Title	Effacing the Dilemma of the Rumoring Subject: A Value-Oriented Approach towards Studying Misinformation on Social Media
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Citation	Aricat, R. (2017). Effacing the dilemma of the rumoring subject: A value-oriented approach towards studying misinformation on social media. Journal of Human Values, in press.
Date	2017
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10220/44102
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Effacing the Dilemma of the Rumoring Subject: A Value-Oriented Approach towards Studying Misinformation on Social Media

Abstract

Rumor has been part of collective human life for centuries. Communities deal with anxiety and make sense of the unknowable by mixing apprehensions with what is already known to them. With modernity, and in line with studies on a range of social phenomena, there have been efforts to develop a science on rumor. Most of these studies deal with rumor at the propositional level, such that the rumoring or rumor-rebutting subject invariably belongs to one of the two sides of the 'true-false' divide. Similar categories are followed in the study of rumor in social media, where the nodes in a rumor chain are, however, less hierarchical, and where images are increasingly used for persuasion. This paper, following a value-oriented approach, argues that the science on rumor has objectivized the problem, and has suggested instrumental solutions like enhancing the digital literacy of social media users. Whereas, a value position should ideally attempt to efface the dilemma of the rumoring/rumor-rebutting subject, and locate rumors within the larger socio-political and historical context of a society.

Keywords

Introduction

Rumor and gossip have always been part of human communities, as noted by anthropologists and historians. They help communities deal with anxiety and sense of imminent danger. Rumor is also a tool of the vulnerable to defend themselves against the oppressors[i]. In traditional communities, rumor has often gone along with occult practices like black magic and sorcery. Considering that rumors were part of the culture and folklore, the relationship between truth and belief in rumors was often obscure. Along with other beliefs, rumor helped communities deal with the 'unknowable'.

Calamities and wars have been a major trigger of rumors in modern societies. Prasad (1935) studied the rumors that circulated in the wake of a devastating earthquake in India some eight decades ago. Kapferer (1990) studied a series of rumors across Europe during its tumultuous periods. The long tradition of rumor studies identifies people's anxiety and an event's relevance to the audience as key positive triggers in the spread of incorrect information. Sociologists describe rumors as improvised news and rumor-mongering as a collective problem solving process helping people to cope with perceived threats during a crisis. Rumors originate and evolve as a product of interpretive deliberations among the community members aimed at making sense of a crisis situation (Shibutani, 1966). The problematization of rumor, as in the case of many other sociological phenomena, is a predicament of modernity[ii].

Despite the interpretive possibilities that rumors offer, and their cathartic effect at times of crises, they are considered a problem to be curbed in the modern period. This is due mainly to their devastating after effects. Wedge-driving rumors, or rumors that spread hatred between communities, have preceded almost all riots, pogroms and genocides in the modern period. Similarly, rumors can defame individuals and threaten the smooth functioning of business firms. As a collective phenomenon metaphorically linked to wildfire, epidemic and

grinding mill, rumor overrides human agency and poses a challenge to human values. Thus, one is faced with the dilemma: As a phenomenon deeply embedded in collective human life, how far is it right to describe rumor as an aberrant communication, where masses are always considered being prone to err, while a knowledgeable few seize the truth and reveal it for the benefit of the society? A question related to individual human agency also presses itself: Does a value position assumed by an individual in the face of a rumor always have to be based on a clear demarcation between the fact and fiction of the rumor, such that fact becomes a progressive force in history and fiction a retrogressive force?

The objective of this article is to provide an overview of studies that have focused on different aspects of rumor, ranging from message characteristics to group dynamics. In doing so, it highlights areas where the science on rumor can gain from new value positions, especially those that can replace the existing ones based on well-entrenched divisions between truth and falsity. Extant scholarship has largely provided an empirical understanding on the origin and spread of rumors. A value-oriented approach is needed not only because rumor has far-reaching impact in the contemporary world, but also to assert that science can never be value-free despite the claims of objectivity made by empiricists. The value position propounded by this article is based neither on devising a method to find the truth behind rumors nor to understand the rumoring mechanism. It is to efface the double dilemma of the subject[iii] – at the first level, when faced with a rumor, an individual has to choose between the fact and the fiction, and at the second level, the subject, while studying rumors, has to find the truth behind them in retrospect. This is not to suggest that anarchism should prevail. The attempt here is to criticize the epistemological traditions of science that is deeply rooted in truth finding. Giving the power back to community and to the individual can help overcome this burden and dilemma.

