

Received: 07 June, 2026

Accepted: 27 August, 2026

Published: 10 September, 2026

Investigating the Factors in Voter Persuasion During the 2025 Iraqi Parliamentary Elections

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Cite this article:

Mohsin, M. J., Salleh, M. A. M., & Hassim, N. (2027). Investigating the Factors in Voter Persuasion During the 2025 Iraqi Parliamentary Elections. *Revista Cultura Científica*, (25): 202–215. <https://doi.org/10.70517/revcc272517>

Abstract

This study assesses the role of Facebook in influencing voters' opinions during political campaigns in Iraq. While various social networking sites have become increasingly common in election campaigns, only a limited number of studies have been conducted on the influence of Facebook in such contexts. The main objective of the study is to determine the effects of Facebook use, information quality, political interest, and social mobilization on voter persuasion, with political knowledge moderating these effects. The study draws on the Uses and Gratifications Theory, according to which people use media to satisfy their social and informational needs. A quantitative research methodology was used for the study, and a cross-sectional survey was conducted with 400 respondents. Data analysis involved the use of SPSS and SmartPLS 4 software. The re-

sults indicate that all Facebook-related independent variables play a significant role in voter persuasion. Among these variables, social mobilization was identified as the most important factor influencing voter persuasion. The model explains approximately 82.4% of the variation in voter persuasion ($R^2 = 0.824$). It was also found that political knowledge mediates the effect of social mobilization on voter persuasion; however, no such mediation was observed for the other variables. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by focusing on voter persuasion rather than voter participation. From a practical perspective, it provides valuable insights for political campaigns regarding the roles of interactivity and credibility.

Keywords: Facebook; Voter Persuasion; Political Communication; PLS-SEM; Iraq

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital communication technologies has changed the way political communication takes place, especially in emerging and developing democracies, where traditional media systems operate alongside developing digital communication infrastructure. Social networking sites have become very popular platforms for political communication due to their interactive nature, which transcends geographic and institutional limitations. For instance, Facebook can be considered an important instrument of political communication, providing opportunities for accessing political information, communicating with other users, and contacting political communicators [1]. In the last several years, the popularity of Facebook as a platform for political campaigning and voter communication has increased rapidly [2].

Facebook differs from conventional media in its interactivity and networking capabilities, thus making it more influential in terms of persuasion. Using various options, such as commenting on or sharing information with others, Facebook users can ensure that political messages are delivered very rapidly to people who can then be socially influenced and persuaded to change their attitudes towards a particular politician or party. Such possibilities are very important and make Facebook a highly influential platform for political communication and persuasion [3].

Therefore, with respect to Iraqi society, Facebook has gained increasing relevance as a means of political communication. In particular, social media sites have become essential in conducting election campaigns, since people prefer using Facebook to exchange political information and engage with other users. Thus, Facebook is not only a source of information but also a means of communication in a socio-political environment marked by the development of democracy and the increased importance of digital media in information consumption [4].

However, the effect of Facebook on influencing people has not been sufficiently explored despite the increasing relevance of this social media site in elections. While some research has already pointed out the positive role of social media in political participation, there is still a lack of systematic studies devoted to examining the impact of different dimensions of Facebook usage on voter persuasion. There is a clear need for empirical research aimed at exploring how Facebook affects voters' opinions and attitudes through different dimensions [1, 5].

To address this gap, this paper will investigate the role of Facebook in voter persuasion during election campaigns. The main objective of this paper is to identify the role of Facebook factors in voter persuasion during election campaigns in Iraq. Therefore, the following research questions will be answered: What is the impact of Facebook's communication role, information quality, political interest, and social mobilization on voter persuasion during elections? What is the mediating effect of political knowledge on the Facebook-voter persuasion relationship? Thus, the present study will employ a quantitative research method and utilize Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypothesized relationships. Data will be collected from Facebook users who vote in national and provincial elections in Iraq.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the emergence of social media, there has been a major shift in the dynamics of political communication. Political communication has shifted from a unilateral approach to bilateral interaction because of social media platforms such as Facebook. Through social media, people have been able to produce, disseminate, and even participate in discussions of political content, thus eliminating the distinction between information producers and consumers. This development has greatly expanded the possibilities for political engagement, participation, and deliberation [6].

A substantial number of studies have reported that social media use is positively associated with citizen participation and political participation. For instance, Boulianne [1] observed that the use of social media facilitates greater political participation by providing access to information and means of communication. Also, Rita, António, & Afonso [5] observed that being exposed to politics on an online platform increases political awareness and efficacy, both of which are essential for political participation.

