# DESIGNING THE SOCIAL MEDIA MODEL AND KEY SUCCESS FACTORS (KSF) IN POLITICAL MARKETING IN THE IRAQI PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

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## Abstract

The domain of "political marketing" despite being relatively recent, has experienced rapid growth over the past decade. It currently draws interest from scholars across various disciplines beyond the traditional marketing sector. Many campaign analysts and social media experts highlight the growing significance of social media in political marketing. However, despite the agreement of researchers on the benefits of social media in political marketing, there is still no robust theory development within the field. In this regard, the present study aimed to provide a qualitative model of social media in political marketing in the Iraqi parliamentary elections. The research is applied in terms of purpose with an exploratory approach and is a qualitative study. The participants in the study were experts and specialists in the field of political social media marketing, 12 of whom were selected with theoretical saturation and using purposive sampling methods. The research data collection tool was semi-structured interviews, whose reliability and validity were confirmed. For the data coding, the TA (Thematic Analysis) technique and the GT (grounded theory) method and were used. The findings are presented in the form of a paradigmatic model including core phenomenon (Political campaign strategy and structure, Digitalization and professionalism), causal conditions (Voter media/digital literacy, Social media user-friendliness, Social media development, Social media richness, Satisfaction with social media),contextual conditions (Digital infrastructure, Economic factors, Cultural factors, Political-legal factors, Politician's digital capabilities), intervening conditions (Failure to manage false and misleading information, Ethical considerations, Lack of security on social media, Disregard for specific community issues, level of trust in social media), strategies (Negative Marketing, Market Orientation, Content Marketing Strategy, Integrated Marketing Management Strategy, Political Market Segmentation Strategy, Strategies for Future Trends) and consequences (Online and Offline participation, Increased voter loyalty, Increased voting intention, Political awareness)

**Keywords:** social media, political marketing, key success factor, Grounded theory

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## Introduction

The domain of "political marketing" despite being relatively recent, has experienced rapid growth over the past decade (Abid et al.,2025). It currently draws interest from scholars across various disciplines beyond the traditional marketing sector (Okan et al.,2014). The idea of Political Marketing involves using marketing principles and techniques in political campaigns by parties and leaders. The goal is to positively position the party and its leader in the political or electoral landscape, making them appealing to voters to secure their support (Dabula, 2017). Leveraging marketing principles to attract voters and foster collective involvement in political activities has become essential amid increasing competition (Ayankoya et al.,2015). There is a widespread agreement that political marketing plays a significant role in politics. (Okan et al.,2014).

Benaissa Pedriza (2021) believes that after the introduction of the internet and virtual social networks, the laws governing the implementation of international election processes have undergone significant changes, and political communication techniques and persuasion strategies are not the same for everyone. Social media is regarded as a key tool for contemporary mass communication, particularly following the Internet revolution. The rise of various platforms has facilitated easier communication among large groups (Albadri, 2023). The adoption of social media for political campaigning and engagement has ushered in a new paradigm, providing innovative methods to promote political participation and involvement (Ayankoya et al.,2015). Many campaign analysts and social media experts highlight the growing significance of social media in political marketing (Hultman et al.,2019, Abid et al.,2023).

Similar to political marketing, political social media marketing (PSMM) has experienced growth in literature and is now the leading area of research within political marketing. According to Perannagari and Chakrabarti (2020) social media is the most frequently used keyword alongside "political marketing (Abid et al.,2025). The capacity to generate value from social connections is rooted in social capital theory, which posits that building relationships can yield anticipated returns in economic, political, labor, or other forms (Lin, 2001). Prior studies have shown that social connections formed on social networks carry inherent resources, opportunities, and benefits, collectively known as social capital (Finkbeiner, 2013). Based on this idea, businesses and organizations can leverage social media to enhance their influence and create value.

Social media has become an active platform for political engagement in shaping the electoral scene during elections in Iraq. Political candidates utilize Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to connect with audiences they might not have reached otherwise, gaining access to a large number of individuals with unknown political inclinations. These platforms facilitate the easy sharing of information about campaign events, debates, and rallies, keeping voters engaged and informed about the elections (Mohammad, 2019). Social media's role in political participation during elections in Iraq has changed how candidates and voters interact within the democratic process (Naresh, 2019). While several studies have explored the impact of social media on political participation and awareness among Iraqi youth (Khalaf,2023), they often focus on behavioral outcomes rather than systematically modeling the mechanisms and strategic elements that drive successful political marketing campaigns on these platforms. Also, although researchers agree on the advantages of social media in political marketing, there is still a lack of strong theoretical development in the field (Abid et al.,2025). In this regard, the present study aimed to provide a qualitative model of social media in political marketing in the Iraqi parliamentary elections.

