

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI
YOUTH

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YOUTH

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THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

Overview

Introduction

The technological revolution and the invention of the Internet in the 1980s have changed how we communicate. Making, accessing, and transforming information a much more straightforward task (Forester, 1987). In recent years, social media platforms have become an integral part of people's lives, providing an easy and efficient way to connect with others, share information, and receive news updates. This has led to a shift in the way people access information, particularly when it comes to politics. Social media platforms have become a primary source of political news and information for many individuals, especially among the youth. As such, social media has the potential to significantly impact political knowledge and participation. The role of social media has grown over time to the point where it has become a tool for political learning and participation among the youth (Ohme et al., 2020). That growing access to political discussions, as some scholars contend, may be linked to the series of revolutions erupted across the Arab world in 2011. According to Howard and Hussain (2013), social media has dramatically changed the speed and scale of mobilization, making it easier for people to coordinate and communicate with each other. Researchers have stressed the important role of social media in enabling citizens to share their opinions and demands with a broader audience, both domestically and internationally (Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Howard et al., 2011). The eruption of the Arab Spring with the Tunisian demonstration on December 18, 2010, brought hope of change to the Arab World and opened the possibility of having a democratic change within the region (Gerbaudo, 2012; Tufekci, 2017). The success of the Tunisian Revolution in overthrowing the regime triggered demonstrations across other Arab countries, such as Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Bahrain. According to a report published by Reuters (2012), in Egypt, the

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

number of internet users significantly increased after the revolution in January 2011. The report from Reuters shows that the number of Internet users in Egypt before January 25 was 21 million. Moreover, during the revolution, they reached 23 million, the report stated that the number of Facebook users before January 25 was 4 million people, and it rose by (23%) after the revolution to 5 million, as for Twitter, the number of users before the revolution was at 26 thousand users and increased to 44 thousand (Reuters, 2011).

The debate between scholars on whether the October revolution in Iraq is connected to the Arab Spring or not continued. Some argue that the protests in Iraq were a continuation of the Arab Spring movements that began in 2011 (Kubba & Leenders, 2020), while others deny any connection. However, there are similarities between the movements, such as the use of social media as a tool for mobilization and the demand for political and economic reforms. Other scholars highlighted that the internet attracted activists who found it a safe space to express their political opinions without fear of the state's control (Nye, 2004). In October 2019, and after months of calls to mobilize youth on Facebook and Twitter, protest broke out in Iraq. Despite the state repression and an internet shutdown, the protest snowballed to move from a spark in Baghdad to a revolution across the country, and activists circulated the calls across social media platforms to join the protest. Despite differences in the scale of these various uprisings across Iraqi cities, many reporters and activists emphasized the influence social media played in organizing, generating, and bypassing state repression. According to Shirky (2011), social media acts as a public sphere and a communicative tool, and can foster the spread of ideas and freedom and motivate people to protest. Shirky (2011) further emphasized how social media provides tools to organize, plan, and sustain revolutions, pass countries' borders, disseminate news at the international level, and reinforce social and political change.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

In many countries, including Iraq, social media have become important tools for individuals to access and share information, participate in public debate, and mobilize for political action (Kraidy, 2016; Oates & O'Hara, 2019). However, while previous studies have explored the relationship between social media use and political behaviors, very few have focused specifically on the case of Iraqi youth (see Kraidy, 2016). This is significant because Iraqi youth, who make up a large proportion of the population, have played a critical role in shaping the country's political landscape in recent years (Matar & Moussa, 2020). By exploring the relationship between social media use and political knowledge and participation among Iraqi youth, this thesis seeks to contribute to our understanding of the factors that shape political behavior in the context of a country that has experienced significant political and social changes. Ultimately, this thesis can inform policymakers and political actors on how to better engage with Iraqi youth and promote their participation in the political process.

Overview of Thesis

This thesis uses the uses and gratifications theory (U&G) to understand the relationship between social media use and political knowledge and participation among Iraqi youth during the October revolution in 2019. This study investigates the role of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter) in forming political awareness and the relationship between social media use and political knowledge and participation among Iraqi youth. The study focused on the importance of youth participation in discussing political issues and how social media helped Iraqi youth to build political knowledge and address matters of concern. Additionally, there is a lack of research conducted that focuses on the role social media in influencing Iraqi youth and forming their political knowledge, as an Iraqi Arab. The author aims to fill research gaps by making observations and recommendations that could help future activists.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

Based on a review of existing studies, very few researchers have studied Iraqi youth and their use of social media in general and the relationship between social media and political knowledge in particular. The uprising in Iraq and the crackdown of the government on the protest showed how Iraq, a country that was presented after 2003 to the international community as a “democratic” state, is dominated by an authoritarian regime. Protesters demanded government policies change and policy reforms, but soon people across the region the demands shifted to regime change and asked for new leadership and the resignation of their current governments. This thesis will focus its investigation on two social networking platforms, Facebook and Twitter, and their role in the Iraqi protests; these platforms are used in Iraq for political discourse and during the revolution.

Facebook and Twitter

The Facebook platform was launched in 2004 and focused on university students at Harvard University. Later, the site expanded to other universities, and the platform remained private until 2005 when Facebook opened its doors to everyone. Facebook allows users to have their profiles publicly available to all other users. Also, Facebook offeres a feature for its users that other websites lack, which is the opportunity to build and personalize their accounts (Mourtada and Salem, 2011). According to the Dubai School of Government (2011), Facebook's total number of users in the Arab region was 21 million users as of December 2011. The Gulf region countries had the highest penetration rate for Facebook as 45% of their population uses Facebook. On the other side of the Arab region, Egypt comes second in the number of Facebook users, with 5 million users. When looking at Iraq, the statistics show that there are more Facebook users than internet users, which means people there often use their cell phones to access Facebook (Mourtada & Salem, 2011). Looking at these statistics, we can conclude that

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

the freedom of internet use does not affect Facebook penetration in Arab countries, as countries with high-level censorships, like the Gulf countries, have high Facebook penetration.

