

Facebook Campaigning in Iraq's 2025 Parliamentary Election: Perspectives of Candidates and Media Experts

MOHAMMED JASIM MOHSIN ALJANABI*
MOHD AZUL MOHAMAD SALLEH
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This study examines the strategic utilization of Facebook by candidates during the 2025 Iraqi parliamentary election campaigns and evaluates candidate and media expert perceptions regarding its role in political persuasion and public opinion formation. Grounded in a political marketing and digital persuasion framework, the research addresses three specific objectives: evaluating candidate communication strategies, analyzing perceptions of Facebook's role in electoral participation and information quality, and assessing perspectives on its influence on local public opinion. A qualitative research approach was used and involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 candidates in parliament and six media experts, where data were analyzed using thematic analysis with ATLAS.ti. According to the results of the research, it becomes evident that the candidates make use of Facebook as a means for political marketing, candidate branding, direct message dissemination, and interactive engagement. It is worth saying that participants found Facebook useful in increasing the political awareness of citizens and encouraging them to participate, especially among the younger generation, stressing that the message validity and accuracy are crucial in order to maintain influence. Yet, strategic campaigns face numerous obstacles like misinformation, cyberattacks, and the digital divide, which prompts candidates to use a combination of approaches, including both digital and conventional campaigning.

Keywords: *Facebook, voter persuasion, election campaigns, political communication, Iraq.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the rapid development of digital communication has transformed political election campaigning, positioning social media as a primary environment for voter engagement and campaign strategy. Among available platforms, Facebook stands out as a critical channel for political news dissemination and strategic candidate-voter interaction. Accordingly, this study examines the strategic use of Facebook by Iraqi parliamentary candidates during the 2025 election campaigns and evaluates candidate and expert perceptions regarding its role in political persuasion, building upon an expanding body of political communication scholarship (Boulianne, 2020; Lees-Marshment, 2019). Unique features of Facebook such as live-streamed broadcasts, targeted messaging, and interactive discussion boards have altered traditional campaign management by enabling candidates to communicate instantly and bypass legacy media gatekeepers (Boulianne et al., 2023).

*Corresponding author: mohammedjassim101@gmail.com

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Within Iraq, both the spread of the Internet and social media usage have escalated significantly over the past decade and have made Facebook the main social media platform for political communication (Zebib, 2022). In the current era where political campaign communications have adopted digital technologies, Facebook functions not only as a broadcasting medium but also as a forum for political communication and engagement (Hama, 2023). In order to analyze these phenomena and forms of communication, Political Marketing and Political Persuasion theories were applied within this research (Lees-Marshment, 2019; Borgesius et al., 2025). Digital political marketing on social media such as Facebook enables political candidates to act as political communicators, use campaign communication, create branding for themselves, and engage directly with voters, unlike conventional top-down broadcast media. Under this paradigm, political persuasion is not only the process of conveying information but also the strategic positioning of candidates, their perceived credibility, and issue-oriented messaging in order to influence political attitudes, increase candidate image, and mobilize voters (Borgesius et al., 2025).

Consequently, digital political persuasion on social media is a complicated phenomenon that depends not only on the content but also on the nature of communication in the digital era, namely, interactivity and personalization of the message. Advanced algorithms and targeted messaging on Facebook can enhance persuasive effects on voter attitudes and behavior much better than traditional media could in the past (Kurniawan et al., 2024). The 2025 Iraqi parliamentary election presents a compelling setting to examine these dynamics, as political actors increasingly deploy Facebook to complement traditional, field-based campaigning within a hybrid campaign ecosystem (Abdullah et al., 2023). Ultimately, by integrating political marketing and digital persuasion perspectives into qualitative findings derived from candidate and expert interviews, this study offers a nuanced understanding of digital campaign operations in an emerging democracy (Jaidka & Ahmed, 2025).