## Theoretical foundations

### Political social media marketing

Political marketing was first introduced by Kelly in 1956 (Binshad, & Afsal, 2020). Political marketing refers to the application of marketing principles and techniques to achieve specific political objectives. As an essential component of modern political practice, it is employed by politicians, political parties, and movements. These entities engage in various marketing activities, including market research, segmentation and targeting, branding, internal marketing, marketing communications, advertising, and relational marketing (Lees-Marshment, 2014). The theory of political marketing is based on the fundamental assumption that political activity can be viewed like traditional business activity. All political activities occur in the political market, where customers (voters) purchase a political product (a party or candidate) on election day (Tempura et al.,2021). Similar to how marketing principles are applied in various organizations, political marketing is employed to convey the ideologies, values, and offerings of political groups to their intended audience (Ayankoya et al.,2015).

It is clear that the Internet, especially social media, has revitalized and enhanced activism. It enables activists to connect by offering communication channels and tools for swiftly sharing ideas, forming groups, and organizing protests (Pătruț, & Pătruț, 2014). Social media has become an essential tool in contemporary political campaigns. Research on this topic began in 2010 (Hadziahmetovic et al.,2021). Social media is widely utilized in politics and various other fields. Party-affiliated websites serve as platforms for politicians to promote their agendas within restricted freedoms. These sites often tailor their activities to engage specific target audiences. Today, individuals actively use social platforms like Facebook and Twitter alongside traditional media

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as tools for communication. Social media plays a crucial role in facilitating interaction between the electorate and the politicians they support (Daşlı,2019). Social media's role extends beyond corporate public relations; it has also become a vital tool for advertising during elections and has transformed into a powerful platform for expressing opinions globally (Safiullah et al.,2017). Social media enables voters to engage with political brands and fellow citizens, setting it apart from traditional media and making it more impactful (Abid et al.,2025).

## Research background

Table 1 A review of the literature on political social media marketing reveals several significant gaps. Firstly, although social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have become central to political marketing and voter engagement, most existing research is concentrated in Western contexts, particularly the US and UK, limiting the generalizability of findings to other regions such as Iraq. Secondly, the theoretical foundations of political social media marketing remain underdeveloped, with fragmented research that often overlooks contemporary topics like influencer marketing, co-creation, and the specific mechanisms through which social media shapes voter behaviour. Thirdly, there is a lack of comprehensive models that identify and explain the key success factors (KSF) for effective political marketing on social media, especially in diverse and evolving political environments. Additionally, most studies focus either on campaign outcomes or platform usage patterns, rather than systematically integrating antecedents, strategies, and consequences into a cohesive framework. Therefore, there is a clear need for research that

develops and explains a context-specific social media model for political marketing, identifying the critical success factors that drive effective voter engagement and campaign success in underexplored settings like the Iraqi parliamentary elections.

## Research methodology

This present study is of an applied nature, conducted within the interpretive paradigm, and adopts a qualitative approach. Participants included active managers in the political sector and experts in social media. The sample was selected through theoretical saturation, resulting in a total of 12 individuals. Purposive sampling was used for participant selection. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

• Possession of a doctoral or master's degree in marketing or social media.

• Over five years of experience related to the political social media marketing.

• Familiarity with social media marketing within the political sector.

Table 2 illustrates the characteristics of the participants in the research. The data collection instrument consisted of semi-structured interviews, with the interview protocol developed based on a review of existing literature and consultations with experts. The interviews were conducted between January and October 2024, with an average duration of 65 minutes each.