Moreover, the influence of social media use on political activity includes not only political participation but also persuasion and opinion formation. While conventional mass media emphasize broadcasting in their functions, social media employ social interactions to persuade people and shape their opinions, which is a unique characteristic of social media compared with traditional media, as noted by Kabir et al. [7]. This suggests that social media may play a more complex role in shaping political ideas than was previously understood.

Among the different types of social media, Facebook has become an important medium through which political campaigns can be effectively conducted. The reasons are its extensive use, interactive features, and ability to reach specific audiences. Political entities depend heavily on Facebook to convey their campaign messages, rally support, and communicate directly with voters. Several studies show that Facebook increases the exposure of political campaigns and allows candidates to communicate directly with voters [8]. This makes traditional media less relevant and enables more personalized political communication. Moreover, because of the interaction capabilities provided by Facebook through tools such as comments, likes, and shares, citizens can contribute to political discussions; therefore, the impact

of campaigns' persuasive messages is enhanced. Nonetheless, even though Facebook has many strengths, its impact in terms of persuasion depends on the context at hand. In some studies, academics point out the importance of examining Facebook's specific features with regard to their persuasive capacity [1]. This highlights the need to examine specific dimensions of Facebook use rather than treating it as a homogeneous influence.

Building on its growing role in political campaigns, Facebook plays a vital role in voter persuasion through direct engagement, consistent involvement, and the instant sharing of information. This facilitates an enhanced knowledge base about political candidates and improves voters' ability to recall information about them. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Facebook's role has a significant positive effect on voter persuasion.

The quality of information used in the process of political communication through social media has a significant impact on the outcome of the entire process. When the information being provided has a high level of quality in terms of credibility, accuracy, and relevance, people tend to trust the source and the message being shared, thus becoming more susceptible to persuasion or more likely to be convinced by the sender [9]. Past studies have shown that exposure to credible political information results in favorable voter behaviors and decisions.

According to previous researchers, such as Christian Vaccari and Augusto Valeriani [10], high-quality and credible political information tends to promote user engagement and the development of politically informed opinions in situations where competition among information sources is extremely high. Likewise, Saif Shahin et al. [11] observed that credible and relevant information has a significant impact on people's political behavior and persuasive processes because it increases their trust in the information provided.

In addition, misleading or low-quality information tends to decrease people's trust and reduce persuasion because they become skeptical of political actors and their communication processes. Moreover, the interactive nature of Facebook encourages users to collectively assess the information provided in terms of its accuracy and relevance through sharing and commenting on posts. Accordingly, the study hypothesizes that:

H2: Information quality has a significant positive effect on voter persuasion.

Political interest can be viewed as awareness of and engagement with political affairs. It is considered an essential element in determining people's level of political involvement and one of the important factors affecting their attitudes toward searching for, evaluating, discussing, and responding to various political communications and messages. In particular, people with high political interest tend to be involved in actively searching for political news, discussing political events and messages, evaluating political information, and being more easily persuaded when such messages correspond to their pre-existing views and interests [12].

There are many studies confirming the importance of political interest for engagement with political information. Thus, according to Matthes et al. [13], individuals with a higher level of political interest tend to consume political content and pay more attention to public matters, especially in an environment with a high level of choice. Another piece of evidence for the importance of political interest in the consumption of political information was provided by Xudong Yu et al. [14]. The researchers claimed that political interest was a strong predictor of engagement with political information online.

In the context of Facebook use, the level of political interest determines users' likelihood of becoming followers of political news and engaging in discussions related to political issues, thus exposing users to persuasive content. Therefore, political interest becomes a major element shaping users' engagement in political communication. Accordingly, it is expected that:

H3: Political interest has a significant positive effect on voter persuasion.

Social mobilization refers to the processes through which people are motivated to engage in political activities via social contact, networks, and collective action. In the case of Facebook, it refers to social mobilization that occurs through networks in which information is exchanged rapidly through peer influence. In such cases, social networks allow people to become politically active through sharing ideas, exchanging opinions, and participating in collective discussions, among other activities.

The importance of social interaction is one of the themes identified in the literature as having an impact on political behavior in a digital environment. Dam Hee Kim and Nicole B. Ellison [15], for example, highlight that social networks have increased political involvement through the facilitation of networked participation and peer communication. Moreover, Siamak Seyfi et al. [16] provide experimental evidence that social influence arising through digital networks can result in increased participation in politics and behavioral change. Furthermore, social networks can influence political attitudes because they can amplify people's interactions and discussions with like-minded peers and reinforce their beliefs [17]. Such amplification and reinforcement within the network can result in increased persuasion because it may become easier for people to convince others when they share similar opinions.

