) and with the support from the United Kingdom (UK).

It is no secret that fake news has a direct impact on social stability and plays a pivotal role in conflicts and confrontations, often leading to rising tensions. Today, as social media platforms and digital tools become more and more prevalent, fake news travels fast. It therefore poses a great danger and must be eradicated. The following practical manual on fact-checking fake news underscores the important role of the citizen-journalist in news reporting and the impact of this news on civil peace. It also highlights the



need to exercise prudence and ascertain the veracity of news before publishing.


As a matter of fact, ordinary people who happen to be at the site of events are usually the first to report the news. They use their smartphones to report in real time or to post images and comments on social media platforms. Hence, it has become extremely necessary to ascertain the veracity of news reported by ordinary people via WhatsApp messages, Facebook, or Twitter. Is the information true and is the context accurate?

The following manual identifies numerous fact-checking tools that can be used by any citizen or news reporter before republishing news.

In an effort to underscore the danger of re-publishing fake news, this manual sheds light on some existing practices, through mainstream and digital media outlets, in reporting news and circulating images, without fact-checking and without taking into account the damage it could incur on certain individuals or groups.

Mainstream media is the first resort for citizens when they want to validate news. If mainstream media outlets are not knowledgeable of fact-checking tools or if they tend to overlook the verification of the news as they compete to out-scoop each other, citizens are often left with news items reported by social media and wrongfully given credibility by traditional media. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of the citizens themselves to verify news before publishing and sharing.





People from various age groups are now turning to social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp as main news sources. As part of the project, the young men and women verified fake news in their regions after they were equipped with the necessary training. They launched a social media campaign «صحتك من صحة الخبر» (Healthy News Contributes to Your Wellbeing), the first-of-its-kind youth-led initiative to correct fake news, primarily in the regions, and report the falsity of fake news through WhatsApp groups which many people use today as a primary source of information. Day after day, the locals in the regions are building more trust in these young men and women who are now serving as a working group to verify fake news in their regions and therefore reduce fear, tensions, conflicts, and violence.

Because credibility is our greatest asset, we believe - as media activists and influencers on social media platforms and community forums and as citizens who care about the wellbeing of our society and the veracity of its news - that the following manual is a must-have. It should be at the disposal of whoever needs support in reporting, filtering, and verifying news especially as we navigate a sea of data in this digital age. This manual is primarily directed to local communities in the regions covered by the project and will serve as a reference document to combat fake news.

## The Five Ws?

Who? When?  
What? Where? Why?

**What:** A manual that helps the UNDP and with the support of the United Kingdom (UK) detect, combat, and limit the spread and impact of fake news on social cohesion.

**When:** It can be read at any time.

**Who:** The manual will serve as a reference document for youth to counter fake news in their regions and play a pivotal role in verifying news. It is also addressed to municipalities as official and influential entities, organizations, schools and youth and locals who are interested in it. Citizens, in general, can rely on the manual to interpret the media messages they receive on a daily basis. The manual comes within the framework of a project entitled “Countering Fake News” implemented by Dawaer Foundation in partnership with

**Where:** The manual is available on the websites of UNDP and Dawaer. There is also a hard copy.

**Why:** The manual provides the necessary information and techniques to verify fake news.

**How:** Through reading this manual (an optional question).

**Note:** These five questions are imperative to verify news.

## About Dawaer

Dawaer Foundation is a non-governmental, not for profit, non- partisan organization established in 2015 by a team of motivated activists who build on their extensive diverse experiences to reach a democratic peaceful society that respects human rights and gives citizens the freedom to practice their beliefs. Dawaer Foundation members leverage their extensive and diversified expertise to achieve their mission. They strive to exchange experience and share knowledge on local, regional, and international levels.

Dawaer is committed to building a peaceful society, where children and youth become



responsible citizens and are able to exercise critical thinking and to protect themselves against violence. Dawaer is committed to empowering children and youth through spreading the notions of human rights, building their capacity and mobilizing their critical thinking to become responsible global citizens who are capable of expressing themselves freely and be agents of change.

Dawaer works with educational institutions, families and communities to enhance child and youth rights and freedom of expression and protect youth from violence.



# Introduction

At first glance, the notion of fake news does not seem as important as the action itself. But after examining the impact of the notion and its connotations and uses, it becomes compelling to dwell on this question given its importance for us as citizens.

Politicians tend to often criticize the performance of the media, suspecting its reporting and analysis. News that does not appeal to those in power are often described as “fake”. To put things into perspective, we can look at what is happening between US President Donald Trump and many international media outlets, namely CNN.

But the problem is that the US media itself has facilitated Donald Trump's mission and has given many politicians the chance to question their credibility, objectivity, and even professionalism in news reporting. This applies to US media outlets among others.

International media has committed many mistakes when it comes to reporting news that has not been verified and which later ended up being incorrect. The responsibility here falls on the media outlets that have fallen in the trap of publishing false news and fabricated and fictional information to serve various agendas and purposes in their pursuit of a scoop.

Often, the source of this information is social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Youtube and others. Ordinary people circulate news without knowing how accurate or serious or credible it is. As such news becomes increasingly shared on social media, traditional media outlets are faced with a lot of material to publish and so little time to verify.

Within the framework of their efforts to restore their credibility, some media outlets have embarked on establishing special units internally to verify the information before publishing it. This represents an explicit acknowledgement of the danger of rushing to publish the information flooding social media sites before conducting proper verification.

Because everyone has become a news reporter in the social media era and because the notion of "citizen-journalist" has become dominant, it was necessary to equip ordinary citizens with the tools they can use to verify fake news, allowing them to practice their role that is now integrated with the role played by the media.

The following is a list of some precise definitions in question:

**Misinformation:** Information published without knowing if it is incorrect, with no intent to cause any harm.

**Disinformation:** Information that is intentionally published to cause harm and offense.

**Malinformation:** Information that is true but intentionally published to tarnish reputation, cause damages, or lead to negative outcomes.

Type	Description	Example
Sarcasm	No intent to cause harm	Sarcastic program or article
Wrong link	Headlines or images that are not related to the content	Interesting, shocking attention-grabbing headlines and images related to a different topic
Wrong content	Use of inaccurate or undocumented information to support or offend someone	Rushing to endorse a position or information because they align with our political stand



## Misinformation

Type	Description	Example
Wrong content	Sharing correct information in an incorrect content	Use of accurate information and an accurate image that do not suit the content
Fraudulent content	Impersonating original sources	Attributing wrong information to a reliable news source
Fabricated content	Wrong content specifically created to deceive and cause harm	Fabricating information and depicting it as a fact
Tampered content	Tampering with original information and images with the intention of deception	Adding tampered images to a fabricated text

## Disinformation

These definitions help identify the type of news we are dealing with, and how they can be distinguished in terms of form, content, and goals. These definitions were coined to distinguish the news that we may fall into the trap of publishing, under the assumption that it is true. This phenomenon is widely spread simply because we do not know and because it is both easy and free to publish false information. There is also the type of news that might have been intentionally created and manipulated so when it gets published it can influence the course of events. In addition, lack of both familiarity and ability to verify the veracity or falsity of news among ordinary

citizens, namely those who are active on social media, may entail disastrous results. In this case, the truth becomes the number one victim. This is particularly true in the Lebanese society considering its religious, ideological, and partisan differences in the aftermath of the crises that have repeatedly threatened its civil peace.

The following are the most prominent terms in relation to fake news:

- Electronic armies or electronic flies: These terms refer to the supporters of a political party who are engaged in battles on social media against their opponents. They are often actively promoting false news to tarnish the reputation of their opponents.
- Bots: Automated applications that are widely used on social media and contribute to spreading false news from accounts connected to these applications. In 2017, a study entitled “Is that Social Bot Behaving Unethically?” said there are millions of accounts on social media spreading fake news. The study estimated that there are around 23 million bots on Twitter compared to 140 million on Facebook and 27 million on<sup>2</sup> Instagram.
- Trolls: The term refers to individuals who intentionally publish controversial content leading to sharp divides to provoke angry reactions.
- Influencers: They are usually well-known figures

2 C. A. de L. S. Berente Nicholas, “Is That Social Bot Behaving Unethically?” Communications of the ACM, vol. 60, no. 9, pp. 29–31, Sep. 2017.

in politics, media, and art. Other figures who gained popularity from social media have also joined these influencers. It is worth mentioning that the problem of communicating with followers might sometimes push the influencers to adopt views or promote ideas and theories that may be incorrect because they lack specialization.

- Deepfake: The term refers to fake video or audio recordings that look and sound just like real. This technology relies on face recognition, just like the one that exists on our mobile phones. This technology is rapidly advancing and is becoming so difficult to detect unless we zoom in and closely monitor the facial movements.

- Hoax: A hoax, a piece of information that is intentionally misleading and is often published in return for money or to merely mislead public opinion or gain interaction.

-Clickbait: It is a bait that lures those looking for a piece of information and prompts them to click on a link or watch videos by using grabbing, scandalous, or very bizarre headlines. This approach could include embedded links that allow attackers to infiltrate computers and smartphones via loopholes opened by these links.

-Filter Bubble: This refers to the fake bubble the user lives in due to the influence of search engines and social networking sites. Facebook tends to selectively

display the targeted content for every user based on several factors through its own algorithms. Each user seems to be living in a bubble that was customized to suit his / her interests. But that bubble evolves to control users' preferences, without them realizing it. Internet activist Eli Pariser has published a lot of content on this term.