**Table 1.** Previous related researches summary.

| Researcher (year) | Title | Method | Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| Abid et al. (2025) | Political social media marketing: a systematic literature review and agenda for future research | systematic literature | The review shows that the field is expanding. However, the literature is fragmented and mainly focused on the US context. There are also conceptual and theoretical gaps. Additionally, it overlooks important contemporary issues like co-creation, influencer marketing, and political advertising on social media. |
| Kumar, & Sharma, (2024). | Social media marketing activities for influencing voter citizenship behavior: brand relationship quality as a mediator | Quantitative | Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) significantly influenced Brand Relationship Quality (BRQ), which in turn had a strong connection with Value Co-Creation Behavior (VCB). However, the direct effect of SMMA on VCB was not significant, indicating that this relationship was indirect and mediated by BRQ. Additionally, the educational qualifications of voters were found to moderate the relationship between BRQ and VCB. |
| Alodat, et al, (2023) | Social media platforms and political participation: A study of Jordanian youth engagement | Quantitative | The findings indicate that social media has a significant and positive impact on political participation. It was also found that gender plays a strong moderating role in the relationship between social media use and political participation. Specifically, gender positively moderates the effect of how often social media is used on political participation, while it negatively moderates the impact of the reasons for using social media on political participation. |
| Al-Homssi et al., (2022) | The Influence of Political Marketing via social media on Political Participation: A mediated moderation through political efficacy and political interest. | Quantitative | The results of this study show that building customer relationships and visibility through social media are positively linked to political efficacy, but not to political participation. Moreover, political efficacy fully mediates the relationship between these factors and political participation. Additionally, the findings indicate that political interest influences the relationship between these variables and political participation. |
| Zaky, S., & Taha, A. (2022). | The use of social media and its reflection on the political participation of youth. | Quantitative | There are statistically significant differences in how social media influences youth political participation. |
| Al Dulaimi, M. (2021). | Recent young Iraqi political participation, social media use, awareness and engagement | Quantitative | Youth engagement in social media over the past decade has been characterized as rapidly evolving. As a result, this has led to impactful political movements and demonstrations in various regions, encouraging public awareness and political participation among younger generations worldwide. |
| Hultman et al.,(2019) | Drivers and outcomes of political candidate image creation: The role of social media marketing | Quantitative | Survey findings from 235 young voters in the UK show that while all social media marketing (SMM) activities seem to positively affect the perceived image of candidates, not all SMM factors are directly linked to relationship equity. Instead, the relationship appears to be indirect, mediated by the candidate's image. Interestingly, political ideology does not seem to influence the relationship between candidate image and relationship equity. These results underscore the increasing significance of SMM activities and candidate image in political contexts. |
| Anim et al., (2019) | Mind the gap": to succeed in marketing politics, think of social media innovation | Quantitative | The study found that a political party or candidate's success in engaging young voters in Ghana relies on their effectiveness in building relationships and gaining visibility through social media. Furthermore, it indicated that political efficacy serves as a mediator in the relationship between relationship-building or visibility on social media and political participation among young voters in Ghana. |
| Dabula, 2017 | The influence of political marketing using social media on trust, loyalty and voting intention of the youth of South Africa | Quantitative | The results indicate that the relationship between political marketing using social media and voter trust, political marketing using social media and voter loyalty, voter trust and voter loyalty, voter trust and voting intention and voter loyalty and voting intention are all positive in a significant way. |

**Table 2.** Characteristics of experts participating in the research.

| Row | Gender | Education | Position | Tenure |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Male | Master's degree in Business Administration | Director of The Self-Employment Division in The Financial Department Housing | More Than 20 Years |
| 2 | Male | Master's Degree in Digital Marketing | Director of Digital Communications in The Media Department of The Iraqi Parliament/ Qualifications | 12 y |
| 3 | Male | Master's Degree in Public Administration | Senior Advisor in The Legislative Affairs Department of The Iraqi Parliament/ Qualifications | 15 y |
| 4 | Male | Master's Degree in Information Systems Security | IT and Cybersecurity Manager in The Technology Department of The Iraqi Parliament/ Qualifications | 16 y |
| 5 | Male | Master's Degree in Public Relations and Communication | Head of Community Outreach and Public Relations in The Iraqi Parliament/ Qualifications | 28 y |
| 6 | Male | Master's Degree in Public Policy | Policy Analyst and Research Coordinator in The Strategic Planning Department of The Iraqi Parliament / Qualifications | 8 y |
| 7 | Male | PhD in Law | House of Representatives | 20 y |
| 8 | Male | Master's Degree in International Relations | Director of Legal Affairs and Policy Coordination in The Iraqi Parliament / Qualifications | 30 y |
| 9 | Male | Master's Degree in Political Science | Director of Public Relations and Media Outreach for The Kurdistan Regional Parliament / Qualifications | 18 y |
| 10 | Male | *Master's Degree in Digital Communications* | Chief Advisor for Electoral Strategies and Digital Campaigns in The Kurdistan Parliament / Qualifications | 23y |
| 11 | Female | *Ph.D. in management* | Researcher | 10y |
| 12 | Female | *Ph.D. in management* | Researcher | 15y |

In this study, the researchers gathered, examined, and analyzed the data to formulate research questions, subsequently presenting the findings in tabular form based on principles of coding. The credibility of the research was ensured through the following methods:

Member Checking: A portion of the findings was shared with the study participants to verify the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations. Participants assessed whether the researchers had correctly understood their statements and whether the analysis appeared logical and reasonable from their perspective.

Peer Review: Texts from three interviews were independently coded by a fellow researcher familiar with the subject matter. The process aimed to establish agreement on the main and subcategories derived from the coding.

External Auditor Review: Feedback from the primary supervisor was utilized as external validation to refine and modify the analysis, ensuring robustness and credibility of the findings.

The analysis of texts and interviews was conducted using grounded theory methodology alongside TA (Thematic Analysis) technique. In the grounded theory approach, patterns and models are directly derived from data that have been systematically collected and analyzed throughout the research process. It is important to note that the interview analysis process followed Strauss and Corbin's procedures.

During the open, axial, and selective coding phases, data were dissected and conceptualized. Open coding, as the first stage of analyzing the interviews, involves identifying concepts, discovering their properties, and exploring their dimensions within the data. In this phase, the data are broken into discrete segments, examined meticulously, and compared based on similarities and differences. Events, incidents, objects, and actions/interactions that are conceptually similar or semantically related are grouped under higher-level abstract concepts called categories.