As seen in previous literature, social mobilization can sometimes be a better predictor of political behaviors than individual characteristics because it encompasses collective processes and not only individual attitudes [18]. As a result, studying social mobilization as a factor affecting voter persuasion can help researchers understand the impact of digital

campaigns in elections. Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Social mobilization has a significant positive effect on voter persuasion.

Political knowledge refers to an individual's perception and comprehension of politics and its components, including processes, institutions, and problems. Such awareness is considered crucial for informed and effective political behavior in democratic countries. Digital media and social media use play a critical role in building political knowledge because social media provide a constant source of diverse information about political processes. Political discussions within a user's network on Facebook increase their access to different types of political content.

However, this connection between social media use and political knowledge proves to be rather complex and conditional. According to Frauhammer and Neubaum [19], users' engagement and specific ways of using social media influence their acquisition of new information and the development of political knowledge. Thus, previous researchers found that active interaction with political news on social networks results in the development of political knowledge and a better understanding of the subject matter [20]. Therefore, according to these authors, political knowledge should be considered an important element of the relationship between social media use and voter persuasion.

Political knowledge may be considered a mediator between the variables in question because it creates a link between Facebook use and the persuasion of its users. Thus, when receiving messages related to a political issue, Facebook users not only perceive them but also interpret, analyze, and assess them, which results in the development of political knowledge. Hence, social media help voters create a structured opinion concerning the issue being discussed. In this way, political knowledge serves as a cognitive instrument through which social media influence voters.

Although there is a considerable amount of research examining how social media affect politics, there are some major gaps that need to be addressed. Although previous research has paid particular attention to topics such as increased participation and civic engagement via social networks, as well as greater information exchange, it has not adequately addressed voter persuasion as a separate phenomenon. Although participation and persuasion are connected to each other, they are still two different components of voters' actions, since the former only requires engagement, while the latter presupposes a change in attitude. Another gap is that previous research has examined each factor in isolation from the others, without attempting to integrate all of them into one framework to consider their interaction in terms of voter persuasion. Therefore, the mechanisms by which social media can persuade a person have not been considered adequately. More specifically, there is little research devoted to examining the mediating effect of political knowledge, which can help researchers better understand the role of social media. This also means that there is limited research on the effects of social media in developing democracies. Thus, it is necessary to examine a particular region where Facebook is becoming increasingly relevant in politics, namely Iraq. Accordingly, the study proposes:

H5: Political knowledge mediates the relationship between Facebook-related factors and voter persuasion.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study is grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which proposes that individuals actively use media to satisfy specific needs, such as obtaining information, maintaining social interaction, and engaging in political activities. In the context of social media, Facebook therefore functions not only as a source of political information but also as an interactive environment in which users participate in activities that can shape their attitudes, perceptions, and political behavior. Based on this theoretical foundation and the findings of previous studies, four Facebook-related factors are identified as the principal determinants of voter persuasion: the role of Facebook, information quality, political interest, and social mobilization. Political knowledge is further considered a mediating variable in the relationship between exposure to political content and voter persuasion. This assumption is consistent with previous research suggesting that media exposure can influence attitudes through cognitive processes involving the acquisition, interpretation, and evaluation of political information. Accordingly, political knowledge provides a theoretical mechanism through which Facebook-related factors may contribute to changes in voters' attitudes and persuasive outcomes. To illustrate the proposed relationships among the variables examined in this study, the conceptual model is presented in Figure 1.

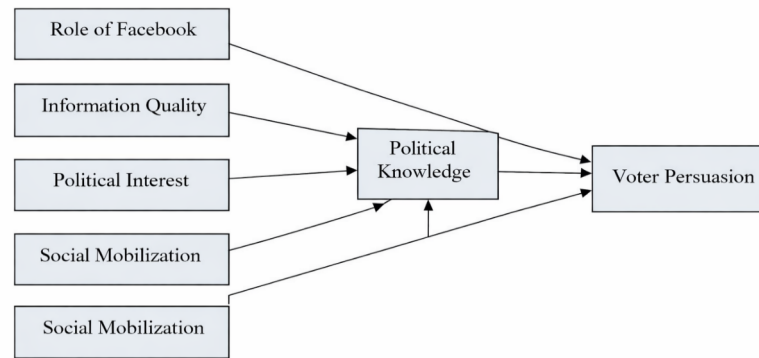


Figure 1. *Conceptual Model of the Study*

4. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the application of a quantitative research design is proposed for evaluating the role of Facebook in voter persuasion. For this purpose, a cross-sectional survey design was utilized for analysis of the relationships between the studied variables within a certain time frame. Such an approach is extensively utilized in social media and political communication research [21]. The data have been gathered with the help of the structured questionnaire that has been delivered to a sample of 400 participants via Google Forms. A non-probability sampling technique has been used to select the study sample of individuals actively using Facebook and exposed to political information during election campaigns. The selected number of respondents represents the appropriate sample size for conducting multivariate analysis and implementing the recommendations for PLS-SEM analysis requirements [22].