- Echo chamber: It refers to pages or platforms that resemble an echo. Individuals belonging to the same party for example visit these pages and are exposed to the same speech that works on reinforcing a belief or idea and eliminating any doubts around it. Individuals find these pages comforting in the absence of any opposing views.

-Propaganda: It refers to political communication that is primarily used to influence an audience and promote an agenda and may be selectively presenting facts. It lacks objectivity and aims at encouraging a particular synthesis or perception.



# Facebook News and Civil Peace

Today, people turn to Facebook pages for news, but these pages represent a significant source of fake news. Facebook has taken many measures to curb the spread of such news, such as introducing a content reporting service. It also provides a feature to add a date to each post to distinguish old from recent ones. In addition, Facebook has embarked on other steps, such as supporting journalistic projects aimed at verifying information. (pic. 1)

Publishing such a news item on a Facebook page



pic.1 A crime was committed against 7 Syrian young men living in Beirut in one apartment. The victims were found with handcuffed hands and feet and were beheaded with a cleaver. They were left without money, mobile phones, or identity cards and could not be identified. They were referred to a forensic medical examiner awaiting the final investigations. #Source: Lebanese General Security

means jeopardizing civil peace and creating tensions between the Lebanese and Syrians, especially in light of the already-complicated relationship between the two peoples.

The same news was posted on Twitter as follows:<sup>(pic.2)</sup>

What is interesting about this news item is that it claims that the source is the Lebanese General Security. In fact, all what it takes is checking the website of the Lebanese General Security and its social media account to verify the veracity of the information before reposting, commenting, and generating reactions.<sup>(pic.3)</sup>

The Internal Security Forces posted a comment on the false news on social media. Also, “Healthy News Contributes to Your Wellbeing” team published a correction to the false news in order to reduce tensions and hatred.<sup>(pic.4)</sup>

Lebanon is among the countries that has hosted the highest numbers of refugees compared to its population and area. There is also a lot of sensitivity when it comes to competition over labor, in addition to a sharp political-sectarian divide as a result of the previous Syrian role in Lebanon and Lebanon’s role in the Syrian war.

The question of the Syrian refugees has often created a sharp divide, especially in the early years of the influx of refugees. Some regions were more sympathetic with the refugees than others, in a country that has always been obsessed with the issue of minorities and majorities. A while ago, there were growing calls for the return of the refugees to the safe areas, while others have said the return must



be voluntarily. With the deteriorating economic and financial situation, declining employment opportunities and lack of these opportunities in some regions, resentment against the Syrians has been on the rise. With that in mind, it does not really take much. When news is proven to be false, one can simply report the issue to Facebook to block the content. Facebook may sometimes suspend the pages circulating misleading information. There are a lot of closed groups on Facebook, as well as many public pages, which create a space to circulate news with unverified content. This is similar to WhatsApp groups that tend to share news without verification. Everyone ends up sharing and forwarding to other groups.

pic.2 A crime that has shocked the human conscience was committed in Beirut. Seven Syrians were murdered, and their faces were distorted. Their mobile phones, documents, and passports were confiscated. They were beheaded.  
 pic.3 #General Security denies the news circulated on the murder of seven Syrians inside an apartment in #Beirut, beheaded and robbed. We call on the citizens to discard such news and exercise prudence before publishing unverified information.  
 pic.4 Fake: Social media users circulated news saying that seven Syrians were murdered and robbed in a residential apartment in Beirut.  
 Truth: Internal Security Forces denied in a tweet the news, urging citizens to discard the news and exercise prudence before publishing unverified information.



# Media and Fake News

It is all about getting a scoop. Media outlets rush to publish news or post an image seen by one of their staff on social media. The content is quickly circulated through WhatsApp or other platforms. The media outlet is not aware that the first person to share the news, be him a photographer or writer, is actually the one who made the scoop. But no one really cares; they just want to rush and publish. Everyone wants to be the pioneer, not for the purpose of publishing content and giving the public the right to access information, but rather to garner interaction and get more likes. Everyone strives to boost their social media accounts, whether reporters media outlet.

but rather to garner, ordinary citizens who really care would often resort to traditional media before sharing any news that seems suspicious or fake. But is it enough to rely on traditional media in this era? The aim of this manual is not to give advice to the media and their staff. Rather, it is aimed at warning citizens against the possibility of media outlets falling in the same trap which any citizen could fall in. It is about the rush to publish and the constant competition among the media outlets, including

the accounts of the reporters on the one hand, and between those and the ordinary citizens who are now in a position to publish whatever they want without accountability - on the other hand.

Unlike media outlets and journalists, ordinary citizens are not concerned with the question of credibility as much as they are concerned with the volume of interaction they get when publishing content, especially if this content goes in line with their ambitions and stands. Even if this content is suspicious and they themselves are not sure about its accuracy, they still tend to publish it.

We often come across news in the media that raises a lot of question marks for us. For example, MTV station published a report saying that pets can transmit Covid-19 to humans. The report prompted many people to abandon their pets while others went as far as poisoning stray dogs and cats. They could have only verified the information by visiting the WHO website or using search engines to verify the content of the report before putting their pets away.

The TV station removed the report from its website and published another one with contradicting content a few days later. It provoked a lot of anger and this was seen in an article published by Al-Akhbar<sup>2</sup> newspaper on the same topic.

Fact-checking is a process that requires from us to develop our critical and analytical thinking, regardless of the source of the information. “Healthy News Contributes to Your Wellbeing”

2 [https://al-akhbar.com/Media\\_Tv/286325](https://al-akhbar.com/Media_Tv/286325)

published the following post on Facebook and Instagram:<sup>(pic.5)</sup>



This tweet was published by an international news website, on its Arabic version, and sparked a lot of fear.<sup>(pic.6)</sup>

The news travelled fast on social media because everyone wants to rush and publish content that garners interaction and generates comments and reactions.

The source of this news is often WhatsApp groups. It might be an audio message saying that someone's relative who works at the Canadian Embassy is



pic.5 Fake: Social media activists shared images of stray pets in Bsalim, Al-Metn District. They were poisoned by the residents who were afraid the pets would transmit Covid-19. Some citizens have also abandoned their pets such as cats and dogs.

Truth: Although one dog tested positive for Covid-19 in Hong Kong, there is no scientific evidence suggesting that Covid-19 could be transmitted from dogs, cats, or any other pet. The virus spreads primarily through respiratory droplets by an infected person when he coughs, sneezes, or speaks according to WHO. But we recommend washing hands properly and regularly. To verify the information on the transmission of the virus from pets to humans, the young men and women resorted to WHO as a credible source. WHO denied the information. Then, they sent the correction of the information to some groups, on WhatsApp, in order to raise awareness about the need to verify the information rather than reading the reactions.

pic.6 The Embassy of Canada in #Beirut sent directives to its staff saying that the blast is a result of a “bomb containing depleted uranium (causing the red color). Ask your beloved ones to stay away from the site and avoid inhaling and going against the wind direction.” #Beirut\_blast #Lebanon

calling for caution. Because the content is attributed to an internal correspondence - as embassies are generally concerned about the wellbeing of their staff - it becomes very difficult to verify the truth unless the embassy itself issues a statement. This is exactly what happened in this case.<sup>(pic.7)</sup>

Based on the above, it is possible to understand the overlap between mainstream media and social media platforms used by journalists to express their opinions sometimes like ordinary citizens.

But what matters the most is that the breaking and attention-grabbing news that was being published garners the highest engagement and remains in our memory for good. Any subsequent corrections or even denials of information are not treated the same way and do not lead to the desired outcomes. We continue to remember the first news on the topic no matter how many times it gets refuted or if the media outlet itself issues an apology.

“Healthy News Contributes to Your Wellbeing” team published the below post on Facebook and Instagram:

“Explosions are ahead of us”. What do you think? Could this news be correct? Maybe!

The news was quickly circulated on WhatsApp through audio messages, which increased tension

pic.7 This is not true at all. Please delete this misleading tweet. (The Embassy of Canada in #Beirut sent directives to its staff saying that the blast is a result of a “bomb containing depleted uranium (causing the red color). Ask your beloved ones to stay away from the site and avoid inhaling and going against the wind direction.” #Beirut\_blast #Lebanon)



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and fear among the Lebanese people one week after the Beirut blast.

“Healthy News Contributes to Your Wellbeing” team would like to refute these messages and underscore the importance of verifying the sources before sharing such news that could have very negative repercussions. Often, the circulation of this type of news rises in the times of crises. But our team is always ready to verify any information.<sup>(pic.8)</sup>



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In addition, our team has taken to the street and prepared a fox pop to poll the people’s opinion about this topic and see how they would react when they receive this news. The team conveyed these opinions and raised awareness on how to verify the news and thus protect one’s self from overwhelming feelings of fear and panic. The team also educated the people on the steps that need to be taken in this regard.

pic.8 Fake: Audio messages are being circulated via WhatsApp saying that the Red Cross asked its members to stay away from crowded places as explosions are very likely to take place in the upcoming days. Others said the French Embassy urged its citizens to stay at home in the upcoming 48 hours in anticipation of a big blast. Truth: “Healthy News Contributes to Your Wellbeing” team contacted the French Embassy in Lebanon and the Red Cross and they both strongly denied the news. According to them, these audio messages are outdated and were shared during the period when Lebanon witnessed numerous explosions.