Subsequently, the researcher engaged in axial coding based on the data obtained from open coding. During this stage, codes identified in the open coding phase were reviewed and compared, then organized into broader categories based on their similarities and differences. Finally, the researcher performed selective coding, which begins after completing open and axial coding and after defining the paradigmatic models.

## Findings

The findings are presented in three sections: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

## Open Coding

Open coding is an analytical process through which codes, concepts, and categories are identified, along with their features, dimensions, and relationships within the data. This process involves three main steps. First, initial codes are identified to facilitate an in-depth review of the sources and information related to the research. These codes are then organized into concepts, which are subsequently classified into broader categories. Table 3 illustrates an example of open coding conducted in this study Table 3.

### Ignoring negative feedback

Misinformation or misleading posts can quickly go viral and damage a candidate's credibility. Poorly managed accounts or neglecting negative feedback can lead to public distrust. Technical issues, such as insecure platforms, may also expose campaigns to cyberattacks.P2, p9, p10

### Collaboration with influencers

The use of digital tools such as analytics enables a better understanding of voter behaviours and preferences, allowing for targeted messaging. Well-crafted campaigns that employ storytelling to highlight candidates' achievements help strengthen trust. Collaborating with influencers also enhances reach and engagement. P1, p2, p15, p8

### Inability to resolve media allegations

Polarizing content and aggressive attacks on opponents may alienate voters. Excessive use of sponsored content can give campaigns an insincere impression. Failure to address accusations or scandals on social media can rapidly lead to public distrust. P7, p9, p10, p11

### Candidates' involvement in local causes

Authentic messages that resonate with societal values are essential. Social media provides candidates with a platform to demonstrate their engagement with local causes. Continuous interaction and transparency bolster voter trust. P15, p13, p9, p8

### Creating campaigns for specific target audiences

The ability to create personalized, emotionally resonant content is crucial. Candidates who leverage social media to discuss real, everyday issues—such as education, healthcare, or local infrastructure-can build trust. Targeted campaigns that utilize data analytics to address specific voter groups, like youth or women, are also particularly effective. P11, p14, p2,

Focus on local infrastructure        Political awareness in a region plays a crucial role. In cities like Mosul, where reconstruction efforts are ongoing, voters are drawn to candidates who address local infrastructure and economic issues. Access to social media platforms and the use of regional dialects or culturally relevant imagery also significantly influence campaign success. P8, P6, P11, P13

### Media space management

Availability of secure communication platforms is vital for building trust. Social media platforms play a key role in combating fake news, enhancing credibility. Additionally, legal and ethical frameworks governing digital campaigns significantly influence their success and integrity. P15, p14, p13

### Axial Coding

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**Table 3.** An example of open coding conducted in the research.

| Open code | Sentences | Participants |
|---|---|---|
| Direct interaction with voters | Continuous presence on social media enables candidates to engage directly with voters, build trust, and foster transparency. | P1,p8, p11 |
| Ignoring negative feedback | Misinformation or misleading posts can quickly go viral and damage a candidate's credibility. Poorly managed accounts or neglecting negative feedback can lead to public distrust. Technical issues, such as insecure platforms, may also expose campaigns to cyberattacks. | P2, p9, p10 |
| Collaboration with influencers | The use of digital tools such as analytics enables a better understanding of voter behaviors and preferences, allowing for targeted messaging. Well-crafted campaigns that employ storytelling to highlight candidates' achievements help strengthen trust. Collaborating with influencers also enhances reach and engagement. | P1, p2, p15, p8 |
| Inability to resolve media allegations | Polarizing content and aggressive attacks on opponents may alienate voters. Excessive use of sponsored content can give campaigns an insincere impression. Failure to address accusations or scandals on social media can rapidly lead to public distrust. | P7, p9, p10, p11 |
| Candidates' involvement in local causes | Authentic messages that resonate with societal values are essential. Social media provides candidates with a platform to demonstrate their engagement with local causes. Continuous interaction and transparency bolster voter trust. | P15, p13, p9, p8 |
| Creating campaigns for specific target audiences | The ability to create personalized, emotionally resonant content is crucial. Candidates who leverage social media to discuss real, everyday issues—such as education, healthcare, or local infrastructure—can build trust. Targeted campaigns that utilize data analytics to address specific voter groups, like youth or women, are also particularly effective. | P11, p14, p2, |
| Focus on local infrastructure | Political awareness in a region plays a crucial role. In cities like Mosul, where reconstruction efforts are ongoing, voters are drawn to candidates who address local infrastructure and economic issues. Access to social media platforms and the use of regional dialects or culturally relevant imagery also significantly influence campaign success. | P8, P6, P11, P13 |
| Media space management | Availability of secure communication platforms is vital for building trust. Social media platforms play a key role in combating fake news, enhancing credibility. Additionally, legal and ethical frameworks governing digital campaigns significantly influence their success and integrity. | P15, p14, p13 |