Items related to the studied constructs were chosen from the previously validated scales to ensure the content validity of the measurement items. All constructs have been measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree; 5 – strongly agree). The following main constructs will be explored in this research: Facebook role, information quality, political interest, social mobilization, political knowledge, and voter persuasion. These constructs are common for recently published research works related to social media and political issues [23].

To analyze the data collected, the research makes use of SPSS and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling. First, the descriptive statistics and correlational analysis will be performed. Then, the multiple regression analysis will be conducted to investigate the effect of the independent variables on voter persuasion. Afterward, for the estimation of the measurement and structural models, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling will be implemented. This approach is widely applied in modern social media and political communication research because of the possibility to estimate complex models and conduct predictions [24]. The measurement model assessment included indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability), convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted), and discriminant validity (HTMT criterion). The structural model assessment involved testing the hypothesized relationships using path coefficients, t-values, and significance levels obtained through bootstrapping procedures.

During the process of analyzing the measurement model, the indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability), convergent validity (AVE), and discriminant validity (HTMT criterion) will be assessed. During the structural model analysis, the hypotheses will be tested by estimating path coefficients, t-values, and significance level through a bootstrapping procedure. Mediation analysis will be performed to reveal whether political knowledge serves as an intervening variable in Facebook-related variables and voter persuasion.

Finally, to test the indirect effects, the bootstrapping technique will be implemented. Bootstrapping is considered one of the most effective ways to test indirect effects in PLS-SEM [25]. It should be mentioned that participation in this study was based on the voluntary principle. What is more, the confidentiality of all respondents has been guaranteed during the research.

5. RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the quantitative analysis conducted to examine the relationships between Facebook-related factors and voter persuasion during election campaigns. The analysis was performed using SPSS and SmartPLS, applying Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling to test both direct and mediated relationships.

5.1. DATA SCREENING AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Before analyzing the dataset using statistics, the dataset had been screened in order to ensure its appropriateness for analysis and that the data satisfied the assumptions inherent in multivariate statistics. The step of data screening is vital in the entire process of conducting statistical analyses since it increases the accuracy and reliability of subsequent analyses. In the current data screening process, the first step involved the identification of missing values and outliers. Results showed that there were no missing values in any of the variables since the number of valid cases per variable was 400.

Therefore, since all variables are all variables have no missing values. Another factor affecting data validity and reliability is the presence of outliers. It was checked for their presence to exclude any possibility of their impact on the statistics. No significant outliers were found as all answers fit within an acceptable range of the five-point Likert scale. In addition, the support measures included calculating the skewness and kurtosis of the data distribution that were within acceptable levels. Finally, multicollinearity analysis was conducted based on VIF and tolerance values. It can be highlighted that the VIF value was less than 5 for all variables, while all tolerance values exceeded 0.10 and ranged between 0.237 and 0.273. Thus, the share of non-co variance between independent variables is high enough and indicates that there is no high intercorrelation of the studied factors. On the other hand, all VIF values are below the critical value (5), with ranges between 3.664 and 4.227. As such, there is no over-inflation of regression coefficients; thus, multicollinearity among dependent variables does not exist. This implies that the independent variables contribute to the model independently, and the consistency of the regression estimations is assured, as indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *Multicollinearity test results*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-.275	.090		-3.060	.002	
	FB_Role	.234	.047	.221	5.024	.000	.237
	InfoQual	.127	.045	.117	2.819	.005	.265
	PolInt	.178	.045	.162	3.946	.000	.273
	SocMob	.527	.048	.476	11.080	.000	.249

a. Dependent Variable: Voter Persuasion

5.2. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Descriptive analysis has been employed in order to conduct an exhaustive analysis of perceptions of respondents towards the variables investigated in the research question under study. Statistical measures of central tendency and dispersion, such as mean and standard deviation, respectively, have been employed to analyze the responses provided by respondents using the five-point Likert scale. Descriptive analysis is an integral part of the entire statistical process as a preliminary step towards inferential analysis of statistical findings. Based on the analysis of the variables under investigation in the current research, it has been found that all of the study variables scored moderate means, reflecting the presence of a balanced attitude among the respondents towards the phenomenon in question. Thus, it can be inferred that the use of Facebook in the course of election campaigns had considerable but not dominating effects on shaping voters' attitudes.