According to (Radcliffe, 2020) research, 72% of Twitter users in Saudi Arabia and UAE also 62% of Twitter users in Egypt see the platform as one of their main sources for online video content. Also, there are countries in the Arab region that are considered significant markets for Twitter, such as Saudi Arabia, with over 10 million users active on Twitter (Radcliffe, 2020)

Twitter revolutionized the way information is shared across the Arab region. In their research, Freelon (2014) collected and analyzed a database of 6 million tweets from countries that witnessed political unrest during the Arab Spring.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

Literature Review

Social media and politics

Social media political participation

Social media has become an important tool for political participation, both online and offline. Research has shown that social media use can increase political participation, including voting, attending political events, and engaging in political discussions (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Putnam, 2000). Social media can facilitate political participation by providing individuals with opportunities to connect with like-minded individuals, discuss political issues, and organize political events and actions (Shirky, 2011). Additionally, social media can provide a platform for political candidates and organizations to communicate with their supporters and disseminate information about their campaigns (Gibson & McAllister, 2014).

The claim that social media platforms provide users with an open and free space is argued by scholars as to whether social media is an open public space or not. Dahlgren (2000) notes that social media lacks openness and cannot be considered a fully open public sphere. Further, he states that the state will likely manipulate social media in countries with authoritarian regimes and can track activists. Shirky (2011) draws attention to the role social media platforms play in forming offline activism and providing a space to discuss politics. Shirky further notes that the political discussions between users on social media can have a persuasive effect on users. In addition, Shirky sheds light on how social media help reduce the cost of coordination between different groups and facilitate communication between members. On the other hand, there is a consensus among many scholars that social media foster offline activism by providing a space for online activism and taking online activism to the streets (Harlow, 2012; Shirky, 2011).

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

Further, Shirky notes that social media helps demonstrators to communicate their messages to the world away from regime censorship.

Political knowledge and social media

Social media has emerged as a new source of political information and has been found to be associated with political knowledge. Research has indicated that social media use can lead to an increase in political knowledge, particularly among younger individuals who depend on social media for news and information (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Valentino, Hutchings, & Banks, 2002).

Kenski and Stroud (2006) found that exposure to political news on social media increased political knowledge among college students. Similarly, a study by Cotten, Williams, and Anderson (2014) demonstrated a positive relationship between social media use and political knowledge among older adults. However, it is essential to note that not all social media use leads to increased political knowledge, as the type of content and sources individuals follow on social media can vary significantly and impact the information they receive (Bimber, 2014). In addition to promoting political knowledge, social media also provides a safe environment for political discussion and supports protests. Ghonim (2012) stated that social media can trigger protests that are difficult to stop, citing the example of the Mubarak regime's shutdown of the internet. Shirky (2011) noted the critical role of social media platforms in many revolutions worldwide. Another scholar, Bennett (2017), highlighted that social media sustains protests, allowing them to expand and spread across the network. While scholars highlight the positive effects of social media on political knowledge and protest, others argued that these platforms can also be used to spread misinformation (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2012).

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

Marshall (2011) opposed the opinion that the Tunisian revolution was a “Twitter revolution”. The author stated that the direct demonstrations led to the success of the movement. Furthermore, the author noted that social media has become an essential tool not only for activism but also for governments to manipulate the information circulating through it (Marshall, 2011). Nevertheless, Marshall pointed out the important role social media played in organizing the demonstrations and mobilizing the protests, specifically Twitter and Facebook (Marshall, 2011). Marshall viewed social media as a medium that contributed to the success of revolutions and opposed the idea that social media can create a revolution. Therefore, Marshall (2011) argued that these uprisings emerged from people’s awareness of the oppression they faced from their governments and the dictators running these states.

According to Shirky (2011), the author noted that social media promotes democracy and changes the public’s views by exposing users to other opinions discussed by other users, such as friends and relatives. Schleffer (2021) notes that the role of social media in coordinating and facilitating logistics of the movements makes dictators face a problematic situation due to the destabilization of the state. Furthermore, the author stated that the outcome of destabilization that is enabled by social media might lead to political change (Schleffer, 2021). Another scholar refers to the “mass” political engagement that social media provides. Owen notes that the easy access social media offers to the public enables them to monitor politics (Owen, 2019). Therefore, Owen states that politicians utilize social media to communicate with the population due to the dominant role of social media as a news source for the people (Owen, 2019). Ibrahim (2021) draws attention to how social media managed to mobilize young Iraqis and increase their knowledge of the political situation in the country. Furthermore, Ibrahim stated that social media

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

generates social changes, and youth use social media to plan, communicate, and organize demonstrations.

Therefore, these views of the scholars support the idea that social media plays a role in forming political knowledge. Furthermore, this supports the research objective of the existing relationship between social media and forming political knowledge.

Social media and Arabs protest. The media coverage mainly focuses on covering the protest countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria, while Iraq gets little attention and media coverage. Al-Rawi (2014) suggested that the Iraqi spring was underreported due to the ongoing unrest in the country, which led to less focus on the protest occurred in Iraq during the Arab spring. Many scholars acknowledge the role social media played during that period (Ghannam, 2011; Castells, 2012). According to Alhindi et al. (2012), the extensive amount of tweets helped to mobilize protesters: an average of 40-45 tweets were posted per minute from Egypt and 30-35 tweets per minute from Syria and Libya. Fuchs (2013), however, questioned this claim and argued that the number of tweets does not necessarily mean those people are on the street protesting. Instead, Fuchs suggested tweets might belong to users from outside the county or simply be retweets, which would raise awareness but not necessarily spark a movement. Other scholars note the critical role Facebook and Twitter played as communication tools during the revolution, also in disseminating information (Ghannam, 2011; Lynch, 2015).