Individual, context, message and medium

Four aspects have received wide attention in rumor studies: individual, context, rumor message and the medium. This section elaborates on these aspects and argues that the focus on individuals and institutions has deepened the division between truth and falsity in rumors. Studies on rumor messages too have narrow focus, as they engage mainly at a simplistic correspondence between truth and falsity at the propositional level. On the other hand, a few studies that focused on the context have, however, looked at the meaning-making attempts in the rumor process. This section also elaborates on the complex technopolitics involving social networking (SNS) and microblogging sites, which helps understand rumors in perspective. A value-oriented approach should restore the human agency back to the individuals, not as much by helping them seize 'the truth' behind rumors and espousing a universal mediation, but by constantly questioning the socio political context that determines the influence and reach of actors in the rumor process.

Individual

The rumor monger or a rumor rebutter can be situated anywhere along the rumor chain, starting from the position of an influential leader to a common man. Influential members of a group have a greater role to play, both in the initiation of a rumor and in rumor rebuttals. However, in the contemporary world, internet has provided a different arrangement of actors in the rumor chain, such that the structural hierarchical flow of information is replaced by a multiplicity of rhizome nodes. Rumor can originate from any node anywhere in the network, but can later face with a rebuttal from another node at the same level. An example of a rumor on Twitter will make this idea clearer. In 2015, when Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's Minister Mentor and one of the most respected leaders, was hospitalized, a doctored image faking a press release from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) started circulating. It 'officially announced' the demise of the leader. PMO debunked the rumor within minutes. State-

supported media and responsible netizens also joined in to spread correct information. They used the same platform – Twitter – and tweeted in succession to rumor mongers to clarify the situation. The rumor was put to rest in a few hours. This was possible as a result of collective action, supported by a platform like Twitter (Chua et al., 2016). Yet, the contribution of individual users in spreading the correct information was widely acknowledged.

In social media, there are users who have greater reach and popularity vis-à-vis the rest. Informed by studies on epidemics, rumor research has identified influential spreaders based on their relative positions in the network. User influence is defined as the scale of reach of a message posted by the user. A general index of user influence is 'number of followers and friends'. It is also observed that audience are swayed more by the opinion of peers and friends than by influential members on social media.

Motivation, technology prowess and sense of responsibility of social media users ultimately determine whether a rumor is spread or rebutted along its course. For example, evidence suggests that people tend to correct rumor from a sense of obligation, and under the pressure of social norms. Those who are sensitive to the adverse consequences of rumors are drawn towards correcting them (Lewandowsky et al. 2012; Steg & de Groot 2010; Zhao et al. 2016). Thus, individuals, along with institutions like government agencies and media, can act as whistle blowers and rumor rebutters when misinformation is spread, offline and online[iv].

Collectives who check against the divisive messages of influential leaders supplement the intervention of individual rumor rebutters. Bhavnani et al. (2009) note that the value systems of group leaders who start a violence-generating rumor and that of the group members can differ. In such cases, members can constrain leaders' influence. If the group members do not already have extreme ideas, the leader's vituperative messages will

fail to strike a chord with them. Collective wisdom wins over the leader's divisive plan. However, the same idea of 'collective' can serve a very different function on other occasions, for example, when the collective itself is led by 'violence-generating' ideology. When mobs are triggered by passion, there is hardly any respect for truth and evidence to support or refute a rumor:

> "*As the likelihood of collective action increases, the veracity of a rumor (credibility) is no longer relevant; disbelief in the rumor can be effectively suspended while the political, symbolic, and ritualistic value of participation with the group assumes greater salience*" (Bhavnani, 2009, p. 883).

In short, individual's motivation, sense of responsibility, access to credible information, level of influence in a group, and impressionability are factors decisive to the spread of correct or incorrect information. Without disregarding the achievements of science in these areas, a few criticisms can be raised about this approach in general. Firstly, individuals and institutions are evaluated based on their roles either to participate or to stop the rumor. In this conceptualization, they are relevant only to the extent that they can situate themselves on one of the two sides of the division between the right and wrong information. This closure, in fact, disempowers the individuals, giving them only limited choice in their participation in the rumor process. Secondly, by exploring the division between right and wrong information as an object of analysis, the studies have actually deepened it. While it may be commonsensical to argue that truth will ultimately win over falsity in due course, the whole schema of true-false divide is deeply connected with the way knowledge is defined in any historical epoch (Foucault, 1981). It also draws substantially from, but also contributes to the exclusionary practices in the society[v]. Avoiding type I and II errors[vi] may be a matter of professional integrity for the rumor scientist, and a gesture of social responsibility for the rumor rebutter. But the system that sustains this truth-false divide, favoring the power structures in a society to the advantage of a limited few needs to be criticized. In short, I

argue, along with scholars who have attempted to go beyond the subject-centric conceptualization of rumor, that it would be more meaningful if rumors are understood as being determined by the socio political structures and historical contexts.