# Fact-checking Websites

When we find a news item on social media attributed to a news website, we must visit the original website that published the news or was said to have published it. Visiting the website allows us, in the first place, to verify if the website has actually published the content in the first place. It would also allow us to check the website, its design, language, and history.

It happened that some social media users shared a news item attributed to a news website called skynewslb.com. When we visited the website, it turned out that the news is attributed to the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI).<sup>(pic.9)</sup>

This news did not exist on the LBCI



pic.9 Riad Saleme to LBCI: Exchange rate to plummet strangely on Monday, 31,08,2020



website when we visited it. We also noticed that Skynews1b website is very similar in the look and feel to the infamous Sky News Arabic website. But it does not have any Lebanese version.

The website is well-designed, and the Arabic content is well written - two factors we have always called for checking to see if there is a hoax in place. But these days, designing a website is very easy. To fulfill certain agendas and publish fake news that come within the framework of misleading campaigns, some people are willing to pay a fortune.

We also found that some of the site pages are blank, which means it is still relatively new or that the website publishers are not aware that they have to deactivate blank pages.

Previously, a simple design of a website and spelling mistakes were two enough indicators that we cannot take the website seriously. But as technology continues to advance, designed website templates have become at anyone's disposal. Those who have suspicious agendas can simply hire a language reviewer. After all, they want to achieve their goal at any price.

A new terminology was introduced when conducting initial verification: horizontal verification. It refers to opening many windows in the browser, and each window is used for a different purpose, all linked to the same website. For example, one must look for the advertisers on the website if possible, the registration and the network of contacts. In addition, one must look at the nature of the news that sparked our interest and cross check it against

other news and interviews on the website. All these details give more clarity about the case.

Has the website published any special interviews? Is the alignment or direction obvious? Is there any explicit interest in shifting the public opinion in a specific direction? These are all valid questions we must ask while we attempt to decode the news and what goes beyond it. Such steps are often overlooked by many people because they require an effort. But if we consider our responsibility in our local communities, these steps become imperative.

Certain websites are specialized with the registration of sites, domain names, date of first publication and other details. Some of these websites have smartphone applications as well. Examples:

<https://research.domaintools.com>

<https://domainbigdata.com>

<https://whoisology.com/>

<https://whois.domaintools.com/>

<https://viewdns.info/reverseip/>

<https://publicwww.com/>

<https://dnslytics.com/>

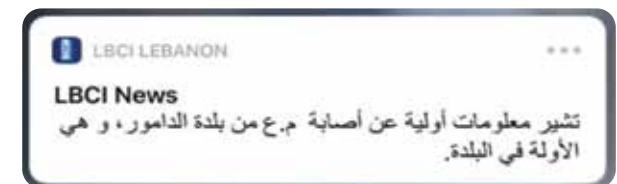
<https://urlscan.io>

<http://carbodate.cs.odu.edu>

When we clicked on the website address, the result showed that the website is registered under another name called Tripoli News. The website was registered in early 2020. There are no available details on the team, journalists, or any other information.

# Fact-checking Sources

Who or what is the source of the news? This is the question we must ask ourselves: What is the relationship between the source and the news itself? How did the source get the information? Why is this piece of news shared at this time in particular? What are the repercussions? What is the background of the source? Who is the source connected with and are there any underlying interests in question? Did the source attribute the news to other sources?<sup>(pic.10)</sup>



The above alert was received via a WhatsApp group, causing panic in the village. The message

pic.10 Initial information says M.A. from Al Damour village was infected and this is the first case in the village.

was forwarded from one group to another so the locals contacted the municipality to know the identity of the infected so those who were in close contact with him would take necessary measures. But the municipality was unaware of the case. After contacting LBCI, it turned out the news is fabricated. It did not require extraordinary skills to know that especially since the text of the message suggests poor writing skills. It includes a spelling mistake.

On a related note, Lebanese political analyst Johnny Mnyayar appeared on February 23, 2020 on Al Manar TV, saying: A week ago, The Washington Post cited sources close to the US Treasury – knowing that The Washington Post does not report lies when citing US Treasury sources – as saying that there are around 800 billion USD wasted in theft and corruption...

It was remarkable that this same information was mentioned earlier, specifically with the onset of demonstrations in Lebanon in October of last year. The information was attributed to The New York Times but this time through a tweet from one of the most famous Lebanese journalists, Rajeh Khoury:<sup>(pic.11)</sup>

The news was circulated by several Lebanese and Arabic news websites. It was attributed to The New York

pic.11 Dear officials, how can you fall asleep? How have you been sleeping for seven days? The New York Times: Lebanese politicians stole 800 billion USD only from the Lebanese people. Is one revolution enough to restore the stolen money?



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Times at times and to The Wall Street Journal at other times. There was no embedded link to the source. The news was widely circulated without any investigation or research.<sup>(pic.12-13)</sup>

Logically speaking, we must trace the first source of the news. Thus, we visited the websites of the mentioned outlets, looking for the source. After verification, it turned out that the story of the 800 billion USD has to do with the United States and represents a grant to fund schools.

In our attempts to know the truth about the number, we found content speaking about Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman confiscating

pic.12 Two million people have taken to the street....Will Hariri's paper succeed? Stolen money amounts to 800 billion USD. EU and US Treasury consider this a crime. Before we open the floor for Professor Assem Akaja to write an editorial, we want to cite The Washington Post's editorial which said that the stolen money in Lebanon amounts to 800 billion USD. The Wall Street Journal, one of the top outlets in the US, has also mentioned that the number is estimated at 800 billion USD. Both newspapers agreed that this is a crime against the peoples of Lebanon, a crime committed by around 90% of the ruling class.

pic.13 A crime against the Lebanese people: Lebanese leaders' deposits in European banks amount to 800 billion USD. Stolen money in Lebanon does not spare Beirut a bitter solution. Stolen money refers to the funds stolen and robbed. Amount: 800 billion USD according to US Treasury 2.3 billion USD were transferred by 5 Lebanese banks

How to get the money back? - Calling on the parliamentary speaker to enact laws - Drafting law to restore the money - Establishing a National Commission to Combat Corruption- Special Tribunal for public money crimes. What is the bitter solution? Lebanon has officially asked IMF for aid

The number is based on surveys conducted by the US Treasury. Observers of the Lebanese affairs said this is the biggest crime committed against the Lebanese people. They said that while Lebanon is suffering a huge economic collapse and is on the verge of bankruptcy, and while the Lebanese people are very close to starvation, Lebanon's leaders continue to deposit all this money abroad without considering returning a fraction to their country to save it – knowing that the money was originally stolen from the nation and the people. Not only that, they even continue plundering the country and hanging onto power at the same time. Observers said these leaders lack a sense of responsibility or else they would not have kept their money abroad, knowing that only a fraction of this amount could save the country. They are expecting the foreign countries to support Lebanon financially and they asked the IMF for support.



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800 billion USD from the princes he detained in the Ritz Hotel at the end of 2018 and in early 2019. It was remarkable that many Lebanese people asked for a similar measure in Lebanon. So in a nutshell, mere wishes were portrayed as reality.

But what has been proven to be baseless was later used in news articles. Journalist Tony Issa wrote in Al Joumhuriya on April 1, 2020 an article entitled: "Where is the stolen money?" The article was based on the information attributed to US newspapers. Issa said: "There is no data on the exact amount of stolen money in Lebanon. But all experts agree that this amount ranges from 150 billion to 200 billion USD. The US Treasury, as reported by The Washington Post, says the number is estimated at 800 billion USD."

In addition, Abdul Munim Ibrahim wrote an article in Akhbar Al-Khaleej after Prime Minister-designate Mostafa Adib in September 2020 entitled: "They stole 800 billion USD... and they are now fighting over the Finance Ministry (portfolio) in Lebanon!"

Fake news is easily recycled in many forms and that is the main problem. It remains usable even after it is proven false. By circulating fake news on news websites and analysts and journalists, the public tends to endorse it. This is why it is the responsibility of the public to audit and investigate to clarify the truth.<sup>(pic.14)</sup>

pic.14 Dear officials, how can you fall asleep? How have you been sleeping for seven days? The New York Times: Lebanese politicians stole 800 billion USD only from the Lebanese people. Is one revolution enough to restore the stolen money?

The above is a verified account that belongs to an influential media figure and publishes information attributed to a Western newspaper which garners a lot of interaction and engagement. When we visited the website, the news did not exist in the first place. This means that people from different backgrounds are taking part in spreading fake news for various reasons. Sometimes, the news is published because of underlying rivalry and sometimes it is abruptly circulated to grab attention only.



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# Fact-checking News

At the end of 2019, Lebanon witnessed a series of demonstrations to protest the deteriorating economic conditions. The protests led to the resignation of the government and the formation of a new government that soon resigned after the Beirut port blast on August 4, 2020. The blast killed dozens of people and caused massive damages to the city.

On November 3, 2019, the revolution active groups called for a protest entitled “Sunday of unity”. Some social media accounts estimated the number of protestors in Beirut at one million, while others were humbler, estimating the number at hundreds of thousands.<sup>(pic.15)</sup>



pic.14 “Sunday of Unity” Embraces hundreds of thousands of protests (video and images) November 3, 2019 – 6:30 PM Both the Martyrs’ and Riad Solh Squares were filled with hundreds of thousands of protestors who participated in the “Sunday of Unity” or “Sunday of Squares”. Because of the security measures in place, many cars were unable to make it to the protest.