Alahmed (2014) argues that social media was important to the revolution's success. The writer further stresses the vital role of social media for traditional media were able to report up-to-date information on the development. Brym et al. (2014) conducted empirical research to

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

examine the role of social media during the protest, and they concluded that social media contributed as an organizational and communicational tool.

To further build our theoretical framework, this study will explore the uses and gratification (U&G) theory to complement our public sphere theory to investigate social media use to generate political knowledge.

The uses and gratification theory is a communication theory that focuses on the motivations behind individuals' media use. According to this theory, individuals actively seek out media to fulfill specific needs or gratifications, such as entertainment, information, social interaction, or personal identity (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). This theory emphasizes that media consumption is an active process and that individuals are selective in their media choices based on their individual needs and preferences. Uses and gratification theory has evolved over time and has been applied to different types of media, including traditional media and new media such as social media. However, the basic premise of the theory remains the same, emphasizing the active role of the audience in media consumption and the importance of understanding individual motivations for media use (Ruggiero, 2000).

To understand the relationship between social media and political knowledge, we should ask what motivates youth to use social media in their political and social movements. Severin & Tankard (2001) noted that U&G is a framework to answer how people use social media to fulfill their needs. Also, it sought to determine why users chose a particular form of media over another. Katz et al. (1974) defined U&G as an attempt to understand how an individual utilizes a specific type of communication among the available ones in their surroundings. Katz et al. (1974) further set out five assumptions that the use and gratifications contain, the (a) audience is

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

active, (b) media use is to fulfill members' gratification, (c) media constitute a wide range of needs, (d) people have enough self-awareness to know and express their reasons for using the media, and (e) their choice depends on geographical variables. From the assumptions outlined above, it is evident that the theory of media gratification can be used to examine social media use by youth to explore what gratifications sought by users.

According to the research on internet diffusion in the Arab world, Loch et al. (2003) proved that Arabs have the will to embrace social networks to satisfy their current needs. Studies have explored the relationship between U&G and social media use during the Arab Spring. For example, Deen Freelon collected and analyzed a database of 6 million tweets from countries that witnessed political unrest during the Arab Spring, finding that social media was used for various U&G motives, including information seeking and social interaction (Freelon, 2014). Similarly, a study by Al-Abdullah (2021) on social media use and political participation in Iraq found that the need to be informed gratification was positively associated with political participation, both online and offline.

In addition, a study by Chadwick and Howard (2009) explored the use of social media during the 2009 Iranian presidential election and found that social media was used to facilitate political participation and communication, as well as to fulfill U&G motives such as information seeking and social interaction. Similarly, a study by Al-Jaber and Mohammad (2014) found that social media use during the Arab Spring in Saudi Arabia was associated with U&G motives such as information seeking, social interaction, and personal identity.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

Arabs' gratifications for using social media

Social media satisfies the needs of Arab youth by providing them with means to express their opinions freely, seek self-presentation and socialize with each other (Al-Jabri, 2015; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Al-Jabri (2015) researched the relationship between social media usage and social/personal factors, and identified four factors: enjoyment, freedom of speech, self-presentation, and social interactions. The content analysis findings vividly show that the freedom of speech and social interaction played an important role in influencing public usage (Al-Jabri, 2015). According to Ghannam (2011), social media offers Arabs a space where they can have the freedom of expression to discuss various political and social topics away from government censorship or control. Ghannam (2011) summarized the potential advantages of social media for revolutions with the following:

Indeed, from Morocco to Bahrain, the Arab world has witnessed the rise of an independent vibrant social media and steadily increasing citizen engagement on the Internet that is expected to attract 100 million Arab users by 2015. These social networks inform, mobilize, entertain, create communities, increase transparency, and seek to hold governments accountable. (p.4)

Freedom of expression gratification. According to Buisier (2011), people across the Arab region shared grievances and protested against human rights violations, including freedom of expression. Therefore, they found social media the medium to express their political views freely (Buisier, 2011). Badr (2015) found that social media gratify youth's need to access information that's not censored by the government, unlike traditional mass media that is heavily controlled by the regime. On the one hand, Badr (2015) suggests that people relied on traditional

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

communication only when the regime shut down the Internet in Egypt and agrees that social media provides all users free access and equality.

H1a: The gratification of freedom of expression will be positively related to the level of political knowledge among Iraqi youth.

H1b: The gratification of freedom of expression will be positively related to the level of political participation among Iraqi youth.

Social interaction gratification. Social media are used to communicate through computer-mediated technology to produce, share content, and connect with others (Lewis, 2010). Further, Lewis (2010) noted that social media facilitate the processing of community knowledge and provide people with the tools needed to have conversations through platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Arabs used Facebook extensively during the uprisings to socialize and discuss various topics of concern. Howard (2011) described tweets during the Arab Spring as a dialogue:

Around the region, people increasingly Tweeted about events that were occurring in their neighborhood. Stories of success and difficulty spread widely and created a kind of “freedom meme.” The same meme traveled across the region through Facebook and YouTube, as inspiring images were captured by mobile phone and transmitted. (p. 13)

Howard (2011) analyzed 3 million tweets and Facebook messages, which highlighted the role of Facebook and Twitter as they formed political debates, spread democracy across borders, and facilitated social interaction.

H2a: The gratification of social interaction will be positively related to the level of political knowledge among Iraqi youth.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

H2b: The gratification of social interaction will be positively related to the level of political participation among Iraqi youth.