**Table 4.** Components related to the central phenomenon.

| Category | Initial concept |
|---|---|
| Using Political Social Media Marketing | Political campaign strategy and structure, Digitalization and professionalism |

**Table 5.** Components related to causal conditions

| Category | Initial concept |
|---|---|
| Voter media/digital literacy | Voter information literacy, Voter education and media literacy |
| Social media user-friendliness | Ease of use of social media, Accessibility of social media |
| Social media development | Wide acceptance of social media by individuals, User-friendliness of social media, Popularity and growth of social networks |
| Social media richness | Multimedia: text, image, sound, video, etc. Access to data visualization tools, Possibilities of peer-to-peer communication (pair-to-pair) |
| Satisfaction with social media | Entertainment, informational, social and instrumental satisfaction |

Axial coding is the second level of coding. In contrast to open coding, which focuses on identifying

emergent themes, axial coding further refines, aligns, and categorizes the themes. With the completion of open coding and transition to axial coding, collected data can be sifted, refined, and categorized with the goal of creating distinct thematic categories in preparation for selective coding. Axial coding identifies relationships between open codes, for the purpose of developing core codes (Williams, & Moser, 2019). After the open coding stages and the identification of sub-categories, the categories are organized within the axial coding framework. Axial coding examines the relationships among the concepts and categories established during the open coding process. Following the disaggregation of data through open coding, axial coding reassembles these elements by establishing connections between a category and its subcategories. The primary focus of axial coding is on a specific category (the phenomenon) concerning the following aspects (Vollstedt, & Rezat, 2019). In this stage, the derived categories, presented as the central phenomenon, were systematically interconnected through a paradigmatic model. Specifically, they were linked by identifying causal conditions (the underlying causes of the main phenomenon), strategies (the responses implemented in reaction to the main phenomenon), contextual features (specific enabling conditions that influence the strategies), intervening conditions (general conditions affecting the strategies), and outcomes (the results of applying the strategies) in a theoretical manner.

**Central Phenomenon**

An event or occurrence is something that triggers a series of actions or interactions aimed at controlling or managing it. The central phenomenon refers to the core event around which the process revolves. In this study, the central phenomenon is the use of political social media marketing. The

categories related to this central phenomenon are presented in Table 4.

**Causal Condition**

Causal conditions refer to the circumstances and events that lead to the emergence and development of the phenomenon. These conditions are the primary factors responsible for the occurrence of the studied phenomenon. The categories related to causal conditions are presented in Table 5.

**Contextual Condition**

Contextual conditions encompass the general enabling factors that influence the formation of the studied phenomenon. The categories related to these contextual conditions are presented in Table 6.

**Intervening Condition**

Intervening conditions consist of a set of circumstances that, by influencing strategies (actions) and the main core phenomenon, either facilitate or restrict the intervention of other factors. The categories related to intervening conditions are presented in Table 7.

**Strategies**

Actions or interactions that are taken to control, manage, deal with, and respond to the main category. Strategies represent purposeful behaviors, activities, and interactions that are adopted in response to the main focal category and under the influence of causal conditions. The categories related to strategies are shown in Table 8.

**Consequences**

Outcomes refer to the results and consequences of implementing strategies.

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**Table 6.** Categories related to Contextual Conditions.

| Category | Initial concept |
|---|---|
| Digital infrastructure | Low internet speed, low internet bandwidth, lack of internet access, internet penetration rate in the country, lack of access to secure information platforms, increasing developments in platform services |
| Economic factors | Cost-effectiveness of using social media |
| Cultural factors | People's understanding of social networks, user education, changing the source of information from print media to social networks, increasing the influence of social networks on lifestyle and attitudes |
| Political-legal factors | Monitoring and regulation of digital campaigns, political stability, lack of government support for social networks, legislation in parliament, legislation and policies of the Supreme Council for Cyberspace |
| Politician's digital capabilities | Leadership capabilities, Adaptability, Relationships and innovation of a politician |

**Table 7.** Components related to intervening conditions

| Category | Initial concept |
|---|---|
| Failure to manage false and misleading information | Misleading posts and information asymmetry, poor account management, ignoring negative feedback, failure to address media accusations of negative and opposing campaigns, aggressive attacks on opponents, exaggerated portrayals of candidates |
| Ethical considerations | Lack of credibility in messaging, failure to disclose financial support, lack of transparency in political advertising, failure to provide coherent and ethical messages, failure to respect data privacy, failure to adhere to privacy laws and ethical standards, use of deceptive practices, such as fake accounts or misleading content, to influence voters |
| Disregard for specific community issues | Ignoring specific community issues, Overuse of sponsored content |
| Lack of security on social media | Weak regulation of the media and information space, insecure platforms, cyberattacks against candidate profiles or campaign data |
| failure to share practical solutions to real problems | Failure to share legal expertise, unprofessionalism, failure to share practical solutions to real problems |
| Level of trust in social media | Trust building, Distrust building, Trust building based on interaction and transparency, Levels of trust in government and political institutions, Trust building based on original and stable messages, Trust building based on real and up-to-date concerns of society |