It does not take a lot of technical expertise to get to approximate numbers that are as accurate as possible. Any citizen could have done that through using some special tools and examining the size of the crowd. These tools are available online for free, such as: <https://www.mapchecking.com>

This website provides a tool that estimates the number of persons per square meter, according to the geographical area. The area is determined visually on the screen and the person can then estimate the number of people according to the density in the area at the time of the protest.

This is another example when it comes to verifying the news by relying on search engines. We often see an article on social media that prompts us to ask the

following question: Is this realistic? Does it make sense? Any content that takes us by surprise must be the first content to be verified.

The Phalange Party posted the following tweet:<sup>(pic.16)</sup>

The tweet was condemned by many people, prompting them to look for the source of the news. By conducting a simple search across search engines and Twitter itself, the source turned out to be a sarcastic account that still holds the name of its original owner.<sup>(pic.17)</sup>

pic.16 Manal Abdul Samad on Twitter: I urge #Gebran Basil to explain to the Lebanese people why was he heading some behind-the-scenes cabinet meetings in the absence of Hassan Diab?

pic.17 I urge Gebran Basil to explain to the Lebanese people why he was heading some behind-the-scenes cabinet meetings in the absence of Hassan Diab?

So, it is very simple to verify the source but we are still making mistakes because we want to rush to publish and fail to verify properly. The situation is not any different when it comes to translated content.<sup>(pic.18)</sup>

It goes without saying that such a statement coming from WHO seems surprising. In this case, it only takes visiting the WHO website or its social media accounts in order to reassure those around us and our small community through the platforms we chose to guide our local community.

(pic.19)

WHO stated the following: “A number of vaccines are now in phase three clinical trials and we all have to hope to have a number of effective vaccines that can help prevent people from infection. However, there’s no silver bullet at the moment and there might never be.”

What WHO means is that there is no magical solution - not that there is no solution at all. So the statement carries a different meaning if placed in the right context.

It is no secret that the outbreak of Covid-19 has sparked a lot of fake news. The young men and women who took part in the “Countering Fake News” workshop published corrections to some false news and misconceptions. For example, some news items said children can never contract Covid-19

pic.18 WHO: A solution to the Covid-19 crisis might not be within reach at all.



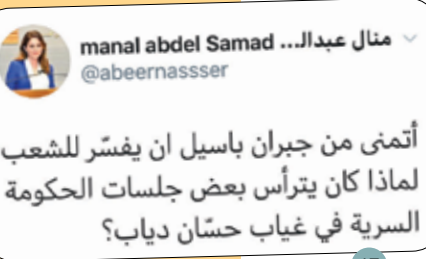
18



19



16



17

although some countries have reported cases among children and youth.<sup>(pic.20)</sup>



20

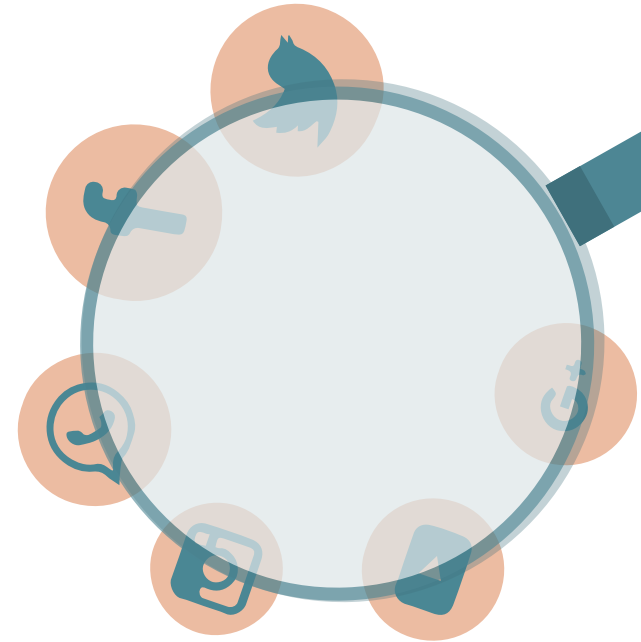
In Aley, a village in Mount Lebanon famous for the Yerba Mate tea, people were under the belief that this herb protects against Covid-19. But this is untrue and there is no scientific evidence to prove that.

A page posted the following:

Yebra Mate team will protect Lebanon from Covid-19! Recent studies revealed that drinking Yerba Mate team everyday can protect against Covid-19 and work is underway to develop a treatment based on this herb. Hold on. Have you believed that? Look at the below photo and keep in mind that “Healthy News Contributes to Your Wellbeing”<sup>(pic.21)</sup>



21



pic.20 Fake: Social media reported that children are immune to Covid-19.  
 Truth: Covid-19 generally causes mild symptoms, mainly among children and adolescents. Nonetheless, it could cause serious symptoms.  
 pic.21 Fake: Social media activists said that doctors in South America noticed there are no reported cases of Covid-19 there. After conducting some studies, they discovered surprising and astonishing information. According to them, the Yarbe Mate tea which is largely consumed by people in South America and some people in Mount Lebanon and Syria is why these regions have no reported cases.  
 Truth: The Yarbe Mate tea is antioxidant but no studies have found a correlation between this herb and a treatment to Covid-19. WHO said there are no current medications to treat or protect against Covid-19 and recommends against self-treatment. Clinical trials are underway and include a number of new and old medications. It is worth mentioning that some countries in South America have reported cases of Covid-19, mainly Argentina.

# Fact-checking Images

Dealing with images varies from one case to another. Sometimes, the image is real but might have been used in a different context. There are also times when images are incorrectly used or intentionally used to serve certain purposes. Various verification tools are used according to each case.

In Qobb Elias village in Bekaa, an image was circulated via WhatsApp groups featuring a truck unloading garbage in the middle of the road. The image was attached to the following text: A truck loaded with garbage came from Beirut to unload trash in Qobb Elias in Bekaa. The truck was confiscated and the locals unloaded the garbage across the municipality building.<sup>(pic.22)</sup> After contacting the municipality, it turned out that some people spread rumors that these trucks are disseminating bad smells coming from the nearby Sicomo Factory which uses it to generate energy. After verification, it turned





out that the bad smell is coming from agricultural fertilizers used in the area.

So in this case, the above image is real, but the comments and reactions have shifted the image into another direction. Those who validated the content were ordinary people who did not have to make a lot of effort to know the truth.

Sometimes, images are shared on WhatsApp, Facebook, or Twitter. One must check if these images were shared by the person who captured the image in the first place. That person must also be asked to send multiple pictures and take pictures from the site itself. The original photo must be sent via e-mail and the sender of the e-mail message must be verified.

When we fact-check an image, we have to observe what features may point to a certain region or perhaps cross check the weather condition against the date of the image. We can also look at the dress code, plate numbers, traffic lights...All these details can reveal information when analyzing the image. The information related to the image, its location, and date can be verified through the following tools: <http://Verexif.com>

<http://exif.regex.info/exif.cgi>

We can also use these verification tools to check whether these images were published earlier or if they were captured in a different location. This is the most common scenario. Many photos belonging to victims of Covid-19 were published. A lot of people have fallen for this but it was later revealed that the photos have older dates and different contexts.

To verify this, the following tools are useful:

- TinEye reverse image search
- Google Image
- Yandex reverse image search
- Bing

You can also use RevEye Reverse Image Search which can be installed on Chrome or Firefox. (pic.23)

The image can be uploaded on the website or the



link may be simply added. If the image appears to have different dates, locations, or circumstances, one must question the image and its purposes. (pic.24)

The following is a comparison between different

	Elements Identified	Faces	Structures	Places	Digital/Logos	Alternate Sizes	Flipped or Altered
Google	1	Neutral	Great	Great	Great	Good	Neutral
Yandex	2+	Great	Great	Great	Good	Good	Good
Bing	3+	Good	Good	Good	Good	Neutral	Great
TinEye	1	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Great	Great	Good

search engines on the image by domain tools: (pic.25)

By using the aforementioned tools to verify images,

pic.24 A truck smuggling fuel from Lebanon to Syria

What a nice photo  
Then why do we have electricity outage?  
Shame on this state

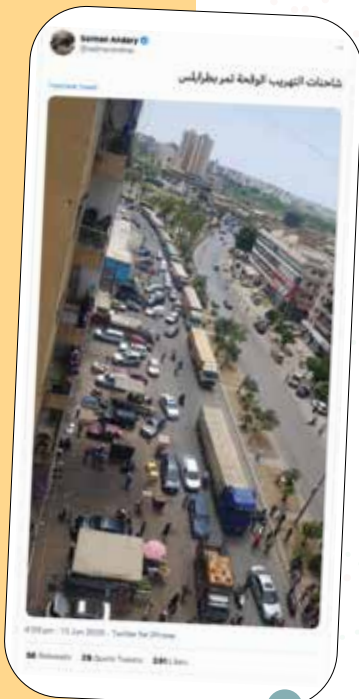
we realized that the photo was published earlier and the location is not Lebanon but rather Yemen. Many people rushed to publish the photo, including MP and former Minister Walid Junblatt. The image gained credibility because it coincided with reports on smuggling fuel on the Lebanon-Syrian borders.