Community and belonging gratification. This gratification refers to a motivation for social media use that centers on the desire of users to connect and belong to a particular group or community. This gratification is linked to establishing and maintaining relationships with people who share similar interests, reinforcing a sense of shared identity, and obtaining social support (Lee et al., 2014). Scholars have highlighted that community and belonging gratification is positively related to political participation and engagement (Kim & Delli Carpini, 2010; Margetts et al., 2016).

In their study of political participation in South Korea, Kim and Delli Carpini (2010) observed a positive relationship between community and belonging gratification and political participation, both online and offline. Similarly, Margetts et al. (2016) reported a positive association between social media use for community and belonging gratification and political participation in the United Kingdom.

H3a: The community and belonging gratification will be significantly and positively related to the level of political knowledge among Iraqi youth.

H3b: The community and belonging gratification will be significantly and positively related to the level of political participation among Iraqi youth.

The need to be informed gratification. The Middle East has experienced tremendous growth in the use of social media in the past years, and social news remains a popular topic that attracts Arab youth (Radcliffe, 2018). Radcliffe notes that the growth is reflected in increased social media users, which grew from 35% in 2011 to 56% by March 2017. According to Radcliffe, since 2012, the number of Facebook users has increased by 264%; a recent survey

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

shows that Arab youth rely on Facebook as a source of news, where 35% of the respondents use the platform to check daily news (Radcliffe, 2018). These numbers reflect the shift in how Arab youth receive information from traditional mass media to social media. The fact that Facebook is becoming a news source for youth supports the claim of the links between social media use and political knowledge and leads to change.

Al-Abdullah (2021) conducted a study on the relationship between social media use and political participation in Iraq and found that the "need to be informed" gratification had a significant positive association with political participation, both online and offline. This suggests that Iraqi individuals who use social media to obtain news and information are more likely to participate in political activities.

This result aligns with previous research that has established a positive relationship between the need to be informed gratification and political participation (Chadwick & Howard, 2009; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). Specifically, social media's capacity to offer individuals a wide range of sources of information has been identified as a critical factor in promoting political engagement (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2012; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012).

H4a: The need to be informed gratification will be significantly and positively related to the level of political knowledge among Iraqi youth.

H4b: The need to be informed gratification will be significantly and positively related to the level of political participation among Iraqi youth.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

Methodology

In this study, an online survey was used to collect data to answer the research questions and hypotheses. The survey was hosted on Qualtrics, an online survey platform, and Facebook was used to distribute the survey through various Facebook groups, such as October Revolution, Iraqi Uprising and Iraqi Movement. In addition, the respondents were asked to share the survey's link further with their friends or family. The survey consisted of questions related to the purpose of using social media, political knowledge, online and offline political participation, and gratifications sought by Iraqi youth when using social media. Kelly et al. (2003) summarized the effectiveness of online surveys as a tool for data collection, stating that "the research produces data based on real-world observations" (p. 262). Other scholars have also noted the benefits of online survey, such as their ability to reach diverse and hard-to-reach populations, and their flexibility in terms of timing and location (Couper, 2000; Dillman et al., 2009).

Sampling

A convenience sampling was used to recruit participants through Facebook, as this platform is considered the most used social media website in Iraq. A convenience sampling approach enabled the researcher to reach an otherwise hard-to-reach research population through his personal social networks and various Facebook groups. Social media groups have been widely used to organize social movements by providing movement participants means of communication and tools to mobilize the mass (Engler, 2021). Facebook played a significant role in the Arab Spring in general and Iraqi movements in specific by providing the space to discuss politics, communicate messages, and facilitate public discussions. In the context of Iraq, Facebook has emerged as a crucial platform that provided a space for political discussion and

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

activism, particularly among the youth and other marginalized groups (Al-Ani & Osman, 2018; Al-Obaidi & Abdulla, 2020).

Facebook groups that focus on politics allow individuals to share and discuss information, express their opinions, and mobilize for political action (Ismail, 2020). The survey was shared on Facebook groups that were selected based on their content, engagement and audience such as the October Revolution, Iraqi Uprising, and Iraqi Movement. Participants were asked to answer the survey and then pass it to their network on social media by posting and sharing the survey link. There was no incentive provided to complete the survey. The survey was open from March 15 to March 31, 2023.

First, a group of filtering questions were used to ensure eligible participants are over the age of 18, currently living in Iraq, and have an active social media account on any platform. They were then presented various questions on social media use gratifications, political knowledge, participation, and demographics. The survey lasted about 8-10 minutes. A total of 784 people accessed the survey, and 241 eligible responses were collected. The final sample consisted of 30 males (12.4%) and 190 females (78.8%). The average age of the sample was 21 years, the median household income was \$20,000, the median educational level was “some college.” Among all eligible participants, (49.6%) were self-identified as moderate, (8.3%) as very liberal, and (15.4%) somewhat liberal.

Measurements: Independent Variables. *Social media use.* Previous studies suggested that the amount of time users spend on the internet in general may play a role in their engagement with social and political activities (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). According to Kwak et al. (2005) study, they found that online news consumption was positively related to political knowledge among users who spent long time on the internet. To measure social media

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

use, a five-point scale was adapted from Valenzuela (2013). It asked survey participants how many hours a day they would use social media platforms, ranging from “1-less than an hour” to “5- more than four hours” ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.07$).

Freedom of expression gratification. The survey included a question to measure individuals’ freedom of expression gratification. Kim and Delli Carpini (2013) found that the perceived impact of social media on freedom of expression was positively related to political knowledge among participants. The question asked the participants to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement, “social media allow me to express my opinions freely”. This measure was adapted from Smith and Anderson (2018), a five-point scale ranging from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5) ($M = 1.4$, $SD = 0.64$).

Social interaction gratification. The gratification of social interaction was measured by asking participants about their use of social media for connecting with others and building relationships, adapting a measure from Mossberger et al., (2013). The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement, “social media satisfy my need to stay connected with friends and families” on a five-point scale ranging from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5) ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.0$).