Therefore, Iraq operates under a fragmented proportional representation electoral system using the Sainte-Laguë method, alongside a restricted media landscape classified as "Not Free" by Freedom House due to political polarization and state pressures. Concurrently, social media adoption has surged, with internet penetration reaching over 81% and social media users exceeding 34 million, positioning Facebook as a primary battlefield for unmediated political communication (Freedom House, 2026). Despite this digital shift, existing scholarship on Iraqi electoral politics remains largely limited to general media consumption or voter behavior. A significant empirical gap persists regarding how political practitioners (candidates) strategically utilize Facebook for candidate branding, source credibility management, and political persuasion during highly competitive campaign cycles. This study directly bridges this gap by offering a qualitative examination of both parliamentary candidate practices and expert perspectives, thereby enriching political marketing and persuasion theory within transitional democratic contexts.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the strategic use of Facebook by Iraqi parliamentary candidates and evaluate candidate and expert perceptions regarding its influence on political persuasion. Specifically, the study addresses the following objectives:

- 1: To examine the political marketing strategies and messaging formats candidates use on Facebook.
- 2: To analyze candidates' and experts' perceptions of Facebook's role in electoral participation and information quality.
- 3: To evaluate candidates' and experts' perspectives on Facebook's influence in shaping local public opinion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The political communication domain is rapidly evolving due to fast technological advancements, primarily marked by the growing role of social media in electoral campaigns. According to recent scholarship on hybrid media systems, social media offers an unmediated channel between candidates and voters, altering traditional persuasion dynamics by reducing reliance on legacy media outlets (Votmer, Selvik, & Høigilt, 2021). In this landscape, Facebook deserves special attention due to its diverse features such as live broadcasts, targeted communication, and interactive groups, which allow candidates to build direct connections with citizens (Lees-Marshment, 2019). This shift enables candidates to communicate more personally while broadening public participation in campaign discourse.

To interpret these dynamic communication practices, this study adopts an integrated theoretical framework combining Political Marketing, Political Persuasion, and Source Credibility (Lees-Marshment, 2019; Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Instead of examining audience-side gratification motives, this theoretical perspective focuses on the strategic techniques employed by political actors to construct candidate branding, formulate campaign narratives, and build trust online. In the process of voting, the use of political marketing explains the different ways in which parliamentary candidates use different Facebook features to create their image and provide solutions through policy. At the same time, source credibility and political persuasion help us understand the influence of the credibility and expertise of the candidates' message on political dialogue (Ali & Zain-ul-abdin, 2021).

Recent literature highlights several key factors associated with Facebook's perceived persuasive capacity, including information quality, political interest, social mobilization, and political awareness (Bajari et al., 2021). High information quality enhances source credibility, fostering voter trust in campaign activities (Pantazi et al., 2021). Existing political interest facilitates active interaction with candidates, while social mobilization, often driven through peer networks and Facebook groups, exerts a strong influence on public engagement (Goodwin et al., 2023). Furthermore, general political knowledge shapes how voters interpret and contextualize political communications (Nelson et al., 2021).

In the context of Iraq, the use of the Internet and Facebook is quite high among younger populations, and hence Facebook is the primary platform where politics takes place. Nevertheless, the efficiency of the campaigning strategy faces challenges such as the digital divide, misinformation, and different levels of digital literacy (Lazer et al., 2018; Rachimoellah et al., 2024). It is in this context that the suggested theoretical framework can be used as an effective way to address the study's three objectives (RO1, RO2, and RO3), offering a nuanced understanding of how Iraqi candidates strategically navigate Facebook to communicate messages, manage credibility, and influence public perception (Ahmed et al., 2025).

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the study's objectives, a qualitative research design was employed, utilizing in-depth semi-structured interviews. This approach is particularly suitable for gaining rich insights into the strategic practices of political actors and expert evaluations regarding the role of Facebook in campaign communication. Rather than claiming direct behavioral measurement of voters, the methodology focuses on analyzing candidate campaign strategies, perceived digital influence, and political marketing practices.

A purposive sampling technique was employed in order to obtain a total of 26 participants, who were further categorized into two main types: 20 active members and candidates of the Iraqi Parliament running their election campaigns on Facebook during the 2025 elections, and 6 academic experts in media and politics. The diversity has been taken into consideration deliberately in the selection of the participants, which comprises different political affiliations, geographical locations (both urban and rural governorates in Iraq), gender balance, and digital literacy. The interviews in this study were conducted face-to-face with participants comprising candidates, media experts, and politicians. The ethical considerations, as well as the confidentiality of the participants, have been ensured by briefing all the participants about the project. Participants are anonymized and designated using specific codes (e.g., P1–P20 for candidates; E1–E6 for experts) as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: General demographic and professional characteristics of participants