Context

While most rumor studies mention the context as an external condition, only a limited number of studies explore it from the perspective of power relations as constitutive of the rumor itself. Here, I introduce four studies that have examined the context disregarding any individual attempt in fact finding.

Wilson (2012) explains the context of rumors that spread among Malawians. They relate to men who migrate temporarily to South Africa for work. These men are assumed to be in possession of some kind of charms that would help them travel long distance back to their hometown every night to be with their wives. Wilson (2012) explains the context in which these rumors gain currency: they are intricately linked with earlier instances wherein the husbands cared less for their families after moving to the new country for work. More than their truth value, rumors served the function of moralizing and warning the men that debauchery can lead to negative consequences, and even death.

The second study is about the episode of mass tension and anxiety in Sri Lanka over attacks on women by a mystery male predator known as the "grease devil" (Venugopal, 2015). It is notable that anxiety over this scourge was particularly acute in the central and war-torn north-eastern provinces. Venugopal (2015) makes a layered investigation starting from the simplistic question of the "truth" of the rumor on grease devil, to the instrumentalities various actors attach to the incidents, to considering the figure of the grease devil as a metaphor. In doing so, he provides a glimpse at the possible outcomes of the rumor in the given context: "unhealed trauma relived, structural violence enacted, and hegemony undone" (p. 616).

The third study that emphasizes context is by Haas and Levasseur (2013), exploring the lack of transmission of collective memory of floods among inhabitants in a riparian town in France. When the town was reconstructed following devastation it witnessed in World War II, the authorities decided to wipe out memories of floods the town had regularly witnessed for centuries. Thus, the generation that inhabited the town after its reconstruction lost link with its past. However, when a flood disaster struck it in the present, the town chose to activate a convenient explanation that it has been victimized. A rumor known to it was repeated as an explanation: that the floods were caused by deliberate channeling of water to this town, which saved the affluent regions in the capital city many miles away. The rumors persuaded the inhabitants of the town to believe that they were made scapegoats in the process. Haas and Levasseur (2013) observe that "rumour emerges as the symbol or rather the symptom of an event [the history of the town replete with flood disasters] that is not mentioned, not spoken about, perhaps even buried" (p. 72).

The fourth study is on rumor control centers set up throughout the US in the 1960s, when the Cold War tensions interlaced with the perceived domestic threats of unrest and rioting by colored people (Young et al., 2014). These centers worked as anticipatory systems that would warn the state of potential violence based on information collected from isolated 'ghettoes'. By early 1970s, 77% of the urban population in US had access to a rumor control center. Newspaper columns were used to publicize and debunk rumors; local telephonic networks were established to connect citizens with the centers, to inform the latter about rumors in the neighborhood. Young et al. (2014) argue that the idea of 'racial state' needs to be understood in the context of these rumor centers, which in most cases reproduced racialized geographies within the city:

> *"Rumor could be an antonym for 'fact', something that had to be dispelled in order to allow greater racial integration. But it could also be a source of reliable information for state agencies on the activities of black activists."* (p. 60).

In sum, to explore the context of the rumor in terms of power relations, exclusionary practices and socio political structures is to unsettle the well-entrenched notions of right and wrong in society. This conceptualization allows individuals to interact with the context of rumor without being burdened by objectivity, but emphasizing on the interpretive nature of reality. The text of rumor becomes a venue of power negotiation, as in Venugopal (2015), or a representation of absent memory, as in Haas and Levasseur (2013). A criticism against social hierarchies and power relations in a rumor from the point of view of interpretation, I argue, is more meaningful than refutation of a rumor at the level of proposition. Unfortunately, empirical science has focused on rumor messages mostly at the propositional level.