Community and belonging gratification. Adapting from Ellison et al., (2014), this gratification was measured by asking the respondents how much they agreed with the following statement, “social media satisfy my need to belong to a community”. A five-point scale was used ranging from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5) ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.17$).

The need to be informed gratification. Adapting from Perrin, (2019), this gratification was measured by asking the respondents how much they agreed with the following statement, “social

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

media satisfy my need to obtain news and information”. A five-point scale was used ranging from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5) ($M = 2.6$, $SD = 0.8$).

Dependent Variables.

Political participation. Both online and offline political participation were measured separately, adapted from Valenzuela, S. (2013) to fit the current issue context. To measure offline political participation, the participant were asked if during the past 12 months they had engaged in any of the following activities : a) Signing a petition; b) Attending a political rally or speech; c) Attending an organized protest of any kind; d) Occupying a property in a protest; e) Confronting authorities; f) Writing a letter or email to a parliament member or political figure; g) Attending political forums or/and debates. The responses scale: never (1) to frequently (5) ($M = 1.4$, $SD = 0.5$, Cronbach’s alpha = .788).

To measure online political participation, this study adapted the measures from Valenzuela et al. (2012) and respondents were asked to indicate how often they use social media for the following activities over the past year: (a) Write to a politician or political party; (b) contributed to a political campaign; (c) follow a political party account on social media; (d) Send a message to discuss political topic or issue.” Five-point scales were used to measure online participation, ranging from never (1) to frequently (5) ($M = 1.4$, $SD = 0.6$, Cronbach’s alpha = .835).

Political knowledge. The current measure focuses on the factual aspect of political knowledge, taking Keeter et al.’s (1996) definition that political knowledge is “the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory” (p.10). Adapting Barber’s (1996) measure, political knowledge was measured by asking respondents to answer the following questions: (a) Name the current president of Iraq; (b) How many members at the Iraqi

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

Council of Representatives (Parliament); (c) What year the next parliamentary election will be; (d) How long is the president's term in years.”. For each item, a correct answer was coded as “1” and a wrong answer or “don’t know” were coded as “0”. A five-item (0-4) scale was developed to measure respondents’ knowledge level, with respondents who correctly answered four questions getting “4”, and those who did make one wrong getting “0” (M = 1.67 , SD =.98).

Control Variables.

Demographics. Age and gender were collected as control variables. Income was measured on a five-point scale ranging from *less than \$20,000* to *higher than \$100,000*. Education level was measured on a seven-point scale ranging from *Less than high school* to *Doctorate*. Political ideology was measured on a six-point scale ranging from *very liberal* (1) to *Political Islam* (6).

Analysis strategy. Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics program. First, demographic information (age, gender, education level, income level, political affiliation) was analyzed. Second, three linear regression models were run, each model tested to test the relationships between demographic characteristics, social media use, freedom of expression gratification, social interaction gratification, community and belonging gratification, the need to be informed gratification, and political knowledge, followed by online and offline political participation.

Results

Descriptive Results

In general, the survey results show that the majority of the respondents identified as female (77.9%, $N=190$), followed by male (12.3%, $N=30$), and only one respondent identified as non-binary/third gender. About 8.2% of the respondents preferred not to say. In terms of annual

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

income, the majority of the respondents (76.2%, $N=186$) reported an income level of less than \$20,000 per year.

[Table 1 here]

Regarding the highest level of education, the majority of the respondents (37.7%, $N=92$) reported having some college education, followed by 4-year degree holders (26.2%, $N=64$) and professionals with a degree (9.4%, $N=23$). According to the survey, the majority of the respondents identified as moderate (48.8%, $N = 119$), followed by somewhat liberal (15.2%, $N = 37$), political Islam (12.7%, $N = 31$).

The freedom of expression gratification descriptive was low ($M=1.4$, $SD=0.64$). The need to be informed gratification results were ($M=3.7$, $SD=1.05$). On the questions to indicate the top reason behind participant's social media use (34.4%, $N=82$) of the participants answered the reason is to get news (42.3%, $N=102$) answered socializing with people.

Regression Analyses Results

For RQ1, which questioned what gratification most sought by Iraqis, a chi-square test was used to consider gratification most sought by Iraqis. A chi-square test for independence was conducted to examine the relationship between respondents use of social media and gratifications sought. The results showed that belonging to community was the gratification most sought by Iraqis $\chi^2(16, N = 241) = 31.376, p = .012$.

A hierarchical linear regression was run where three blocks of independent variables were used to predict how gratifications sought by respondents and social media use influenced their political knowledge and political participation. In the first block multiple regression models predicting political knowledge based on various demographic and social media use variables. The results indicate that education level ($\beta = .128, p = .055$) has significance in predicting

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

political knowledge. The results show that education level ($\beta = .138, p = .037$) and information seeking gratification ($\beta = .255, p < .001$) were significant predictors of political knowledge, even after controlling for other variables. The results supported Ha4 as there is a significant positive relationship between need to be informed gratification and political knowledge ($\beta = .255, p < .001$).

[Table 2 here]

In the second and third models online and offline participations were tested, the results show that political ideology, education level, and age have a significant positive effect on online political participation in all three models. The results shows Information seeking gratification have a significant positive effect on online and offline political participation). H4b which hypothesized that the need to be informed gratification would be significantly and positively related to the level of political participation among Iraqi youth was supported ($\beta=.301, p < .001$).

[Table 3 here]

Discussion

Overall, the survey lead to several important findings. First, it found that that the top reason for social media use among Iraqi youth was socializing with people, followed by getting news and to stay informed. These findings support the results for the hypothesis that the need to be informed gratification would be significantly and positively related to the level of political knowledge among Iraqi youth.