No.	P. ID	Participant Category	Gender	Political Status	Region or Governorate	Urban or Rural Background	Level of Facebook use
1	P1	candidate	Male	IMP Candidate	Baghdad	Urban	High
2	P2	candidate	Male	IMP Candidate	Baghdad	Urban	Excellent
3	P3	candidate	Male	IMP Candidate	Basra	Urban	Excellent
4	P4	candidate	Male	IMP Candidate	Diyala	Rural	High
5	P5	candidate	Female	IMP Candidate	Anbar	Rural	High
6	P6	candidate	Female	IMP Candidate	Diyala	Rural	High
7	P7	candidate	Female	IMP Candidate	Salah ad-Din	Rural	High
8	P8	candidate	Female	IMP Candidate	Salah ad-Din	Urban	High
9	P9	candidate	Male	IMP Candidate	Baghdad	Urban	High
10	P10	candidate	Male	IMP Candidate	Baghdad	Rural	Good
11	P11	candidate	Male	IMP Candidate	Baghdad	Urban	High
12	P12	candidate	Male	IMP Candidate	Diyala	Rural	High
13	P13	candidate	Male	IMP Candidate	Mosul	Urban	High
14	P14	candidate	Female	IMP Candidate	Baghdad	Urban	Good
15	P15	candidate	Male	IMP Candidate	Diyala	Rural	High
16	P16	candidate	Female	IMP Candidate	Salah ad-Din	Rural	High
17	P17	candidate	Female	IMP Candidate	Kirkuk	Rural	Excellent
18	P18	candidate	Male	IMP Candidate	Baghdad	Urban	Excellent
19	P19	candidate	Female	IMP Candidate	Baghdad	Urban	High
20	P20	candidate	Female	IMP Candidate	Mosul	Rural	High

21	E1	Media Expert	Female	Academic expert	Baghdad	Urban	Good
22	E2	Media Expert	Male	Academic expert	Babylon	Rural	Good
23	E3	Political Expert	Male	Academic expert	Baghdad	Urban	Good
24	E4	Political Expert	Male	Academic expert	Baghdad	Urban	Good
25	E5	Political Expert	Male	Academic expert	Baghdad	Urban	Good
26	E6	Media Expert	Male	Academic expert	Baghdad	Urban	Good

The qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, adhering strictly to the six-phase framework established by Braun and Clarke (2019): data familiarization, initial code generation, theme search, theme review, theme definition, and final reporting. Data management and coding procedures were facilitated using ATLAS.ti software by a single researcher. Full verbatim interview transcripts were imported and segmented into discrete analytical units. A hybrid coding approach was applied, combining deductive codes derived from the study's integrated framework of Political Marketing, Political Persuasion, and Source Credibility (e.g., candidate branding, messaging formats, source credibility management, digital misinformation, and voter engagement perceptions), with inductive codes emerging organically from the raw interview data. Methodological trustworthiness was maintained through member checking, peer debriefing, and maintaining a detailed audit trail.

FINDINGS

This section presents the empirical qualitative findings gathered from semi-structured interviews with political candidates and media experts regarding the role of Facebook in the 2025 Iraqi parliamentary election campaigns. The presentation of findings is structured around three main empirical themes.

Theme 1: Candidate Strategies and Strategic Uses of Facebook in Election Campaigns

From the interview analysis, it is evident that Facebook is one of the main platforms through which political campaigning is done in Iraq, and candidates use the platform to send messages and construct their images.

a. Perceived Role of Facebook in Political Communication and Voter Persuasion

Participants highlighted that Facebook functions beyond basic message dissemination, acting as a dynamic medium for direct interaction, because it is an interactive tool that contributes to shaping voters' persuasions. As Participant 1 observed:

I think that the role played by Facebook is crucial in influencing voter persuasion during campaign periods because Facebook is free and allows candidates to communicate their programs and stances. A candidate can communicate their political philosophy and program through publications, videos, and even broadcasts. Candidates can also respond to public queries, giving them a good chance to develop a vivid mental picture in voters' minds. Facebook enables voters to make comparisons between candidates and their stances, thereby promoting public debate (P1).

Similarly, Participant 11 emphasized how Facebook is not only a broadcasting platform but rather an interactive communication medium where deliberations and comparisons can be made between voters.