Message

Message is another aspect of rumor that has received wide attention. Studies draw from literature on persuasion, and identify source credibility, objectivity and clarity as important factors influencing the rumor process. In fact, rumor messages often gain traction when audience are duped to believe in their attribution to fake sources, which are passed off as authentic. On social media, this is achieved by doctored images, hyperlinks to spurious websites or other deceiving techniques. It then depends on the audience's skill and experience to differentiate between messages that make truthful attribution to credible sources. In their study of Twitter tweets in the aftermath of three events – (i) a mass shooting in US, (ii) a vehicle recall by an automobile company, and, (iii) the 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai – Oh et al. (2013) observed that source ambiguity and personal involvement of the tweeters in the incidents are positively linked to a rumor message. In the case of shooting and terrorist attack, anxiety of the users added fuel to the proliferation of unverified information.

Although it is commonsensical that a rumor message can be refuted by providing correct information with supporting evidence, scholars observe that it may not be so in all cases. Berinsky (2016) observe, based on the psychology on 'fluency', that rumors acquire their power through familiarity. Rumor corrections in fact help audience to remember the rumor message as the former reduce the strain on information processing. Thus, direct refutation actually backfires and helps audience remember the rumor with better fluency. By way of extension, it may be recalled how propagandists repeat false messages with the objective of engraving them in audience's mind, despite they being patently false. Berinsky (2016) observes that such deeply ingrained messages can hardly be debunked by any correction, no matter what the strength of the correction is.

Similar to the individual-centered studies, message-centered studies too follow a clear demarcation between right and wrong information at the propositional level. Message characteristics are then mapped back to the human mind, and paradoxes are identified, as the example by Berinsky (2016) suggests. An overview of the methods used to operationalize and code rumor messages will help substantiate the point. In the study by Oh et al. (2013), the rumor messages, in addition to all independent variables, were considered dichotomous. They were coded as 0s and 1s, representing a simplistic, direct relationship between truth or falsity[vii]. In addition, the messages were treated equally for all the three contexts studied (ranging from product recall to terrorist strike). The context is, thus, considered only as an external condition, which is accorded only secondary importance, or is even considered irrelevant in a discussion on the universality of propositions. Context has meaning only to the extent that it helps the universal human rationality to appear in propositions. These "unobtrusively collected tweet texts" (Oh et al., 2013, p. 415) are then analyzed for their ability to represent the facts. One observes that an exclusive attention on messages misses out the constitutive role of the context and divides individuals based on an ascribed

rationality. With the emergence of SNS and microblogging sites, a complex politics of the medium has also entered this mix.

The medium

In the early phase of rumor studies, offline spaces received greater attention. With the advent of SNS and microblogging sites, rumor propagation is achieved with increased ease, reach and speed. This is further fueled by affordable mobile devices and a variety of data tariffs that afford data connectivity to large sections in the society. The affordances of these platforms are varied, such that fake videos, messages and images abound. Indeed, there is low distortion of rumors in social media compared to rumors in a natural offline setting. But, equally disturbing is the fact that messages are encrypted in advanced platforms like WhatsApp such that there is no custom made solution to track and kill rumors.

Asynchronous nature of social media messages means that a user who follows the news after the rumor died down could easily access both the rumor and the rebuttal tweets on the same platform. Users are swayed by these 'still active' tweets depending on their ideology and orientation. Features widely observed among offline rumors like decreasing rates of diffusion and levelling of messages with increasing physical and social distance have less relevance on social media.

Considering the wide impact of rumors on SNS and microblogging sites, the immediate reaction of authorities is to ban internet services, pull up intermediaries and ensure accountability of service providers. While authoritarian states filter and ban messages arbitrarily[viii], opinion is divided in democratic states on how much of free speech is to be allowed on online platforms. The politics of the new media thus becomes a key part of this debate. Firstly, the hype of rumors can be challenged based on inequitable distribution of resources. Despite being thriving mobile markets, many developing regions still experience a digital divide in terms of the obstacles faced by majority of its population to gain from use of

Information Communication Technologies. Those who are using SNS or microblogging sites to spread rumor or rumor corrections are still on the privileged side of the divide. In this conceptualization, those who are left out of this platform should be given more attention than those who misuse it or are addicted to it.

A second way of studying it is based on the concept of 'technopolitics', which is a comprehensive framework to delineate the power negotiations and political agendas involved in the introduction of new technologies.