There are also tools to check if the images have been edited to change the background or add characters such as:

- FotoForensics
- Forensically

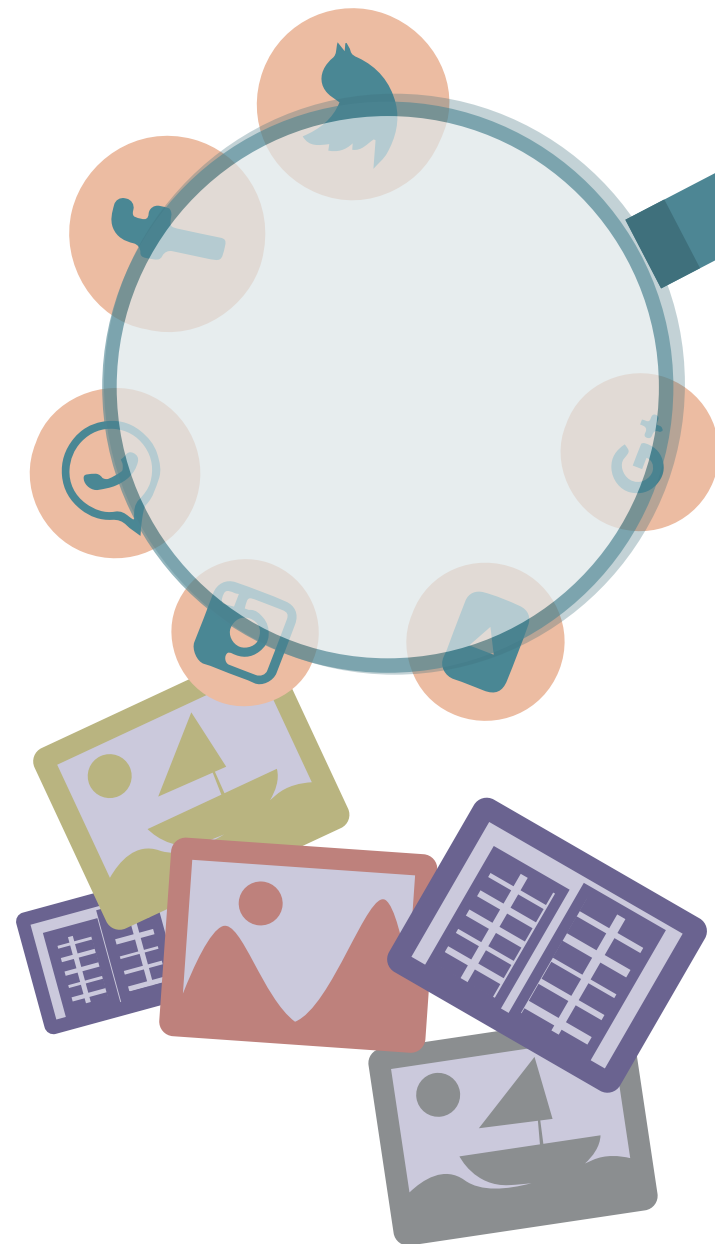
Although some images are real, they are used to convey different messages. For example, Sky News Al Arabiyah reporter Salman Al-Andary published the following tweet:<sup>(pic.26)</sup>

The photo is real but the trucks are not used for smuggling. Rather, they belong to the World Food Program (WFP) and were on their way to Syria carrying food aid according to a statement issued by WFPP.



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pic.26 Trucks used for smuggling pass through Tripoli in broad day light



# Fact-checking Videos

Any social media user may come across a video on Facebook that they want to verify. They might also question a video embedded in a tweet. A WhatsApp message might seem unrealistic. The

following are some methods and tools to fact-check videos and verify their credibility.

Lebanese MP Ziad Hawwat shared a tweet on his account featuring a convoy of tanks which he said were smuggling gas to Syria through illegal crossings, including Qusair crossing.<sup>(pic.27)</sup>

In light of the deteriorating situation in Lebanon and the scarcity of raw material and oil derivatives from local markets, such tweets would normally spark hatred between the Lebanese and Syrians on



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pic.26 How does it make sense that the crime of smuggling gas to Syria through illegal crossings, including Qusair, continues to be committed under the sponsorship of the party of the de facto while the state is watching and our foreign currency reserve is vanishing?

O people, this is such a serious theft of the Lebanese people's wealth.

the one hand, and between the Lebanese peoples themselves on the other hand. The tweet has accused a certain Lebanese party and held it responsible.

If we look at the engagement, the tweet got over 400 retweets, hundreds of likes, and the video was viewed more than 60,000 times.

Ali Hashem, a journalist who previously worked for international and local media outlets, verified the video and published a tweet that shows the location of the video on the map after inspecting the buildings that appeared in it. Usually this is the simplest way to verify a certain geographical location, as we tend to examine the buildings that appear. By using Google Maps or Google Earth for example, we can verify the buildings and roads in any given location and cross check it against the video. We can also take a screenshot of the video itself, and search for the image as we have explained in the section dedicated to fact-checking images. The results of the search help us confirm whether or not the news is fake or accurate.

After verification, Hashem concluded that the image was captured from different location. Here is his tweet.<sup>(pic.28)</sup>

pic.28 The video is taken from Qatinah village in Homs, 56 km away from the Lebanese border. The video was captured near the famous fertilizers' factory there. Cross checking the images against the maps is not hard and perhaps he who posted the tweet was unsuccessful.

How does it make sense that the crime of smuggling gas to Syria through illegal crossings, including Qusair, continues to be committed under the sponsorship of the party of the de facto while the state is watching and our foreign currency reserve is vanishing?

O people, this is such a serious theft of the Lebanese people's wealth.

Interaction with Ali Hashem's tweet is low, compared to the tweet made by MP Hawwat. Hashem's tweet garnered 35 retweets, 135 likes, and 4 comments.

Fact-checking a video is not as easy as fact-checking a text or image. But we should still verify the information before publishing. Like images, there are two types of edited videos:

- 1- Real video, but used incorrectly.
- 2- Edited video that was tampered with by using a special technology.

Sometimes, it happens that the video is real but the way it is portrayed differs according to who is sharing it, like the example we gave above. This requires from us to observe certain details in the video, the topic in place, and the scenes.

We can fact-check videos by using the following:

- InVid
- Youtube Dataviewer

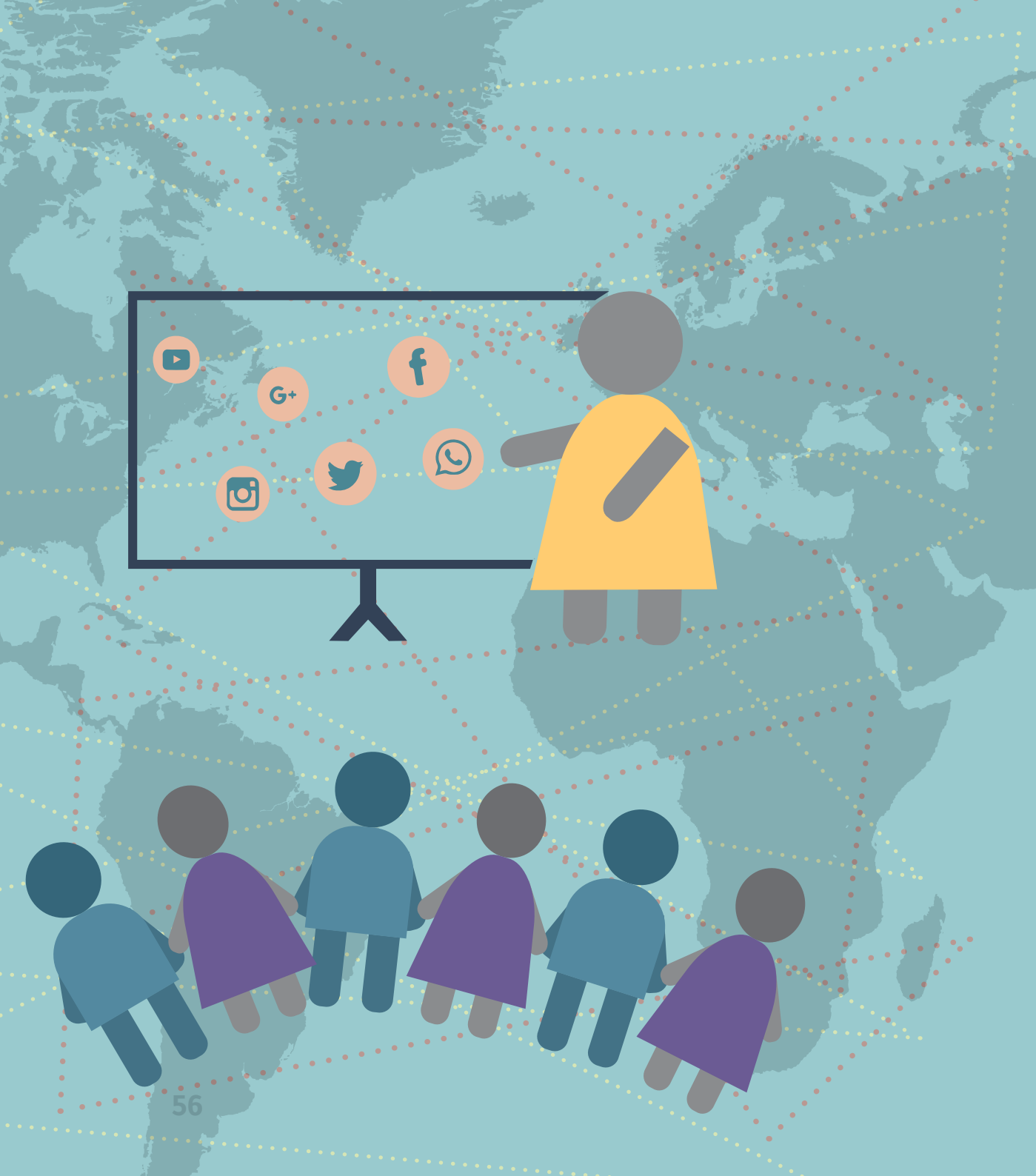
These tools allow us to capture images from the video and to search for similar images. In addition, we must check the social media accounts, mainly Youtube, which is the primary platform for these videos.