Therefore, Facebook plays a key role in shaping voters' persuasions by providing easy-to-use information and allowing candidates to explain their electoral platforms through direct communication between the candidate and the public. Facebook also helps build a candidate's image through videos, interactive posts, and activities, making voters feel closer to the candidate and better understand their positions (P11).

However, a fundamental analytical divergence emerged between political practitioners (candidates) and academic experts. While candidates expressed high optimism regarding digital persuasion, academic experts voiced strong skepticism, citing voter volatility. As Participant 12 noted:

No, I am against this issue. Perhaps persuasions may arise among Iraqi voters, but only temporarily. Iraqi voters are characterized by moodiness and constantly change their electoral mood and decisions. Therefore, I believe that Facebook has no role in shaping voters' persuasions (P12).

b. Types of Effective Content

Participants emphasized that persuasive outcomes depend on content structure. Visually rich and issue-based local content proved most resonant. Participant 20 explained:

I make sure to diversify the content, including videos, photos, and explanatory posts, with a focus on the service issues facing the residents of our region, such as water, electricity, unemployment, and everything related to education. I also share my daily field activities to show people that I am close to them and understand their problems. This is evident to the extent to which the public responds to our posts through comments and likes (P20).

This implies that the electorate can be more receptive to content that portrays real-life experiences and meets community requirements, as Participant 16, who emphasized the value of short, direct visual communication:

I found that short videos were the most effective form of content. This is because it delivers the message quickly and builds up engagement on relevant issues that connect with the electorate. It also enables live interaction between the candidate and the voters (P16).

Challenges in Using Facebook for Campaigning

Despite its utility, candidates reported major operational challenges, primarily coordinated misinformation and electronic troll networks. Participant 12 detailed this struggle:

The challenges that we face in election campaigns, including false and misleading information, are in addition to the presence of electronic trolls that work to spread incorrect or false information. We are dealing with it through clarification of the issue that is attributed to us. In general, most of this information is not true. Therefore, we try not to respond to them, and we don't give them any importance (P12).

Participant 10 noted the importance of tackling the issue of misinformation through effective communication and engagement:

Fake news was one of the biggest problems we had, which I addressed with credible information and simple explanations. In addition to this, we were quite successful at handling the negativity and insults thrown our way, concentrating only on meaningful discussion (P10).

Moreover, the experts recognized that structural digital divides are an important obstacle. Participant 25 observed:

One of the barriers is that those who were intended to be persuaded did not have smartphones or the internet to connect with the candidate. The older voters are unlikely to use these devices; thus, the use of influencers may be limited in the poorer areas (P25).

Theme 2: Facebook's Role in Enhancing Election Participation and Information Quality

The empirical data indicates that Facebook influences voter mobilization and civic awareness, though the effect is bounded by information quality and institutional trust. Thus, Facebook is a double-edged weapon that is effective when it comes to enhancing the conviction of voters while posing the challenge of the credibility of information shared there.

a. Enhancing Voters' Persuasion via Facebook

Based on the participants' perspective, one of the key issues raised in this theme is that Facebook is very instrumental in mobilizing voter turnout by providing a platform that facilitates direct communication between politicians and their followers. Moreover, one of the things that

the participants identified as a motivator was that Facebook helps link the electoral platform to concrete community benefits. According to participant 7:

Facebook has played a great role in voter persuasion by making people aware of the importance of taking part in elections. People were encouraged to support a certain candidate by realizing that this would make them voice their needs, hence helping the candidate provide services in their regions (P7).

Moreover, Participant 3 pointed to the increasing significance of Facebook in the Iraqi political scene over time, with greater utilization, especially during times of elections.

The level of Facebook use has been on the rise since 2014. The rise has begun significantly and clearly now... It is noticeable that the rate of Facebook use increased during the peak period of the election campaigns, as most Iraqis are interested in political issues. I even submitted proposals to the Election Commission, asking it to put controls and instructions for media campaigns during the election period (P3).

On the other hand, participant 19 described that this interaction is not limited to receiving messages; it extends to questioning candidates about the credibility of their posts. This is what participant 19 pointed out.