**Table 8.** Categories related to strategies

| Category | Initial concept |
|---|---|
| Negative Marketing | Emphasizing the weaknesses of competitors, cyberattacks targeting candidate profiles or campaign data, cyberattacks against candidate profiles or campaign data |
| Content Marketing Strategy | Beautiful visual design, relevance of content to target customers, use of appropriate search keywords, appropriate timing for publishing content on social media |
| Integrated Marketing Management Strategy | Precise targeting and targeted advertising, managing advertising campaigns, creating a favorable mental image, using stories to showcase candidates' successes and strengths, highlighting achievements, telling personal stories and individual experiences |
| Political Market Segmentation Strategy | Analysis of voter behavior and preferences, development of a dedicated marketing mix in each sector, field study of voter behavior, review of historical and demographic data, data-driven strategy, data-driven campaign |
| Strategies for Future Trends: Artificial Intelligence, Chatbots, Collaboration with Influencers, Augmented Reality | Working with influencers, AI can help campaigns personalize content and automate responses, increasing voter engagement, augmented reality (AR), filters, and interactive AR experiences can make campaigns more engaging and memorable. |
| Level of trust in social media | Trust building, Distrust building, Trust building based on interaction and transparency, Levels of trust in government and political institutions, Trust building based on original and stable messages, Trust building based on real and up-to-date concerns of society |

Some categories represent the effects that arise from applying these strategies and are influenced by the main core phenomenon, causal conditions, and intervening conditions. These associated categories are presented in Table 9.

**Selective Coding**

Selective coding is the systematic process of identifying the core category and relating it to other categories, thereby validating relationships and filling gaps with categories that require further refinement and elaboration. In other words, selective coding involves the integration and refinement of categories to develop a coherent theory. During this stage, the researcher, while focusing on the processes embedded within the data, emphasizes which category is most frequently repeated and capable of linking other categories. At this point, the "core category" is identified, and other categories are systematically connected to it. Based on Strauss and Corbin's (1990) model, the components of the final research model, as determined through selective coding, are as follows: Figure 1.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This study aimed to develop a comprehensive qualitative model to better understand the dynamics of social media and its critical success factors (KSF) in political marketing during the Iraqi parliamentary elections. The findings are presented in the form of a paradigmatic model, which includes: Causal Conditions (Voter media/digital literacy, Social media user-friendliness, Social media development, Social media richness, Satisfaction with social media),

Contextual Conditions (Digital infrastructure, Economic factors, Cultural factors, Political-legal factors, Politician's digital capabilities), Intervening Conditions (Failure to manage false and misleading information, Ethical considerations, Lack of security on social media, Disregard for specific community issues, level of trust in social media), Core Phenomenon (Political campaign strategy and structure, Digitalization and professionalism), Strategies (Negative Marketing, Market Orientation, Content Marketing Strategy, Integrated Marketing Management Strategy, Political Market Segmentation Strategy, Strategies for Future Trends), and Consequences (Online and Offline participation, Increased voter loyalty, Increased voting intention, Political awareness)

Based on the findings, the causal conditions include 5 categories, which consist of Voter, Voter media/digital literacy, Social media user-friendliness, Social media development, Social media richness, Satisfaction with social media. One of the aspects of political social media marketing is voters' digital literacy. Digital literacy aims to cultivate active citizens, as all facets of digital literacy contribute to fostering civic engagement. Creative individuals equipped with critical thinking skills are more likely to pay meaningful attention to social issues. Recognizing the significance of these issues can increase interest and awareness, which in turn is expected to motivate individuals to take action (Moon, & Bai,2020). In the context of social media, Putra (2023) discusses how functionality, ease of use, and overall web design are vital for enhancing user experiences and shaping perceptions within the realm of political social marketing. The influence of websites on political party identity and engagement emphasizes the necessity for continuous innovation and adaptation in the