The fact that staying informed was a significant reason behind social media use among Iraqis suggests that social media serves as a source of information for Iraqi users, and that this need for information and being exposed to different points of vides may be a key player in forming their political knowledge. The results showed a significant relation between political

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

knowledge, and the level of education among participants also the need to be informed gratification. This result suggests that Iraqi youth who have higher level of education and a stronger desire to be informed are more likely to have more political knowledge. This extends the findings from studies such as the one conducted by Al-Abdullah (2021) study that found a significant relationship between the need to be informed gratification the level of political knowledge among Iraqis. These findings also align with Delli Carpini & Keeter (1996) research that notes the importance of information seeking behavior in relation to political knowledge. Probably the current political situation in Iraq has resulted in a greater need among Iraqis to be informed about politics and current events in order to better understand and navigate the complex political environment that directly impacts all levels of society. Additionally, according to previous studies social media use has been found to increase the belief among users that they can have an impact on the political situation, which in turn can lead to more levels of political knowledge (Gil de Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012).

This study results showed as significant relationship between both online and offline political participation and respondents' political ideology that's suggests that the more liberal Iraqi users are, the more likely they are to participate in online and offline political discussions. Furthermore, information seeking gratification and socializing gratification are both significant in relation to offline participation indicating that individuals who seek information and social gratification from social media are more likely to participate offline, while those who seek social gratification are less likely to participate offline

Results shows significant relation between online participation and political ideology. One possible explanation why Iraqi users who identify as more liberal have higher levels of online political participation could be that users with liberal political beliefs are more likely to be

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

younger, and more educated, which could make them more likely to have access to and use social media platforms for political participation (Gil de Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012; LaRose & Eastin, 2004). Therefore, the most important gratification that predicts Iraqi youth political activity both learning and participating is information seeking gratification.

This thesis had a very interesting finding about social interaction gratification, it shows the more Iraqi participants used social media to socialize and stay connected with friends and family, the less their political participation. In their study, Sunstein (2017) notes that social media use for socializing may result in forming "echo chambers," where users are exposed to information that confirm and aligns with their existing beliefs. The author suggests that this may lead to a lack of exposure to alternative perspectives and political debates.

Based on the results of this research that showed the Iraqi youth significantly relies on social media to receive their news and stay informed. Thus, it is important for political activists and movements to effectively utilize these platforms as it provides a two-way communication. According to Kushin & Yamamoto (2010) author notes that movements should tailor their messaging to audience and use engaging and creative content such as infographics, and videos.

Conclusions

General limitations and future research. A primary limitation of this study is that it is a study which only looks at only social media role on political knowledge, and therefore limits the generalizability of the study to other factors that play a role in impacting political knowledge and political participation in general.

Specifically, the survey was published only on Facebook, whereas social movement campaigns on social media use a variety of platforms, including but not limited to Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube. Future studies should seek to further understand the use of these

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

platforms, and what gratifications sought by their individuals. The survey is limited in that it relied on a small sample, as well as a sample from solely Facebook, which limits the generalizability of the study to young individuals who use another platform. In addition, the majority of participants were female, which might skew the results of the survey. Future studies should expand on this survey but with a larger sample that includes individuals who are residing outside Iraq and don't have a social media presence to gain a more representative sample of the Iraqi youth population in the effort to understand how use of social media impacts their political knowledge and participation.

Despite these limitations, this thesis is important for the way it sheds light on the crucial role of social media as a source of information for Iraqis. The study suggests that political movements and organizations should take into consideration the different gratifications sought by Iraqi youth and tailor their communication strategies accordingly. Moreover, it challenges the general perceptions that social media is mainly used to socialize, on the contrary the use for socializing may have a negative impact on political participation.

The findings of this thesis can inform policymakers and political actors on how to better engage with Iraqi youth and promote their participation in the political process. Specifically, the results of the analysis can help identify the factors that are associated with political knowledge and participation among Iraqi youth, such as the importance of social media use and what gratifications sought by Iraqis. Policymakers and political actors can use this information to tailor their communication and engagement strategies to better reach and engage with this demographic. For example, they may consider utilizing social media platforms to disseminate political information and foster discussion and engagement among Iraqi youth. Additionally, the findings suggest that promoting opportunities for staying informed gratification may be an

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

effective strategy for increasing political knowledge among Iraqi youth. By implementing targeted policies and strategies informed by these findings, policymakers and political actors can work towards promoting greater political engagement and participation among Iraqi youth.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

Appendices

Appendix I: Survey Recruitment Post

This research study has been approved by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board 713-743-9204.

Iraqi young adults who actively participated in the October Revolution in 2019. Click here for more information.

Seeking young Iraqi adult 18 years and older who use social media to follow news

Study seeking Iraqi who uses social media platforms Facebook and Twitter to express their political opinions

Study Looking for young Iraqi adults who have a social media presence and reside in Iraq. Click here to join

Study Looking for young adults who use any social media applications to follow the political situation in Iraq. Click here to learn more.

Appendix II: Survey questionnaire

Ver. Survey for The Social Media Role In Forming Political Awareness Among Iraqi Youth - Copy

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 Consent to Take Part in a Human Research Study **Title of research study:** The Social Media Role In Forming Political Awareness Among Iraqi Youth **Investigator:** Aymen Khalaf, thesis being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Wenlin Liu. **Key Information:** The following focused information is being presented to assist you in understanding the key elements of this study, as well as the basic reasons why you may or may not wish to consider taking part. This section is only a summary; more detailed information, including how to contact the research team for additional information or questions, follows within the remainder of this document under the "Detailed Information" heading. **What should I know about a research study?** Someone will explain this research study to you. Taking part in the research is voluntary; whether or not you take part is up to you. You can choose not to take part. You can agree to take part and later change your mind. Your decision will not be held against you. You can ask all the questions you want before you decide, and can ask questions at any time during the study. We invite you to take part in a research study about

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

Social Media Role In Forming Political Awareness Among Iraqi Youth because you meet the following criteria, being 18 years or older and living in Iraq and you have social media presence.