Facebook has played an important role in promoting political persuasion through political debates and discussions on the Facebook platform. The public engages with the information posted by a politician or candidate, whether it is true or false. This means you are simply trying to win over voters. For example, on my Facebook account, I only post information that is true and relevant to voters (P19).

b. Facebook's Influence on Voter Awareness and Information Quality

From the findings, it is evident that Facebook has a great influence on the enhancement of voter awareness in that it provides users with various political messages and also ensures continuous exposure to political information. Participant 1 stated:

It was evident that my participation in Facebook during the electoral campaigns helped to raise voter awareness. I used posts and videos to inform and stimulate citizens to ask pertinent questions, give responses, and compare different electoral options as compared to previous campaigns (P1).

This means that interaction-based content, including informative posts, videos, and discussions, helps in making a sound judgment about politics. That was what Participant 9 added:

I have found that my Facebook activities while campaigning for myself helped increase voter engagement and political awareness among them. Awareness was created in people through awareness-based posts, video sharing, and live streaming of discussions (P9).

Participants stressed that voters critically evaluate post credibility. That what Participant 13 observed:

The quality of content distinguishes candidates' election messages. While some share only rhetorical statements, others provide practical solutions to voters' concerns. Consequently, Iraqi voters are discerning and able to differentiate between empty rhetoric and informed, experience-based political communication (P13).

Additionally, Participant 14 noted: "More people are interacting, asking questions, and monitoring our activities... leading to changes in political beliefs" (P14), while Participant 22 confirmed: "The quality and source of information significantly influence voter beliefs during election campaigns..." (P22).

c. Facebook's Role in Transparency and Accountability in Elections

The other significant factor highlighted by the findings is Facebook as a tool for increasing transparency in the electoral process. It has been established that Facebook provides an opportunity for monitoring candidates' actions and engaging in discussions on election-related issues, as described by Participant 19:

Facebook serves as an open platform where citizens can verify information and engage in discussions. By enabling the public to track candidates' activities, evaluate promises, and provide instant feedback, Facebook promotes transparency, accountability, and continuous community oversight in the electoral process (P19).

Likewise, other participants indicated that Facebook makes it easier for the public to monitor and identify contradictions within the context of political communication; this what pointed by Participant 7:

Facebook plays a role in enhancing transparency and accountability during Iraqi elections as it makes more information accessible, builds citizens' awareness, and allows citizens to monitor politicians' behavior... (P7).

Conversely, some experts expressed skepticism regarding systemic transparency in an emerging democracy like Iraq. Participant 12 stated:

In my view, there is no transparency in the election process in Iraq because it is an emerging democracy where there is a lack of transparency and accountability in many aspects, including social media, especially Facebook" (P12).

Theme 3: Facebook's Role in Influencing Local Public Opinion

From the results found, it can be seen that Facebook is becoming an important online platform for creating public opinion among the voters of Iraq. It has been found through the responses of the participants that Facebook serves as more than a communication tool and a recreation tool; it is also the main source of news related to politics, as well as the main place for debate on various issues taking place in the current society. It can therefore be concluded that Facebook is one of the main places where public opinion is formed in Iraq.

a. Addressing Fake News and Digital Attacks

The interviews also show that Facebook is employed as a mechanism to manipulate public perception through fake news and cyberattacks. The candidates spoke about using deliberate crisis communication tactics to save their reputations from any rumors. Participant 17 noted:

In my political campaigns, I experienced fake news and rumors about my political stances. In order to solve this problem, I applied the strategy that involves a rapid response to any negative statements. I try to be precise and provide factual information through posts and live videos... (P17).

Likewise, many other respondents pointed out the necessity of an adequate response strategy. Participant 18 emphasized the importance of evidence-backed clarification:

Personally, whenever I face the challenge of misinformation, I try to verify the sources first... I put forward my response in a calm manner, supported by evidence and documents that confirm the falsity and lack of credibility of this information. Sometimes, when it does not even warrant an answer, I simply disregard the misinformation... (P18).

Such strategies show how much people understand about the challenges of online misinformation. In some cases, participants preferred minimal responses to avoid amplifying false narratives, as Participant 8 pointed out.