> "*Studying technopolitics means taking into consideration not only how technology may become an instrument of politics, but also how political ambitions both interact with technological opportunities and constraints and evolve as a result of this interaction*" (Gagliardone, 2014, p. 7).

Highlighting the technopolitics behind ICT systems introduced by the government to deliver public service goods in Ethiopia, Gagliardone (2014) observed that "the government managed to adapt technologies to respond to the urgency and ambition of its own political agenda" (p. 15). Similarly, in Indonesia, President Suharto's effort to electrify the villages was supported by the rhetoric that the government wanted to spread the benefits of development, although the political agenda behind it was to "distribute electricity as a form of government largesse for which the people should be grateful" (Mohsin, 2014, p. 68). In the name of bureaucratic efficiency the apartheid state in South Africa used computers to "manage its race-based identity registration – the hated passbooks and their related fingerprint databases" (Edwards & Hecht, 2010, p. 620).

Viewed from this perspective, the rumors that help advance majority nationalistic agenda in many a country, may be viewed as part of a concerted and maligned effort to perpetrate violence against the 'Other'[ix]. Internet forums, supplemented by grapevine in offline spaces, are thus only the tools to achieve this end. Support for free speech becomes farcical in such cases, when the ultimate aim is to discriminate against minority communities

and to unleash violence against them. Thus rather than understanding the rumor process in its objectivity, only a value-based approach can understand the perpetrators' political intentions in such situations.

To summarize, there are efforts to create a science out of the rumor phenomenon, mostly focusing on the individual, the context and the message. In the case of studies that focused on individuals/institutions and messages, simplistic questions like 'who is capable of knowing the truth' or 'how can truth be rescued from the various obstacles that smother it in rumor' take precedence. This section has shown that rumor has a greater role to play if it is not put to test at the altar of belief and truth. Rumor reflects the power relations between various actors in a society (Huang, 2015). Its functions can range from being a medium for moralizing and discriminating to serving as a platform for state-sponsored repressive measures. Empirical studies reveal the correlation between individual, context and message, but only rarely engage with the meaning-making effort at each of these levels. To assume a value-oriented position means to negate the objectivity of the science of rumor and highlight the power relations and hegemonic social structures that determine the contours of rumors, as done by the studies of Haas and Levasseur (2013), Venugopal (2015), Wilson (2012) and Young et al. (2014). With such an understanding, a different experience and knowledge of rumor is attained, which is quite dissimilar to the well-entrenched propositional level analysis espoused by mainstream empirical studies.

Conclusion

Natural calamities and wars generate dread rumors, or rumors that apprehend a dreadful outcome in future. Terrorist attacks and mass shootings, similarly, evoke panic reactions from audience. Misinformation is circulated on such occasions. When the situation is tensed, and when official communication is scarce, misinformation is passed off as credible. In fact, modern social life presents enough grist for the rumor mill to run in fields

ranging from health, religion to politics. This article has treaded a thin line by criticizing the scientific methods that accord greater importance to truthful information. As such, it provides a glimpse at the present state of 'episteme' in a wide variety of disciplines that rumor studies draw from, ranging from psychology, sociology to Information Science. A division between true and false information widely characterizes mainstream rumor studies, as became evident in the review of studies focusing on individuals and rumor messages. On the other hand, there are efforts to highlight the socio political context that determine the role of rumor in societies, disregarding questions like 'who is capable of knowing and spreading the truth'. Such studies need to serve as models in our understanding of this phenomenon of far-reaching consequences.

Theoretically, the article has borrowed from Foucault; questions raised in relation to madness and sexuality find resonance in the context of rumor too: for instance, "if madmen have existed in society for centuries without being singled out, how does a science of madness eventually wielded its power on modern society by creating a division between reason and madness?" and "how has a scientific knowledge on human body, supported by systems like psychiatry and medicine, succeeded in classifying, labeling and indeed curing sexual aberrations"? If a rumoring subject is the reverse of a knowing subject, the discourse of truth and falsity that is very much alive in rumor studies can similarly been questioned.

Despite this criticism, there seems to be greater consensus among scholars that rumor indeed is an aberrant communication. This notion is rooted in the flagrant nature of rumors – as noted by Allport & Postman (1947), "no riot ever occurs without rumors to incite, accompany and intensify the violence" (p. 193). It is then a matter of political correctness whether one supports violence-generating rumor or condemn and refute it. However, on a different scale, from the perspective of epistemology, one finds that these scholars have always kept correction at the horizon, which they think would bring more transparency to

human interactions offline and online and help individuals become more rational actors. This article has criticized these efforts based on the idea that just as knowledge, rumor too is not "subjected to the subject".