In general, your participation in the research involves completing a 5-10 minute online survey questionnaire asking about your knowledge and attitudes toward your use of social media Facebook and Twitter.

There are no known risks and no personal benefits to doing this survey. You will not receive compensation for participation. **Detailed Information:** The following is more detailed information about this study, in addition to the information listed above. **Why is this research being done?**

The purpose is to study the relationship between the use of social media and political knowledge and how the use of Facebook and Twitter as sources for political information can impact political knowledge, aims to fill research gaps by making observations and recommendations that could help future activists. **How long will the research last?** We expect that you will be in this research study for 5-10 minutes to complete the survey. **How many people will be studied?** We expect to enroll about 300 people in this research study.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

You will need to complete a 5-10 minute online survey questionnaire while the survey is still active and accepting submissions. **What happens if I do not want to be in this research?** You can choose not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you. Choosing not to take part will involve no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled. **What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?** You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you.

If you stop being in the research, already collected data will not be recorded to the study record, as the survey submission would not be completed. **Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?** There are no foreseeable risks related to the procedures conducted as part of this study. If you choose to take part and undergo a negative event you feel is related to the study, please inform your study team. **Will I get anything for being in this study?** You will not receive any compensation for participation in this survey. **Will being in this study help me in any way?** There are no known benefits to you from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to others include helping scholars study the impact of social media platforms Facebook and Twitter on user's political knowledge. **What happens to the information collected for the research?** Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your responses to people who have a need to review this information. Facebook will serve as just a tool to publish the questionnaire. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of this organization, as well as collaborating institutions and federal agencies that oversee human subjects research. **Consent to Take Part in a Human Research Study** We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your ID confidential.

Who can I talk to? If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, you should talk to the research team at: Aymen Khalaf via akhalaf2@cougarnet.uh.edu or to Dr. Wenlin Liu via wliu30@central.uh.edu

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may also talk to them at (713) 743-9204 or cphs@central.uh.edu if:

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
 - You cannot reach the research team.
 - You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
 - You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
 - You want to get information or provide input about this research.
-

Q2 Please acknowledge your agreement to participate by selecting "agree" below. If you do not want to continue, please select "disagree".

- Agree (1)
- Disagree (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Please acknowledge your agreement to participate by selecting "agree" below. If you do not want t... = Disagree

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Section 1 Introductory

Q3 Are you 18 years or older?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you 18 years or older? = No

Page Break

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI
YOUTH

Q4 Are you currently located in Iraq?

No (1)

Yes (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you currently located in Iraq? = No

Page Break

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI
YOUTH

Q5 Do you use social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, etc...?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)
- if other please specify which social media platform you are using? (3)
-

Skip To: End of Survey If Do you use social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, etc...? = No

End of Block: Section 1 Introductory

Start of Block: Section II. Social Media Use and Political Knowledge

Q6 Select the top reason behind your social media use..... Select one answer only

- Socializing with people (1)
- Getting News (2)
- Discuss politics (3)
- Shopping (4)
- Others, please specify (5)
-

Page Break

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

Q7 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (19)	Somewhat disagree (20)	Neither agree nor disagree (21)	Somewhat agree (22)	Strongly agree (23)
I use social media to seek political information (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use social media to engage in political conversation (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use social media to express my political opinions (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use social media to communicate with activists (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use social media to campaign for a topic or issue (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use social media to support certain political ideology or politician (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

Q8 On an average weekday, in hours, how much time do you spend on social media?

Less than an hour (1)

1-2 hours (2)

2-3 hours (3)

3-4 hours (4)

4+ hours (5)

Q9 Please provide answers to the following questions about your political knowledge.

1. Name the current president of Iraq

Q10 2. How many members at the Iraqi Council of Representatives (Parliament)?

Q11 3. What year the next parliamentary election will be?

Q12 4. How long is the president's term in years?

End of Block: Section II. Social Media Use and Political Knowledge

Start of Block: Section III. Political Participation

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI
YOUTH

Q13 How frequently have you participated in the following activities during the last 12 months?

	Never (52)	Sometimes (53)	About half the time (54)	Most of the time (55)	Frequently (56)
Signing a petition (15)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attending a political rally or speech (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attending an organized protest of any kind (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Occupying a property in a protest (17)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Confronting authorities (18)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Writing a letter or email to a parliament member or political figure (19)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attending political forums or/and debates (20)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

Q14 Please indicate how often you use social media for the following activities over the past year:

	Never (21)	Sometimes (22)	About half the time (23)	Most of the time (24)	Always (25)
Write to a politician or political party (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
contributed to a political campaign (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
follow a political party account on social media (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Send a message to discuss political topic or issue (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Section III. Political Participation

Start of Block: Section III. Gratifications sought from using social media

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

Q15 Please indicate your degree of agreement with the following statements about your social media usage to socialize:

	Strongly disagree (18)	Somewhat disagree (19)	Neither agree nor disagree (20)	Somewhat agree (21)	Strongly agree (22)
I use social media daily to communicate with friends and family (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use social media to engage in discussion (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I rarely use social media to socialize (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q16 How important is social media to your daily life?

	Not at all important (11)	Slightly important (12)	Neutral (13)	Very important (14)	Extremely important (15)
How important is social media to your daily life? (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

Q17 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	1 Strongly disagree (1)	2 Somewhat disagree (2)	3 Neither agree nor disagree (3)	4 Somewhat agree (4)	5 Strongly agree (5)
social media allow me to express my opinions freely (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
social media satisfy my need to stay connected with friends and family (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
social media satisfy my need to belong to a community (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
social media satisfy my need to obtain news and information (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Section III. Gratifications sought from using social media

Start of Block: Section IIII. Demographics

Q18 Which gender do you identify most with?