We can use different applications to examine the scenes, one by one, such as VLC. We can use different tools such as:

- Wikimapia
- SunCalc
- Google earth



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# Media Literacy

Why is it necessary to bring up the question of media literacy in a manual on fake news? The answer to this question is that we are focusing on the verification tools that are at the disposal of the ordinary citizen as well as the veteran journalist. Media literacy that alerts the people to the importance of playing their role as auditors and inspectors of every message, its content, and background becomes more effective when verification tools are at everyone's disposal. These tools are not exclusive to one group only and do not require extraordinary skills. Rather, they only require training and practice so we can eventually create a society that is immune to misleading and manipulation.

The concept of media literacy, or education, has first appeared in the 1960s as an attempt to use the media

in education. Later, the concept evolved and focused on how to raise awareness among young people and youth on the dangers of the media, its impact, and the messages it could convey.

The UNESCO has been promoting media education since the 1970s. In 1977, the UNESCO published the first book in this regard: “Media Studies in Education”.

In April 1999, the UNESCO convened a conference in Vienna entitled: Media Education and the Digital Age. In the conference, media education was defined as: “It deals with all communication media and includes the word and graphics, the sound, the still as well as the moving image, delivered on any kind of technology. It enables people to gain understanding of the communication media, producing them, and choosing the appropriate tools to express their messages.”

The conference outlines the following objectives of media education:

- 1- To enable the people to fully understand media communication and how media outlets operate.
- 2- To acquire skills in using these media to communicate with others.
- 3- To learn how to analyze, critically reflect upon and create media.
- 4- To identify the sources of media texts, their political, social, commercial and/or cultural interests, and their contexts.

Thus, according to these definitions and objectives, the nature of media education becomes clear as a

concept. It aims at enhancing critical thinking among the audience in order to establish a solid background of the media content and whoever stands behind it.

Media education has been introduced in universities, colleges, and schools as part of the curriculum in many countries around the world. There are numerous references about it in multiple languages. Lebanon is one of the countries that took the initiative early on and dedicated five hours for media education for Grade 6 within Civil Education. Four hours were dedicated for students of Grade 12 on “Media and Public Opinion”.

Given the changes that happened to the media landscape, media literacy becomes more important than ever. It is no longer a question of media outlets because establishing a media outlet does not require a huge capital. One can simply launch a website or a Youtube channel or create an Instagram account to communicate with a large audience without any cost and with great ease. But the danger lies in the content disseminated by these platforms in the absence of censorship or impact measurement.

Therefore, there is a pressing need to understand the nature of the media messages and decode them, in addition to questioning the news we follow and media outlets reporting it.

Media literacy focuses on the process of creating media content, as well as the impact of the images and their connotations. It also touches upon the influence of media stereotyping, terminology, and the danger of using people as a commodity

to achieve commercial and advertising purposes. Media literacy promotes critical thinking and encourages the diversification of sources of the content. It calls for questioning the content, so the audience stay away from misinformation and manipulation of information.

This manual seeks to limit misinformation and manipulation as much as possible. Ordinary citizens can search and verify news themselves even if the news was reported by a media outlet. After all, the ownership of each media outlet as well as the revenues from advertising, according to media education, steer the direction of the news and content.

Recipients usually prefer to get information from a media outlet they trust. In Lebanon, these reliable outlets usually represent the recipients' political, partisan, or religious alignment. Thus, the media is powerful enough to influence in a direct and indirect way. Therefore, educating the audience on this issue is a pressing need. Giving them access to the right tools to verify the news opens a wider door for them to gain knowledge, break stereotypes, and let go of prejudices.





## Helpful Websites

**Here are some helpful websites for fact-checking information and countering fake news in every region:**

Africa: Africa Check  
Germany :Correctiv  
Spain: El Objetivo  
Argentina: Chequeado  
Australia: The Conversation  
FactCheck, RMIT ABC Fact  
Check  
Sweden: Viralgranskaren  
Ireland: TheJournal.ie Fact Check  
Northern Ireland: FactCheck  
Northern Ireland  
Italy: : Pagella Politica  
United States: AP Fact Check;  
Climate Feedback; Factcheck.  
org; PolitiFact; Snopes; The  
Washington Post Fact Checker  
Bosnia and Herzegovina:  
Istinomjer

Brazil: Aos Fatos; Agência Lupa;  
Agência Pública - Truco  
Portugal: Observador Fact Check  
Turkey: Dogruluk Payi; Teyit.org  
France: France 24 Les  
Observateurs; Le Monde  
Décodeurs  
Georgia: : FactCheck Georgia  
Serbia : Istinomer

### **In the Arab world:**

Jordan: Fatabyyano, akeed  
Syria: verify-sy  
KSA: norumors  
Egypt: dabegad, falsoo, matsda2sh  
Lebanon: factchecklebanon fact-  
o-meter,

**Here are some international websites providing training on fact-checking fake news:**

First Draft  
International Fact-Checking Network: IFCN





## Conclusion

Fake news has become a prevalent phenomenon with dangerous repercussions such as distorting awareness and knowledge and instigating and mobilizing public opinion as a result of selective, distorted, or fabricated content. It can possibly entail falsification of history, events, and reality leading to ignorance of facts and reality.

Fake news is never a new phenomenon and the media has always fallen for it. Some media practiced lies and ran fabricated stories to gain traction or promote a political propaganda. Historically speaking, yellow journalism has always referred to this type of news. Today, this issue has grabbed much attention because publishing news is no longer practiced by media outlets or certain groups. It is now possible for any citizen to circulate news, impersonate another person, or hide behind a fake name to promote fake news for various agendas. It is also possible for politicians, political parties, those working in the public sector, public figures, and celebrities to publish content and promote ideas even if they have little knowledge.

It becomes extremely dangerous when these practices are used in the context of Covid-19 for example. When a celebrity, or what we call an influencer, publishes misleading information, we could end up with a catastrophe.

While we can easily verify the news that is publicly available on social media, news circulated via private WhatsApp groups might have a dangerous impact.

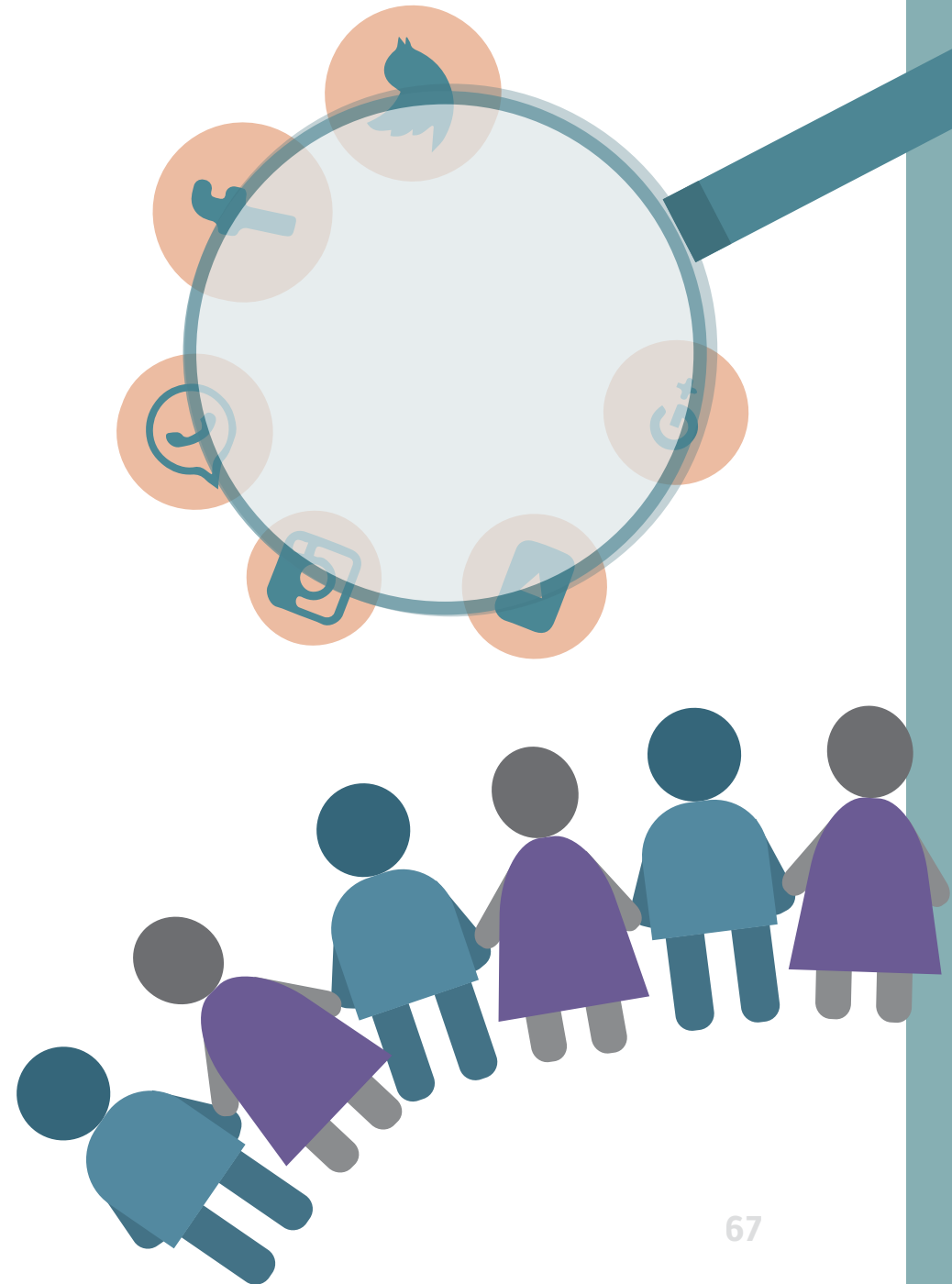
Those in charge of the fact-checking tools we mentioned might deliberately deactivate them from time to time for various reasons. However, many tools continue to emerge. It is better to master one tool than using multiple tools that we are not experts in. This manual puts many tools at your disposal especially since the public is not the primary publisher of news. Therefore, it becomes necessary to provide guidance for the youth that are engaged in efforts to promote community awareness and strengthen civil peace.