Misinformation on Facebook is a major challenge during election campaigns. So, we deal with false information through brief denials without further engagement, as fake accounts are difficult to trace... (P8).

b. Balancing Digital and Field Communication

One other major outcome of the research analysis is the need for striking a balance between digital communication and personal communication in influencing public opinion. Although Facebook offers candidates a wide reach and interactivity, it was noted that this medium cannot

completely replace personal interaction. Thus, Participants stressed the necessity of combining Facebook with physical outreach. Participant 1 explained:

To balance Facebook, use it with direct, in-person engagement to influence public opinion. I used Facebook daily to share messages and monitor public feedback, while field activities such as neighborhood visits, social and religious events, and community meetings help reach citizens who do not use social media. This combined approach ensures more inclusive public engagement (P1).

It implies that integration of online and offline approaches increases inclusivity and encourages wider participation from all sections of the community. That is what Participant 4 reinforced about this hybrid necessity:

Surely, engaging the community outside is more effective compared to Facebook; however, it highlights the significance of considering both. Although field engagement allows daily face-to-face meetings and listening to the people, in my electoral campaign, I used Facebook to communicate with people from far-off places and answer their queries (P4).

DISCUSSION

The discussion interprets the empirical findings of this study through the dual frameworks of Political Marketing Theory (Lees-Marshment, 2019) and Political Persuasion Theory (Scammell, 2025; Njoku & Wilcox, 2025), synthesizing the three themes to evaluate Facebook's role within Iraq's specific socio-political ecosystem.

Theme 1: Candidate Strategies and Strategic Uses of Facebook in Election Campaigns

The empirical findings under Theme 1 directly fulfill Research Objective 1 (RO1) by delineating candidates' strategic messaging formats and campaign practices on Facebook. Interpreted through Political Marketing Theory, political candidates operate as strategic communicators who deploy Facebook for market-oriented positioning, low-cost candidate branding, and direct constituent engagement (Kogen, 2024). Within the resource-scarce and competitive landscape of parliamentary election campaigns in Iraq, Facebook decreases financial barriers, thus allowing well-known political elites as well as independent candidates to reach voters without intermediation. At the same time, within the framework of Political Persuasion Theory (Scammell, 2025), high use of short videos and locally oriented content based on issues demonstrates authenticity and helps to increase source credibility (Akobiarek & Puyok, 2024; Fornasier & Borges, 2022). The use of short visual narratives enables candidates to create the image of a human being and bypass traditional mass media controlled by political parties.

However, a critical insight of this study lies in the profound analytical divergence between political practitioners and academic experts. Although the candidates believe Facebook to be an efficient and effective tool for persuasion, confusing their own digital presence, number of comments, and number of interactions on Facebook with real political influence, academic assessments have shown that digital persuasion is always conditioned. In the unstable political

situation in Iraq, online advertising approaches will encounter political cynicism, tribal or sectarian loyalty, and serious digital inequalities (Kayode et al., 2024). Academic experts explain that political communication through the internet is not always ideologically isolated but is always being filtered and re-interpreted in light of institutional disillusionment and socio-economic frustration of the voters. Consequently, while Facebook optimizes market reach and candidate positioning, it does not automatically guarantee electoral decision-making or voter conversion.

Theme 2: Facebook's Role in Enhancing Election Participation and Information Quality

From the findings in Theme 2, one can conclude that the capacity of Facebook to increase voter turnout and political awareness depends on information quality and platform trust (Abid et al., 2023; Asimakopoulos et al., 2025). High-quality, data-driven messages increase the credibility of the sources and cause cognitive persuasion and political persuasion (Afzal et al., 2024; Oparaugo, 2021). Concerning the Political Persuasion Theory, as soon as candidates deviate from empty and meaningless rhetoric and present pragmatic approaches to dealing with issues related to electricity, jobs, water works, and local governance, voters will show cognitive and communicative reciprocity. Consistent exposure to credible information about the candidates increases political awareness among people, transforming passive content consumers into discerning evaluators of competing political agendas.

In addition, the social media network is a deliberative forum for enhancing public accountability and monitoring candidates' promises (Dommett & Bakir, 2020; Stier et al., 2020). With its open forums and live interaction feeds, the network allows voters to question candidates' assertions, seek clarification on policies, and keep track of campaign promises. However, in an emerging democracy where regulatory mechanisms are weak, the platform has a two-edged role in terms of democratic practices (Abdulazeez et al., 2024). In the case where the online environment is flooded with misinformation and noise politics, candidates have no option but to be proactive about their crisis communication strategies, which form one of the essential aspects of Digital Political Marketing (Ashraf et al., 2025; Udochukwu et al., 2024). In an environment where systemic electoral transparency remains contested, high information quality becomes the primary asset through which political actors protect their reputation against competitive political discreditation.