There are also aspects of rumor that challenge human values at a more direct level: For instance, the rumor that children are kidnapped for organs and rituals is rampant in many a society. A common reaction is to vilify a group that is considered to be actively engaging in kidnapping, or to target an outsider who is then accused with the trafficking. In such cases, a direct ethical question is whether one should participate in the collective action against the outsider with or without believing the rumor, or whether one should verify the truth behind the rumor before venturing into action? Rather than relying on a universal category of 'ethics', only a locally co-constructed notion of ethics can help address problems of this sort.

A science of rumor is aimed at objectifying it and then creating a knowledge out of it. To assess rumors on the basis of truth and falsity is to disregard their role in human life. On the other hand, to efface the dilemma of the rumoring subject (Chomsky & Foucault, 2006) is to understand the power relations involved in the generation and spread of rumor. In making this turn, I have attempted to consider rumor as an instance of positive assertion and fearless speech (Foucault, 2001). A new kind of value position is needed to assess the depth and scope of such an assertion.

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[i] This is also true in the case of anti-government rumors in authoritarian states. See Huang (2015).

ii A comparison to Foucault's reference to *parrhesia* or fearless speech is in order. Foucault examines the characteristics of *parrhesiastes*, or the one who speaks the truth, and observes that in Greek *parrhesia*, the coincidence of belief with truth is not a mental evidential experience. On the other hand, the very fact that the *parrhesiastes* has certain moral qualities suffices as an evidence that what he speaks is the truth: "For the Greeks…the coincidence between belief and truth does not take place in a (mental) experience, but in a *verbal activity*, namely *parrhesia*. It appears that *parrhesia*, in this Greek sense, can no longer occur in our modern epistemological framework" (p. 14). Thus, in the modern framework, most rumor studies are oriented towards demarcating facts from rumors, which always bear a negative connotation. Based on this demarcation, strategies are adopted to curb the spread of rumors.

iii Drawing again from Foucault, this resonates with his thesis of 'effacing the dilemma of the knowing subject', which came up in the interview with Chomsky (Chomsky & Foucault, 2006). Foucault criticizes the way history of science attributes primacy to the individual genius who makes original discoveries. Based on this notion, collective order, "myths" and "tradition" are considered a hindrance to the emergence of truth in history. Knowledge, for Foucault, is a non-individual formation, which is not "subjected to the subject". I extend this argument to the study of rumor; if knowledge is the obverse, then rumor is the reverse. In both cases, there is a need to efface the dilemma of the knowing/unknowing subject.

iv See a recent news report on "myth busters" in the internet space: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-40657074
Although this paper began by identifying the incompatibility between ancient epistemological framework based on truth as a verbal activity and modern framework based on mental experiential evidence, it is to be noted that free speech superimposed on truth had a specific function in the Greek society. The *parrhesiastes'* main objective was to criticize someone in authority, or to confess his wrong doings putting his own life in danger. This function of free speech is not seen in the case of 'myth busters,' who engage mostly with day-to-day prank rumors at a mundane level.

v To quote from Foucault (1981), "when viewed from the level of a proposition, on the inside of a discourse, the division between true and false is neither arbitrary nor modifiable nor institutional nor violent. But when we view things on a different scale, when we ask the question of what this will to truth has been and constantly is, across our discourses, this will to truth which has crossed so many centuries of our history; what is, in its general form, the type of division which governs our will to know … then what we see taking shape is perhaps something like a system of exclusion, a historical, modifiable, and institutionally constraining system" (p. 54).

vi A type I error is the incorrect rejection of a true null hypothesis (a "false positive"), a type II error is incorrectly retaining a false null hypothesis (a "false negative").

vii To make a digression to a personal experience as a researcher, this author too had to put up with the institutional compulsion to approach rumor from a positivist stand point, represented by 0s and 1s, while working in a related project in the recent past. All other attempts to engage with rumors were dismissed as "fuzzy discourse".

viii For a recent news report on filtering of social media messages in China, see http://www.bbc.com/news/business-40651951

ix A recent example from India will be the rumors on members of minority communities carrying/storing/consuming a particular kind of meat, or those related to the desecration of religious worshiping places.