Table 2. *The mean and Standard deviation of the study variables*

Variable	Mean	SD
Facebook Role	3.39	1.12
Information Quality	3.45	1.11
Political Interest	3.41	1.07
Social Mobilization	3.40	1.08
Political Knowledge	3.45	1.07
Voter Persuasion	3.35	1.11

According to Table 2, it is observed that the highest average scores were recorded by the variables Facebook's role, information quality, and political knowledge, all having average scores of 3.45. The results obtained indicate that the respondents believe in the authenticity of political information spread on Facebook, and also, respondents have moderate political consciousness. On the other hand, it has been seen that the political interest score recorded by the respondents is 3.41, which shows that respondents show a high interest in politics. The score for the dependent variable of the research – voter persuasion – reached 3.35, suggesting that the effects of Facebook's use in elections are relatively moderate.

Furthermore, the relatively equal means of the variables analyzed in the current research suggest consistency in attitudes expressed by respondents. At the same time, standard deviations have been calculated for all of the variables within reasonable margins, proving the absence of extreme variability in responses received from respondents.

5.3. CORRELATION ANALYSIS

In order to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between the research variables, the Pearson correlation test was used. The objective of the test was to establish any relationship that exists between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The independent variables included Facebook Role, Information Quality, Political Interest, Social Mobilization, and Political Knowledge, while the dependent variable was Voter Persuasion. The findings of the Pearson correlation test are provided in Table 3.

Table 3. *The Pearson correlation analysis between the study variables*

variables		Facebook Role	Information Quality	Political Interest	Social Mobilization	Political Knowledge	Voter Persuasion
Facebook Role	Pearson Correlation	1	.838**	.768**	.781**	.758**	.815**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400
Information Quality	Pearson Correlation	.838**	1	.733**	.764**	.740**	.785**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400
Political Interest	Pearson Correlation	.768**	.733**	1	.829**	.830**	.812**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400
Social Mobilization	Pearson Correlation	.781**	.764**	.829**	1	.802**	.872**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400
Political Knowledge	Pearson Correlation	.758**	.740**	.830**	.802**	1	.805**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400
Voter Persuasion	Pearson Correlation	.815**	.785**	.812**	.872**	.805**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows the correlation matrix among all variables included in this study. As observed in the table above, statistically significant positive relationships exist between all independent variables and voter persuasion ($p < 0.01$). In other words, an increase in all Facebook-related factors was found to have a direct effect on voter persuasion. Namely, compared to all other independent variables considered in this research, social mobilization demonstrated the highest correlation with voter persuasion ($r = 0.872$). It shows that people react to the content provided on Facebook, particularly when there is an option to discuss issues among peers. In addition, Facebook itself demonstrated a statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.815$) between using this medium and voter persuasion, which means that Facebook provides some degree of persuasive influence.

Besides, there were high levels of relationship between political interest ($r = 0.812$) and political knowledge ($r = 0.805$) and voter persuasion. It indicates that those individuals who demonstrate higher engagement in politics and greater knowledge about it were more affected by the information shared on Facebook. Moreover, the next correlation coefficient ($r = 0.785$) was observed between the quality of information provided and voter persuasion. It proves that the provision of credible information is a crucial factor while persuading voters to cast their votes on Facebook. Finally, it needs to be emphasized that correlation coefficients between independent factors are relatively low, less than 0.90. As a result, no problems with multicollinearity were detected. It proved that all independent variables represented separate constructs and could be used in further analyses (e.g., regression analysis and PLS-SEM analysis).

5.4. MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

For multiple linear regression analysis, the relationship between the independent variables, namely Facebook role, information quality, political interest, social mobilization, and political knowledge, and the dependent variable, namely voter persuasion, was tested using multiple linear regression analysis. It would be relevant to note that the use of multiple regression analysis allows us to understand the extent to which independent variables contribute to the development of the model, taking into account the other independent variables. That is why it is crucial to check the validity of assumptions concerning the analysis. It can be stated that no issues related to multicollinearity occurred since all the VIF values were at an acceptable level. At the same time, the linearity and independence of errors assumption has been validated.

Table 4. *The Regression Model Summary*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.908a	.824	.821	.40567

a. Predictors: (Constant), Political Knowledge, Information Quality, Social Mobilization, Facebook Role, Political Interest

Table 4 depicts the summary of the model for regression analysis. It is evident from the table that the model accounts for a considerable amount of the variance in voter persuasion, with an R^2 of (0.824). This means that around 82.4% of the

variance in voter persuasion is accounted for by the predictors in the model. The significance of the adjusted R^2 value in supporting this claim cannot be overstated.