**Table 9.** Categories related to consequences.

| Category | Initial concept |
|---|---|
| Online and Offline participation | Timely engagement, active and two-way interaction in the digital space, maintaining open and ongoing communication, stronger relationships with youth, rapid dissemination of messages, greater online and offline political participation, local voter engagement, social media platforms allow politicians to bypass traditional media and connect directly with voters. From live Q&A sessions to policy updates, this fosters a sense of intimacy and transparency. |
| Increased voter loyalty | Increased voter loyalty |
| Increased voting intention | Online political participation, online behavioral intentions, voter media-based judgments, online relationship quality, user-generated content creation, user-generated content features such as sentiment, keywords, cluster density, and online community reactivity. |
| Political awareness | Using social media in political marketing helps increase public political awareness. |
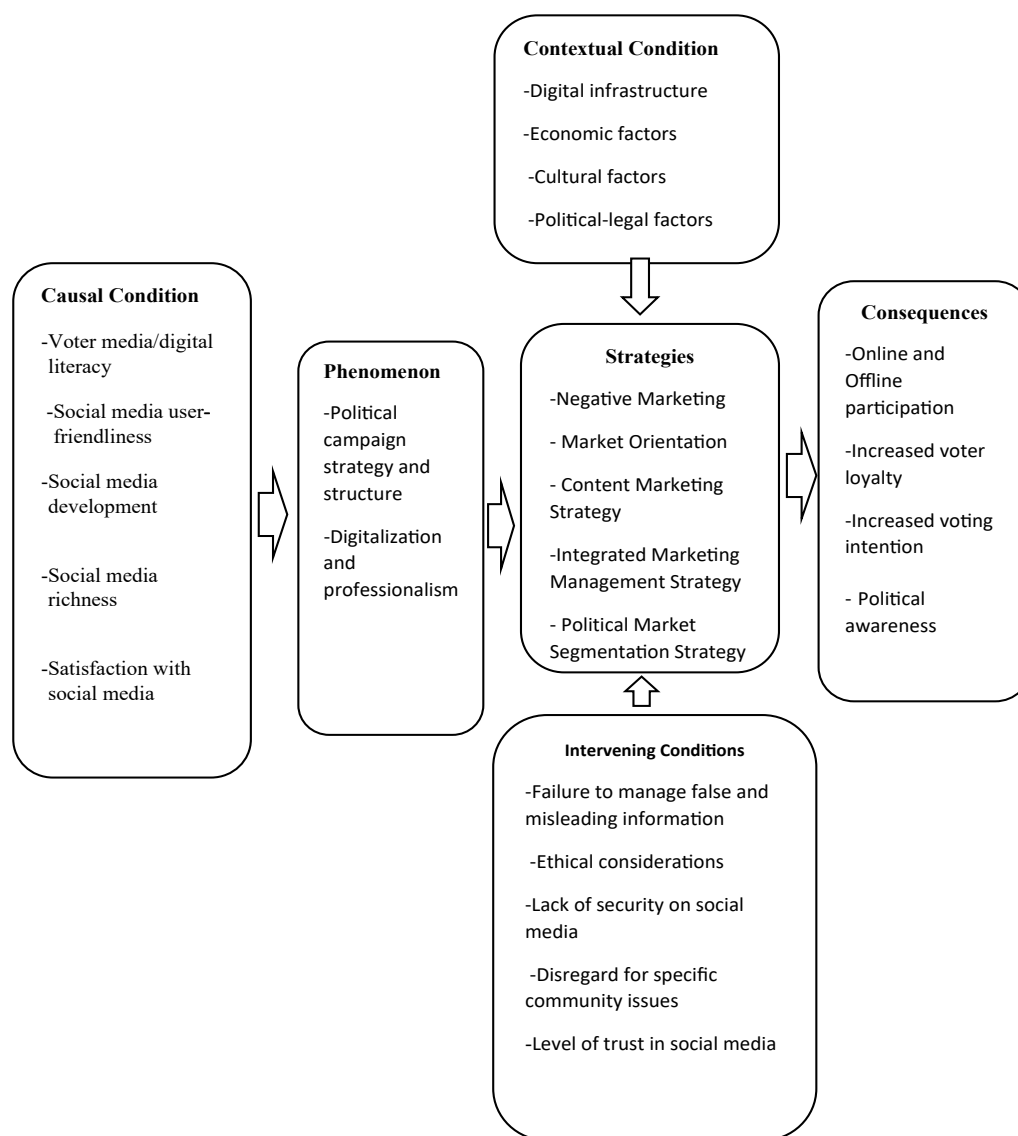


**Figure 1.** Research paradigm model.

digital landscape. In line with Social media development, Hadziahmetovic, et al (2021) acknowledge that the rise of social media is transforming perspectives on marketing, including the realm of political marketing. The primary tools utilized for this purpose are Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, which were predominantly employed for advertising campaigns during election periods.

The core phenomenon, titled "political social media marketing" includes concepts such as, Political campaign strategy and structure, Digitalization and professionalism. In political campaigns, strategy refers to a detailed plan of actions aimed at achieving specific objectives. These activities are undertaken by political organizations or competing candidates to vie for parliamentary

positions and secure the support of voters during elections (Meifilina, & Anjarwati, 2019). A political communicator effectively conveys their message by possessing both appeal and credibility. Creative legislative candidates should focus on developing a more precise campaign strategy (Meifilina, & Anjarwati, 2019). Professionalism and digital technology are two key trends shaping election campaigns in the twenty-first century. According to Grusell, & Nord, (2020) the professionalization of political campaigns can largely be attributed to the ongoing advancement of communication technology and skills.