Theme 3: Public Opinion Formation, Digital Attacks, and the Hybrid Campaign Model

Theme 3's evidence shows how Facebook influences the public opinion of the community yet brings out the limitations of digital campaigning (Khalaf, 2023; Swastiningsih et al., 2024). Cyberattacks, electronic troll machines, and propaganda campaigns are quite influential in reducing the persuasive power of digital technologies (Garnett & James, 2020; Hunter & Biglaiser, 2022). In the context of the Iraqi elections, politicians are faced with digital warfare aimed at manipulating public opinion, forging agreement, or damaging the opponent's image. Such toxic digital processes increase public division and decrease the level of trust in online communication, making it necessary for politicians to invest a lot of resources in reputation management.

In order to mitigate these weaknesses and to fill digital literacy gaps among different demographics and geographies, political campaigns have to work in an architecture of a hybrid campaign model (Bright et al., 2021; Rajpopat, 2024). While digital political marketing campaigns

on Facebook provide wide exposure for the campaign and fast interaction, offline and personal contacts are very important in building trust and relationships (Ausat, 2023). Digital campaign communication creates initial brand exposure and frames public discourse, yet its ultimate persuasive conversion requires physical validation through ground-level community engagements, tribal council visits, and personal interactions.

Therefore, beyond confirming that social media matters in elections, this study's primary theoretical contribution is establishing the conditionality of digital political persuasion within transitional democracies. Given the socio-political circumstances prevalent in Iraq, where ethnicity and sectarianism dominate, and the technology infrastructure is unequal, digital political marketing does not stand alone as a way of changing voters' attitudes. It is rather an adjunct to this process, and its effectiveness is ultimately controlled by offline socio-political realities.

CONCLUSION

As stated in the introduction, the present research aimed at exploring the role of Facebook in shaping the process of voter persuasion in the 2025 Iraqi parliamentary election campaigns based on qualitative data obtained from political actors and expert interviews. The findings achieved and reviewed above show that the application of Facebook in the given process is a complicated issue with a number of positive and negative characteristics. It can be said based on the review that the candidates utilize Facebook as an instrument for branding and promoting their agendas, while also communicating directly with the citizens. Yet, it is important to realize that online popularity does not always mean electoral persuasion. Persuasive efficacy relies heavily on post credibility and visual content, while remaining deeply constrained by localized trust dynamics.

Conversely, systemic barriers reduce Facebook's capacity to drive voter conversion. Factors like coordinated disinformation, electronic troll campaigns, uneven internet access, and digital literacy divides prevent online platforms from acting as standalone mechanisms. Thus, political persuasion in Iraq requires a hybrid campaign architecture that continuously validates digital visibility through face-to-face field engagement.

From the theoretical perspective, this study advances Political Marketing and Political Persuasion Theories by contextualizing them in a fragile democracy. The qualitative evidence demonstrates that in transitional systems, digital political marketing functions primarily as an auxiliary tool for brand visibility rather than a direct mechanism for electoral conversion. Therefore, for practical and policy implications, campaign strategists must integrate digital reach with grounded field operations. For regulators, the findings emphasize the urgency of formulating ethical rules for digital campaigns and fostering public digital literacy.

In general, this study reveals new aspects of political persuasion in the modern world and offers researchers numerous possibilities for further investigation. In particular, one may conduct quantitative or mixed studies in order to explore voters' attitudes to Facebook content and estimate the relationship between digital tools and voter behavior empirically. Conducting longitudinal studies may contribute to understanding the long-term consequences of using Facebook posts on voter behavior. The comparative analysis of other social networks or other geographic locations would also provide additional information regarding the problem under consideration.

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BIODATA

Mohammed Jasim Mohsin is a PhD student at the Center for Media and Communication Studies (MENTION), Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Email: mohammedjassim101@gmail.com / p129525@siswa.ukm.edu.my

Mohd Azul Mohamad Salleh, PhD, Senior Lecturer at the Center for Media and Communication Studies (MENTION), Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. His area of expertise is new media and communication technology. Email: azul@ukm.edu.my

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