Table 5. *The results of the ANOVA test*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	302.902	5	60.580	368.114	.000b
	Residual	64.840	394	.165		
	Total	367.742	399			

a. Dependent Variable: Voter Persuasion

b. Predictors: (Constant), Political Knowledge, Information Quality, Social Mobilization, Facebook Role, Political Interest

The significance of the regression analysis as a whole was evaluated through ANOVA, as displayed in Table 5. The model proved to be statistically significant ($F = 368.114$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the predictors, taken into account simultaneously, exert a significant influence on voter persuasion.

Table 6. *the regression coefficients*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-.272	.089		-3.068	.002		
	Facebook Role	.216	.046	.204	4.670	.000	.233	4.285
	Information Quality	.107	.045	.099	2.386	.017	.260	3.846
	Political Interest	.111	.049	.101	2.263	.024	.226	4.426
	Social Mobilization	.490	.048	.442	10.121	.000	.235	4.254
	Political Knowledge	.145	.044	.139	3.309	.001	.252	3.969

a. Dependent Variable: Voter Persuasion

Table 6 shows the regression coefficients, namely, the standardized beta value (β), t-statistic, and significance level for every predictor. Based on the results, all the independent variables positively and significantly influence voter persuasion, meaning that the higher the values of such variables, the greater the persuasiveness of the message is likely to be. From among all the variables, social mobilization had the highest predictive ability ($\beta = 0.442$, $p < 0.001$) and demonstrated the greatest ability to affect voter persuasion. It means that voters are affected not just by messages themselves but by social aspects as well, including social interaction, peer pressure, and social mobilization. Hence, it can be concluded that persuasion in the digital environment is a result of the activity of communication networks rather than individual exposure. The significance of Facebook's role as another predictor was confirmed ($\beta = 0.204$, $p < 0.001$), proving its effectiveness as a political communication channel. Knowledge in politics played an important role ($\beta = 0.139$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that politically knowledgeable people are easily persuaded.

Furthermore, political interest ($\beta = 0.101$), ($p = 0.024$) and information quality ($\beta = 0.099$, $p = 0.017$) had a significant yet relatively small impact on persuasion. To put it differently, although cognitive engagement plays an important role in the process of persuading voters, its effect is less pronounced than social interactions. Moreover, the differences between the beta values of different variables demonstrate that the influence of social factors on voter persuasion outweighs that of the information aspect. All in all, the regression results support the hypotheses posed in the paper effectively and confirm the significance of Facebook-related predictors in voter persuasion.

5.5. MEASUREMENT MODEL ASSESSMENT (PLS-SEM)

The measurement model is made up of the structural correlation of the latent variables with their respective indicators [26]. The measurement model was tested to determine the reliability and validity of the constructs used in the study before conducting further analysis on the structural correlation. This is a crucial part of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling.

Table 7. *Measurement Model Assessment (Reliability and Convergent Validity)*

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Facebook Role	0.901	0.924	0.670
Information Quality	0.905	0.927	0.679
Political Interest	0.893	0.918	0.653
Political Knowledge	0.910	0.930	0.689
Social Mobilization	0.894	0.919	0.654
Voter Persuasion	0.927	0.942	0.732

Table 7 displays the output of measurement model validation by providing Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of all constructs. It can be seen from the results obtained that all constructs have high internal consistencies as the values of Cronbach's Alpha surpass the suggested benchmark of (0.70). Moreover, it can be concluded that the measurement model demonstrates sufficient reliability, as Composite Reliability values are higher than the suggested benchmark of (0.70). Thus, the results imply that the measurement scale is consistent and represents well all constructs included.

Additionally, it was found that the measurement model provides evidence of convergent validity, as all values of AVE are higher than (0.50). Such findings mean that each concept explains a considerable part of difference in its indicators, which proves convergent validity. Generally speaking, the results indicate that the measurement model meets the requirements concerning reliability and validity and thus can be used in a subsequent structural model analysis.

Finally, the discriminant validity of the proposed constructs was assessed with the help of the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). Most of HTMT values turned out to be lower than 0.90, which means a reasonable discriminant validity. Nevertheless, a number of HTMT values exceeded the mentioned threshold, particularly, the values for social mobilization and voter persuasion, which are considered to be highly correlated with one another. However, taking into account that there is a significant conceptual difference between constructs used and good validity results, discriminant validity can be considered to be appropriate, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. *Discriminant Validity (HTMT)*

Construct	FB Role	Info Quality	Political Interest	Political Knowledge	Social Mobilization	Voter Persuasion
Facebook Role	—	0.927	0.857	0.836	0.871	0.892
Information Quality		—	0.815	0.814	0.847	0.854
Political Interest			—	0.918	0.928	0.893
Political Knowledge				—	0.889	0.877
Social Mobilization					—	0.957
Voter Persuasion						—