Countering fake news is at the heart of any efforts to provide guidance, raise awareness and provide support. It is our duty to promote the use of reliable news sources and help local communities distinguish facts from disinformation.

We put these tools at the disposal of whoever wants to upskill themselves when it comes to the veracity of news, mainly on social media where content is published at a large scale.

In conclusion, in the era dominated by a flood of news and a rush to publish, one cannot verify everything. Therefore, we must verify any suspicious news that promote wrong or inaccurate content and abstain from resharing it. After all, you do not have to share everything. Only share what you are sure about.

Yes, fake news might be tempting and more exciting. But we must eventually choose between excitement on the one hand and accuracy and credibility on the other hand.



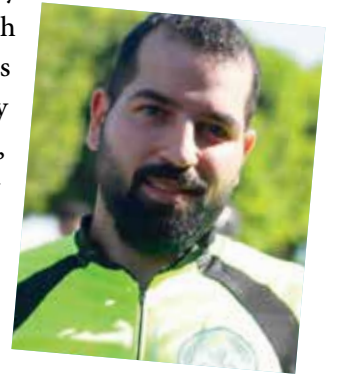


## Testimonials

### Nadine Moadad

#### Choueifat

A fake news story is intentionally and verifiably false with fabricated elements, some of which are true and others are false. These new stories are politically, financially, and commercially driven and aim at attracting followers. However, some fake news articles may be unintentionally propagated due to negligence, unawareness, or ignorance especially when real photos and videos are used but attributed to incorrect dates and places. Sounds, videos, and photos might be also used out of context.



Within the framework of its efforts to counter fake news, Dawaer Foundation volunteered to establish working groups from various regions in Lebanon to monitor the news disseminated in each region under the slogan of “Healthy News Contributes to Your Wellbeing.”

I, Nadim Moadad, have volunteered with the Choueifat city team, to combat fake news in this region in collaboration with the municipality. Choueifat is the second largest city in Lebanon and hosts a population of diverse political affiliations and nationalities. Fake news articles are usually a result of political tensions running in the region. Working with “Healthy News Contributes to Your Wellbeing” campaign has taught me a lot. I have learned how to track news to get to the original source. We have participated in many useful virtual

and face-to-face workshops to combat fake news in the city. I have become very vigilant and determined to verify any news article before publishing or believing any story.

I highly recommend this outstanding experience that has introduced me to new faces with various expertise and taught me to use new means to limit the prevalence of fake news.

## **Nivine Al-Rayyes**

Aley

I am a student at the Faculty of Law at the Lebanese University. When I first heard of “Healthy News Contributes to Your Wellbeing” campaign, I was very curious to take part and learn more.

The campaign has brought together a group of 40 young men and women from 10 regions in Lebanon.

The participants have different perspectives, beliefs, and outtakes. We have one common goal which is to limit the spread of fake news on social media.

We were trained by experts who provided us with the right tools and adequate guidance to address the issue of fake news.

Thanks to the training and the sessions conducted by experts, we are now more capable of telling fake from real news.

Given the current situation in Lebanon, we need awareness campaigns to help people limit the spread



of fake news that affect our social stability. I also recommend raising awareness in the society to empower citizens and make them capable of verifying the news before believing it.

Personally, I feel both proud and happy. This experience has boosted my self-confidence and taught me new skills and techniques I did not know before. For example, I have learned how to verify images. As a law student, my primary mission is to defend justice and my obligation is to raise awareness in my community. If you have doubts about any news article, you can reach out to me or

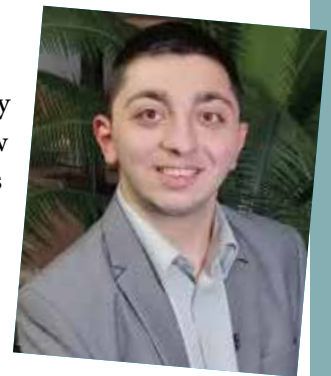
Healthy News Contributes to Your Wellbeing” page for assistance.

## **Hanna Nakat**

Tripoli

Participating in this program has expanded my knowledge about fake news and taught me how to combat it by using specific techniques. I was trained by industry experts and I am now sharing these new skills with my friends to avoid falling into the trap of fake news.

By enrolling in this program, I have discovered and developed new aspects of my personality. I have also met new colleagues from other villages and discovered the beauty and charm of Lebanon. The spread of fake news on social media represents a global concern for governments, policymakers,



organizations, companies, and citizens. Fake news articles are primarily aimed at destroying trust and shaping political, regional, and religious ideologies and orientations.

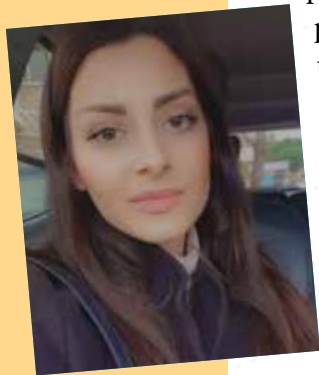
## Lama Diddi

### Qobb Elias

Fake news tends to distort the events and fabricate them to manipulate public opinion in order to implement political and economic agendas, particularly in the times of crises. For the most part, social media networks have contributed to the spread of fake news. These networks are the primary source of information and hate speeches and videos. Users are allowed to express their opinions freely online and this is why fake accounts and websites have become widespread and uncontrollable.

Previously, recipients were not expected to verify the veracity of information. That mission was restricted to journalists. But the online space was a game changer. Recipients must ensure their wellbeing and the wellbeing of those around them by verifying the credibility of the websites.

My own experience with Dawaer Foundation and the UNDP in combating fake news was very useful and effective. We were trained on a number of mechanisms, techniques, and programs that help us verify the news before publishing it via instant messaging applications. Thanks to these techniques,

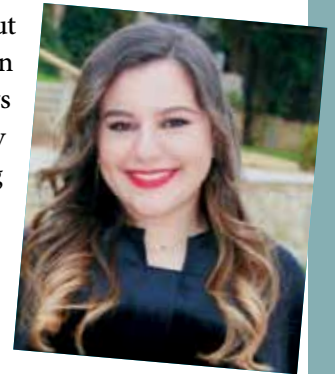


we are now able to spot fake from real news and correct the news before sending it to any websites and groups. Hence, raising awareness among individuals and our communities on the danger of fake news is very effective in combating this type of content. Once individuals are aware of the danger of fake news and rumors, they steer away from them. These programs are extremely important because they provide a direct contact with the participants, train them, and recruit them to fight fake news in their regions. Change can start with a small group and expand to a larger group, which is the society. These programs play a pivotal role in raising awareness to limit the impact of fake news and the ensuing feelings of anxiety and fear.

## Lara Obeid

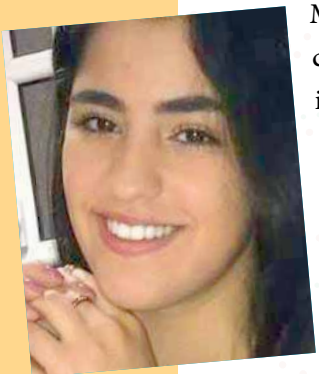
### Aley

My experience with “Healthy News Contributes to Your Wellbeing” campaign tells a lot about the success of a team that worked so hard on upskilling itself to verify the veracity of fake news circulated in the region, combat it, and eventually correct it. Fake news contributes to destabilizing the society, so it was particularly necessary to find a sustainable solution implemented by a local community team. The UNDP and Dawaer Foundation trained this team in collaboration with Aley Municipality. The Municipal Council members helped create a suitable environment to reinforce the role of this team.



## Jana Sleem

Aley



My experience in participating in the project to counter fake news has been amazing. We live in a world that is affected by almost everything including news that creates tension in Aley and other regions. It was a perfect timing as the project coincided with the October 17 revolution and the spread of Covid-19. These two events saw a surge in fake news.

My participation in the project had so many advantages. For instance, it provided an opportunity to work with young men and women from 10 Lebanese regions. Our motto was “hold on, validate, and verify.” We have also been exposed to various tools to verify fake news, combat it, and limit its influence on people. We also launched “Healthy News Contributes to Your Wellbeing” campaign on Instagram and Facebook and put a lot of efforts to correct fake news.