- Male (5)
- Female (6)
- Non-binary / third gender (7)
- Prefer not to say (8)

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI
YOUTH

Q19 What is your highest level of education?

- Less than high school (1)
- High school graduate (2)
- Some college (3)
- 2 year degree (4)
- 4 year degree (5)
- Professional degree (6)
- Doctorate (7)

Page Break

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI
YOUTH

Q20 What is your annual income level?

- Less than \$20,000 (1)
 - \$20,000 - \$50,000 (2)
 - \$50,000 - \$75,000 (3)
 - \$75,000 - \$100,000 (4)
 - Higher than \$100,000 (5)
-

Q22 What is your age:

Q23 What is your political ideology?

- Very liberal (1)
- Somewhat liberal (2)
- Moderate (3)
- Somewhat conservative (5)
- Very conservative (6)
- Political Islam (7)

End of Block: Section IIIII. Demographics

Appendix III: IRB Approval

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH



DIVISION OF RESEARCH
Institutional Review Boards

MODIFICATIONS REQUIRED TO SECURE “APPROVED” DETERMINATION

January 27, 2023

[Aymen Salman Khalaf Khalaf](#)

akhalaf2@uh.edu

Dear [Aymen Salman Khalaf Khalaf](#):

On 1/27/2023, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH
Investigator:	Aymen Salman Khalaf Khalaf
IRB ID:	STUDY00004049
Funding/ proposed funding:	Name: Unfunded
Award ID:	
Award Title:	
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• KHALAF Aymen - CITI Completion Report.pdf, Category: Completed Checklists;• Khalaf Aymen - HRP-502e.pdf, Category: Consent Form;• Khalaf Aymen - Social Media Post Text - Arabic Translation.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;• Khalaf Aymen - Social Media Post Text.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;• Khalaf Aymen - Thesis Protocol.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;• Khalaf Aymenv - Survey Instrument.pdf, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.);
Review Category:	Exempt
Committee Name:	Not Applicable
IRB Coordinator:	Sandra Arntz

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI YOUTH

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THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI
YOUTH

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents (N = 244)

Demographic Characteristic	N	%
Gender		
Male	30	12.3%
Female	190	77.9%
Non-binary / third gender	1	0.4%
Prefer not to say	20	8.2%
Annual income level		
Less than \$20,000	186	76.2%
\$20,000 - \$50,000	27	11.1%
\$50,000 - \$75,000	9	3.7%
\$75,000 - \$100,000	10	4.1%
Higher than \$100,000	9	3.7%
Highest level of education		
Less than high school	9	3.7%
High school graduate	22	9.0%
Some college	92	37.7%
2-year degree	14	5.7%
4-year degree	64	26.2%
Professional degree	23	9.4%
Doctorate	17	7.0%

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI
YOUTH

Table 2

Regression Results for Political Knowledge as Dependent Variable

	B	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)	1.229	0.693		1.772	0.078
Gender	0.033	0.094	0.024	0.354	0.723
Education	0.088	0.042	0.138	2.099	0.037
Income	-	0.064	-	-	0.939
	0.005		0.005	0.077	
Age	-	0.000	-	-	0.141
	0.001		0.098	1.476	
Political Ideology	-	0.038	-	-	0.202
	0.048		0.086	1.281	
Time on Social Media	-	0.062	-	-	0.196
	0.081		0.089	1.297	
Importance of Social Media	0.014	0.070	0.015	0.206	0.837
Info Gratification	0.305	0.083	0.255	3.662	<0.001
Opinion Expression on Social Media	-	0.056	-	-	0.468
	0.041		0.054	0.726	
Belonging to Community on Social Media	-	0.059	-	-	0.204
	0.075		0.095	1.274	
Social Gratification	-	0.069	-	-	0.840
	0.014		0.015	0.202	

Note. N = 150, R² = 0.240. SE = standard error, β = standardized regression coefficient, t = t-value, p = p-value. Gender was coded 0 for male and 1 for female. Political ideology was measured on a 7-point scale from 1 (extremely liberal) to 7 (extremely conservative). Time on social media and importance of social media were measured on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). Info Gratification, Opinion Expression on Social Media, Belonging to Community on Social Media, and Social Gratification were measured on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI
YOUTH

Table 3

Multiple Regression Analysis of Factors Predicting Online Participation

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
CONSTANT	1.289*** (0.409)	1.570*** (0.455)	1.176** (0.448)
WHICH GENDER DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH?	-0.009 (0.063)	-0.009 (0.063)	-0.015 (0.061)
HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION	-0.027 (0.028)	-0.028 (0.028)	-0.020 (0.027)
ANNUAL INCOME LEVEL	0.030 (0.042)	0.029 (0.042)	0.013 (0.041)
AGE	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.042 (0.000)
POLITICAL IDEOLOGY	0.081*** (0.024)	0.083*** (0.024)	0.054* (0.024)
TIME ON SOCIAL MEDIA (WEEKDAY)		-0.050 (0.041)	-0.028 (0.040)
IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA		-0.024 (0.044)	-0.049 (0.046)
INFORMATION GRATIFICATION			0.235*** (0.053)
SOCIAL MEDIA OPINIONS			0.024 (0.036)
SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNITY			0.049 (0.037)
SOCIAL GRATIFICATION			-0.095* (0.044)
R²	0.036	0.039	0.165
ADJUSTED R²	0.004	0.008	0.122
F (DF)	1.121 (5)	1.188 (7)	2.240 (9)
P-VALUE	0.353	0.318	0.040*

THE SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN FORMING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG IRAQI
YOUTH

Note. Standard errors are shown in parentheses. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.