Contextual conditions include the following five categories: Digital infrastructure, Economic factors, Cultural factors, Political-legal factors,

Politician's digital capabilities.

Digital infrastructure remains a foundational element, as the reach and impact of social media campaigns are directly tied to internet accessibility and the proliferation of digital devices among the Iraqi population (Ali, 2011). While internet penetration has grown, disparities in access-especially between urban and rural areas-continue to affect the inclusivity and scope of digital political engagement. Robust digital infrastructure, supportive economic policies, culturally sensitive messaging, a balanced regulatory environment, and strong digital capabilities among politicians are all essential for maximizing the impact of digital campaigns. Political efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to comprehend politics, have their voice heard, and effect change politically. According to Anim et al. (2019) a candidate's ability to achieve political participation from Ghanaian young voters depends on how effectively they build customer relationships and gain visibility through social media.

Intervening conditions include five categories: Failure to manage false and misleading information, Ethical considerations, Lack of security on social media, Disregard for specific community issues, level of trust in social media.

Propaganda and misinformation can significantly affect voters' opinions and electoral choices (Reisach,2021). Several intervening conditions significantly shape the effectiveness of political marketing on social media in Iraq, each presenting unique challenges and risks. Foremost among these is the persistent failure to manage false and misleading information. Disinformation campaigns, often orchestrated by political and religious actors, have weaponized social media platforms to spread fake news and propaganda, eroding public trust and undermining the integrity of electoral processes (Abdirahman, 2023). In politics, a voter's trust in a political leader fosters loyalty to both the leader and their party. This loyalty often leads the voter to strongly intend to support that party. Research has shown that when voters trust and have confidence in a political party and its candidate, they are likely to cast their votes for them (Dabula, 2017). According to Tufail et al., (2015), social media provides sufficient information that can influence the voting intention of the citizens. Additionally, Khalaf, (2023) believes that the use of social media in political marketing leads to increased political awareness among people.

Strategies include five categories: Negative Marketing, Content Marketing Strategy, Integrated Marketing Management Strategy, Political Market Segmentation Strategy, Strategies for Future Trends. Fazlzadeh et al., (2018) consider the strategies to include comparative advertising, Negative Marketing, endorsement by celebrities, and trap-setting tactics. Marketing managers aim to create and enhance relevant content for social media audiences by developing skills such as utilizing interactive advertising, employing appealing visual designs, providing creative content, aligning content with target customers, planning appropriate publishing schedules, and using effective search keywords. By focusing on generating engaging social content, the company does not need to push its products; instead, by delivering timely and relevant content that meets customer needs, it encourages customer involvement in content creation, ultimately boosting product sales. In this context, managers should concentrate on how to design the content and when to distribute it. This approach transforms passive observers into active participants, leading to increased customer interactions and promoting the company's brand (Pour et al.,2021).

The outcomes encompass nine categories: Political awareness, voting intention, Online and Offline participation, Increased voter loyalty. Saeed, A., & Hernandez, (2023) believed that Social media has the potential to empower individuals, highlight marginalized voices, and promote democratic participation. Nonetheless, the review also recognizes the adverse effects, including the dissemination of misinformation, formation of echo chambers, and increased political polarization. Moreover, issues related to data privacy, manipulation, and online harassment are also examined. Van Deth (2015) defined political participation (PP) as the active engagement of individuals or groups in the political sphere, either by directly selecting political leaders like the president or indirectly by influencing public policy (Anim et al.,2019). Over the past two decades, research on social media has revealed a positive correlation between offline and online political participation (Al Dulaimi, 2021).

### Suggestion and Limitation

Future research should focus on developing robust theoretical frameworks to better understand the role of social media in political marketing, particularly in diverse contexts like Iraq. Expanding the participant group beyond experts to include a wider range of stakeholders, such as voters and campaign managers, could provide more comprehensive insights. Conducting longitudinal studies would help track changes in social media's impact over time, revealing important trends. Additionally, comparing findings from Iraq with other countries could uncover unique challenges and opportunities in political marketing. Establishing clear ethical guidelines for political marketing on social media is essential to address concerns about misinformation and security.

However, the study's qualitative nature may limit the generalizability of its

findings to other contexts or populations. The relatively small sample size of 12 experts may not capture the full range of perspectives in political social media marketing. Furthermore, the specific cultural and political landscape of Iraq may heavily influence the findings, making them less applicable elsewhere. The rapidly changing nature of social media means that conclusions may become outdated quickly, necessitating ongoing research. Lastly, the use of purposive sampling may introduce bias, as the selected experts may have viewpoints that do not represent the broader field of political marketing.

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