Locally, we collaborated with Aley Municipality which was very adamant about supporting our cause. Together, we outlined a joint strategy to raise awareness among people. The two pages we created on social media were positively received and we are currently working on developing them more and more.

Personally speaking, the project means a lot to me especially as people tend to believe fake news which

poses many risks to our society. With the growing need to raise awareness, it is imperative that this project continues. For my part, I will continue to raise awareness among people and I am willing to teach those around me how to verify fake news.

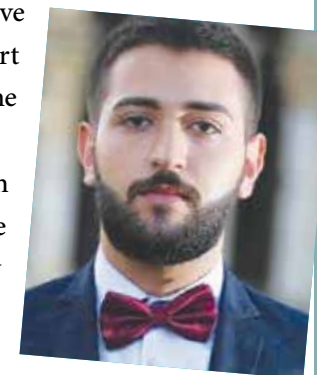
Participating in this project has been an amazing experience and I hope I take part in any future projects that aim at making a change.

## Ali Ayyash

Aley

The project is a big-life changing experience. Every morning, we used to wake up and navigate through social media pages looking for news as if we were looking for our daily dosage of anxiety. But after we participated in the training sessions, our perspectives have changed, and we are now validating any news article we receive. We are even working on correcting fake news in our inner circle. Day after day, this circle has expanded, and we have become a reliable source for the locals who resort to us to verify news. News verification has become an integral part of our day-to-day lives.

We were trained for several months and we got in touch with the relevant authorities to verify fake news. Our group is now a go-to source to verify news. We gained the trust of the people and collaborated with everyone around us. Not only

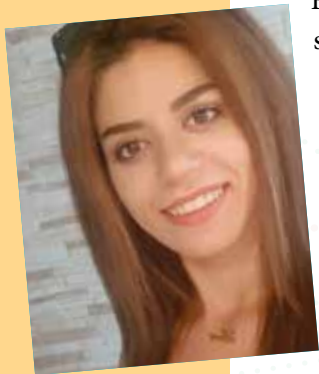


that, but we also sought to share knowledge with our friends and acquaintances to protect them from fake news and its negative effect on their wellbeing. Even though it was my first experience, working under this project has certainly reduced the spread of fake news in our region. It was a much-needed effort because fake news threatens social stability and affects mental health.

## Lara Akel

### Damour

Fake news is all around us, be it family, political, or security related. My participation in “Countering Fake News” project in collaboration with the UNDP and Dawaer Foundation has added a lot of value to me personally and to my region Damour. As families are very close to each other in this region, fake news tends to spread quickly among people who usually interact with this type of content. Participating in this project has changed my perspective towards many things, including my ability to read the news objectively, approaching it with logic, verifying the news articles, and looking into why they were published in the first place. I also had the chance to develop my skills and became capable of using some techniques to fact-check photos and videos. It is worth mentioning that the training was, for the most part, very practical, thus adding a lot of value. Fake news has a negative impact which our society

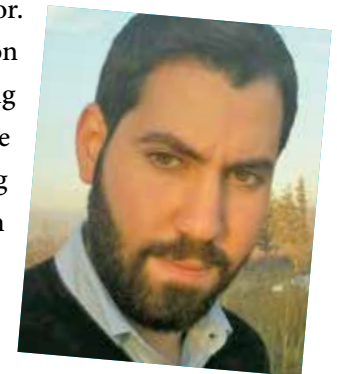


may not realize. It leads to major problems that may exacerbate and create a rift within the same home. Currently, I am looking forward to transferring this knowledge to my local community knowing that I have seen a great response from the locals, organizations, and municipalities to achieve social stability. In addition to the rich information I have learned, the project was a starting point to put together a practical plan for my own community. The goal is to urge the youth to verify any news article before publishing it. In conclusion, the wellbeing of our community, relationships, towns, families and our own health depends on the veracity of news.

## Mohammad Daloul

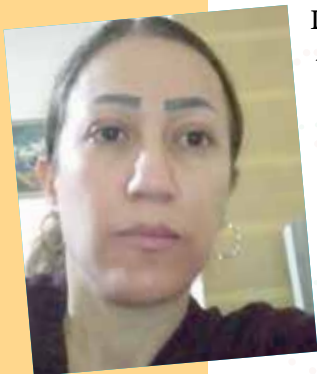
### Riyah

My experience with the project to combat fake news was very successful and had a positive impact on me as I learned to spot the difference between fake and real news. Thanks to this experience, I have realized the impact of fake news on societal behavior. The project had a positive impact on my region as it contributed to raising awareness among individuals on news verification. Locals have shown a great response as well. I am trying to reach out to so many people in my region and educate them on how to verify fake news circulated in our region.



## Muna Jaber

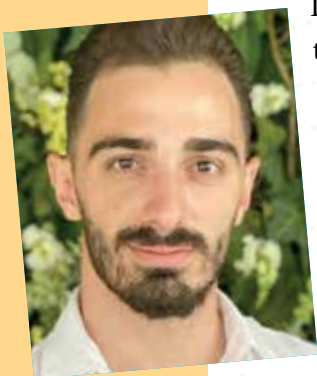
### Riyaq



Despite the difficult circumstances we have been through in Lebanon, the spread of Covid-19, the economic crisis, and the Beirut Port blast, my participation in the project to combat fake news has been an amazing experience. I felt very comfortable and confident and I learned to what extent fake news can affect our society. In addition, getting to know colleagues from different Lebanese regions made the experience more enriching and rewarding. In a nutshell, I have become more capable of analyzing and validating news before believing and publishing it.

## Jaleel Sarkis

### Chekka



It was definitely a difficult year for all of us. We took to the street and then we were forced to stay at home because of the Covid-19 outbreak. Despite all that, participating in the project to combat fake news was such a positive experience. It helped me learn things I was completely unaware of. I used to believe news without questioning its veracity. The project has taught me how to verify fake news, be it in the form of a text, photo, or video. This has become part of me now. Whenever I

read a news article or receive a photo or video, I immediately verify the content because I realize the impact of fake news on society.

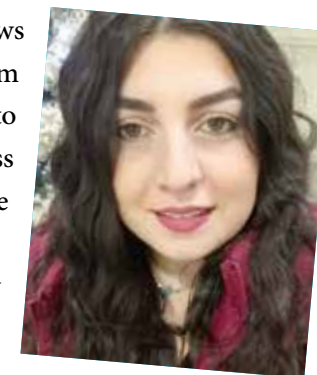
In the beginning, it was not easy to convince the people of the importance of verifying fake news. But with time, we have successfully convinced some people who are now questioning the news they receive and digging deep to validate the content.

## Lara Salem

### Amioun

I have taken part in the project to combat fake news and I can say it was a very useful experience from which I learned how to spot fake news. Thanks to this experience, I contributed to raising awareness in my village in order to limit the impact of fake news.

Despite numerous challenges, we successfully managed to launch “Healthy News Contributes to Your Wellbeing” campaign on Facebook and Instagram to correct fake news circulated in different regions. The campaign also aims at raising awareness and limiting the spread of fake news. Personally, I have benefited a lot from the workshop on how to film Vox Pops.





# Instructions

## Facebook and Civil Peace



- Check the account's creation date.
- Does the profile photo really belong to the user?
- Can we verify the personal information?
- Are common friends, if available, public figures?
- The type of content published by the account gives an idea of the background and role.
- Use Facebook tools to verify the content.

## Media and Fake News

- Every news article that takes us by surprise is worth being investigated.
- Verify the source of the news.
- Look at the background, impact, and timing of the news.
- Who benefits from publishing the news and who is harmed?
- What is the relationship between the media outlet and the source?
- Do not rely on one source or one media outlet.



## Fact-checking Websites

- Check the website's history to learn more about its owners and creation date (a list of tools was shared earlier).
- Check if the names of writers, correspondents, and reporters are mentioned. Do these names tell about a specific identity? If articles are published anonymously, then we should question the content.
- Is the language professional? Are there any typos?
- Are the images exclusive to the website?
- Check the advertisements, if any, and find the link between the content and the advertisers.



## Fact-checking Sources

- Verify the original source (do not trust anonymous or secret sources).
- Identified sources: Look at the background and motives.
- Check the information the sources have previously published and verify their veracity.
- Ask the following question: Why was this information published at this time in particular?
- Do not reshare information before you verify it.

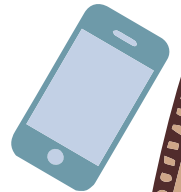


## Fact-checking News

- Use search engines and advanced options.
- Check how the news appeared in its original language and the first website that published it.
- Use special tools to verify maps such as "Google Maps". To validate the number of participants, use "Map Checking". You can also use "SunCalc" that shows sun movement and sunlight phases during the given day at the given location.

## Fact-checking Images

- Get in touch with the photographer and ask for several photos.
- Check the image forensics (multiple tools have been referred to earlier).
- Validate the content of the photo (buildings, people, weather condition, and time).
- Use tools such as "TinEye", "Google Image" or "Microsoft Bing". These tools among others show if the photo has appeared elsewhere online.
- Check if the photo was manipulated by using tools such as "FotoForensics".



## Fact-checking Videos

- "Youtube DataViewer" or "InVid" are two tools that help convert videos into images and assess the reliability of newsworthy video files and content.
- Use "VLC" applications to play through a video frame by frame.
- Use search engines, Google Maps, and Google Earth to verify a location and its compatibility with the scene referred to in the video.