5.6. STRUCTURAL MODEL RESULTS (DIRECT EFFECTS)

Following the validation of the measurement model, the structural model was assessed to examine the hypothesized direct relationships among the study variables [27]. This step involves evaluating the path coefficients, their statistical significance, and the model's explanatory power, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9. *The direct relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables.*

Hyp.s	Statistical Path (Direct Relationship)	Path Coeff. (β)	T-Value	P-Value	Result
H1	FB_Role $\rightarrow$ Voters_Persuasion	0.214	4.513	0.000	Supported
H2	Info_Quality $\rightarrow$ Voters_Persuasion	0.106	2.345	0.019	Supported
H3	Pol_Interest $\rightarrow$ Voters_Persuasion	0.108	2.201	0.028	Supported
H4	Soc_Mobilization $\rightarrow$ Voters_Persuasion	0.494	9.882	0.000	Supported

The direct relationship between independent variables and voter persuasion is demonstrated in Table 9. The relationships predicted were all found to be positive and significant, confirming hypotheses H1-H4. In particular, social mobilization was found to have the most potent impact on voter persuasion ($\beta=0.494$), ($p<0.001$). It suggests the importance of social interactions and peer pressure for forming voters' attitudes. It can be assumed that in an online political context, persuasive efforts are mostly driven by group processes.

At the same time, Facebook's contribution also demonstrated a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.214$, $p < 0.001$), implying the use of the social network as a means of political communication and political activism. Also, statistically significant, although less powerful, was the effect of political interest ($\beta = 0.108$, $p = 0.028$) and information quality ($\beta = 0.106$, $p = 0.019$) on voter persuasion. To assess the explanatory power of the developed model, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated. According to the obtained data, the model was characterized by high predictive capabilities; specifically, voter persuasion accounted for an R^2 of 0.824. This suggests that the independent variables collectively explain a large proportion of the variance in voter persuasion, confirming the robustness and predictive capability of the proposed model.

5.7. MEDIATION ANALYSIS (INDIRECT EFFECTS)

The mediating role of political knowledge was examined using bootstrapping procedures to assess the indirect effects of the independent variables on voter persuasion through the mediator.

Table 10. *The indirect relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables.*

Indirect Path (Via Mediator)	Path Coeff. (β)	T-Value	P-Value	Result
FB_Role $\rightarrow$ Pol_Know $\rightarrow$ V_Persuasion	0.116	1.637	0.102	Not Supported
Info_Qual $\rightarrow$ Pol_Know $\rightarrow$ V_Persuasion	0.053	0.778	0.437	Not Supported
Pol_Int $\rightarrow$ Pol_Know $\rightarrow$ V_Persuasion	0.027	0.354	0.723	Not Supported
Soc_Mob $\rightarrow$ Pol_Know $\rightarrow$ V_Persuasion	0.222	1.968	0.049	Supported

Table 10 presents the indirect effects of Facebook-related variables on voter persuasion via political knowledge. Based on the analysis results, it can be concluded that political knowledge mediates the influence of social mobilization on voter persuasion. According to the data, the indirect effect is significant only when the relationship between social mobilization and persuasion is concerned, $\beta = 0.222$; $p = 0.049$; therefore, it can be said that political knowledge mediates the relationship in question.

However, the indirect effects of Facebook role $\beta = 0.116$; $p = 0.102$, information quality $\beta = 0.053$; $p = 0.437$, and political interest $\beta = 0.027$; $p = 0.723$ were insignificant. Consequently, it can be concluded that political knowledge does not mediate these relationships with persuasion at all. These results partially confirm hypothesis H5 and demonstrate that the mediator role of political knowledge is conditional on specific contexts.

6. DISCUSSION

The present study sheds light on the empirical issue of the effect of Facebook on voter persuasion in Iraqi elections. This study has provided substantial implications about digital politics in terms of both theory and practice for emerging democracies. First, this study demonstrates the significant role of social mobilization as the major determinant of voter persuasion. That is, social mobilization is revealed as an important factor influencing digital political attitudes; hence, interactive dynamics are considered necessary for influencing voters. This result is consistent with recent theories indicating that the effects of social media mainly occur through interaction, endorsement, and networking [28]. To put it another way, the effects of social media should be analyzed not only from the perspective of political content but also as networks and interactive dynamics, which, in turn, affect persuasion in social terms. Second, another significant finding is that Facebook played an important role as an avenue for political communication and persuasion. In simpler terms, it proved that social media platforms provide direct and interactive means of communicating between political actors and citizens, thus improving the persuasive nature of their actions.

Also, the research outcomes showed that Facebook is an important means of political communication and persuasion. Therefore, it confirms the fact that social media platforms provide direct and interactive means of communicating between political actors and citizens, thus enhancing the effect of campaign messages. In accordance with several recent studies, platforms such as Facebook provide micro-targeting capabilities, immediate interaction, and thus improve persuasive opportunities [29]. Such characteristics of social media platforms enable moving away from one-way communication to a much more interactive and user-centered approach, thus improving the potential for political influence. In addition, politically interested respondents were found to display significant positive effects on voter persuasion. This has been proven in several studies conducted recently. According to Theocharis & Jungherr [30], people who are politically motivated will be more engaged with information related to politics that appears in digital media [30]. This means that the information is processed better in these individuals, hence making them easy to convince. Finally, the quality of information had a positive effect, but it was significantly weaker compared to political interest. Although such results indicate that credibility and accuracy of the information remain important, recent studies showed that emotional and social engagement are generally more effective in persuading [31].

In addition, another significant finding is that political knowledge served as a partial mediator between social mobilization and voter persuasion. Specifically, socially shared political content increased awareness of such information, which influenced voter persuasion positively. Nevertheless, in most cases, no mediation was found, which proved that social media persuasion cannot be considered exclusively within cognitive processes. On the contrary, many research studies prove that digital persuasion in social media is influenced by several mechanisms, such as cognitive, emotional, and social [1]. Therefore, in the framework of a social media environment, the analysis of persuasion should take into account these factors. Furthermore, the great predictive strength of the model ($R^2 = 0.824$) proves its accuracy and consistency. The inclusion of social, informational, and individual components in the model proves its suitability. Such models have been recently emphasized in explaining voting and other political behavior on social media platforms [30]. In conclusion, this study adds to the existing body of knowledge by extending Uses and Gratification Theory into the area of voter persuasion. In contrast to other studies that considered political participation and engagement as one single issue, this study has taken persuasion as a separate aspect. Lastly, this study addresses a crucial gap in the literature through its applicability in Iraq.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper gives an extensive evaluation of the role played by Facebook in persuading the electorate during campaign periods in Iraq, both empirically and theoretically. In terms of contribution, this study gives a great deal of empirical evidence that the factors related to Facebook's role, information quality, political interest, and social mobilization have the potential to influence voter persuasion significantly. For instance, among the four factors, the one found to be the most significant is social mobilization. This factor, in particular, reveals the critical role of social interactions in digital persuasion in politics. The effects of other factors, like information quality and political interest, although significant, were found to have less influence compared to those of social mobilization. Moreover, it was established that the effect of political knowledge partially mediates the relationship between social mobilization and voter persuasion. The above observations suggest the existence of a connection between the two types of persuasion mechanisms; that is, social and cognitive persuasion in digital environments.

Theoretically, this study makes a contribution by establishing the applicability of the Uses and Gratifications Theory in explaining voter persuasion. Another theoretical contribution comes in the shift in focus of research from participation to persuasion. Besides that, the paper gives an integrative model that includes social mobilization, political interest, information quality, and political knowledge. Empirically, the contribution is made by highlighting the importance of social mobilization, political interest, information quality, and political knowledge as predictors of voter persuasion. Based on the above discussion, practical implications that arise include the need for political actors and campaigners to emphasize social mobilization in campaigns. This entails increasing participation of social media users through comments, sharing, and user-generated content as ways of enhancing persuasive outcomes. Even though high information quality is also important, it is advisable to complement it with methods of increasing social interaction. Besides, voters' knowledge is vital in improving persuasion power.

However, there are limitations associated with this paper. The first limitation is the cross-sectional research design adopted in the study. In this regard, since the researcher collected data at a single point in time, this limits the ability to explain causality among the variables. The second limitation is the generalizability of the findings since the paper is based on the political situation of Iraq. The third limitation is the heavy dependence on self-reported data, which makes it vulnerable to response bias. To mitigate such limitations in future, longitudinal and experimental research designs can be applied. Comparison with other countries would also be ideal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the Center for Media and Communication Studies (MENTION), Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and its faculty members for their immense especially my supervisors support throughout the completion of this article.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

FUNDING

This research received no external funding.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data used in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

In the course of preparing this manuscript, the authors employed ChatGPT to improve the linguistic quality and readability of the content. After utilizing this AI tool, the authors conducted comprehensive review and necessary revisions to ensure the accuracy, integrity, and scientific rigor of the manuscript. All authors bear full responsibility for the final content of the published work, including any errors or inconsistencies that may arise.

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