

The Influence of Social Media on Decision-Making Processes in the Iraqi Parliament and the Issues It Affects

Mohammed Jasim Mohsin¹, Mohd Azul Mohamad Salleh², Nurzihan Hassim³
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Correspondence email: mohammedjassim101@gmail.com

Abstract

Social media has experienced exponential growth over the past decade and is now recognized as a valuable tool for influencing decision-making on common societal issues in Iraq. The main objective of this paper is to highlight the impact of social media on decision-making on many common issues from the point of view of members of the Iraqi parliament. A series of interviews was conducted to enhance the data of the participants in this study. A set of thematic data analytics was guided by NVivo8 software. Finding an understanding of practices related to the impact of social media use on decision-making within the legislative institution represented in the Iraqi parliament for many common issues. The results of this study indicate a significant impact of social media on decision-making regarding many common issues, including political, economic, and social concerns.

Keywords: *social media; decision-making; Iraqi parliament; political issues; economic challenges; disinformation management.*

INTRODUCTION

This article reviews common issues and topics that the use of social media affects in the decision-making process in the Iraqi parliament. This paper focuses on a number of common issues that are affected by social media, because many organizations today rely on social media to promote their business, whether they are commercial, educational, social, or others. Modern social media has been proven to be of great importance in the marketing and decision-making process, especially for organizations that deal with citizens. Therefore, most organizations use social media to achieve their goals and meet their interests (Abdul Rozak et. al, 2021).

There is an ongoing debate about the issues in which the use of social media affects the decision-making process, and some researchers believe that social media provides a unique opportunity to work on agreeing on some issues and topics of interest to a segment of society that relies on the use of social media as a means of pressure on decision-makers (Mas & Gómez, 2021). If we take a look at the decision-making process

and how social media affects the elements of the decision-making process, that is, the relations between decision-makers and the decision-making process based on the influence of social media (Reisach, 2021).

Therefore, social media includes websites that help in the relationships that occur between users from different backgrounds, which arise in a rich social structure. User-generated content meets requirements and decision-making. According to the importance of social media for different subscribers, it has gained great interest from scientists on various common issues in the decision-making process (Azzaakiyyah, 2023). The topic of decision-making is therefore applied to a variety of common topics and issues, and the reviewed articles reveal that the submitted articles have diverse backgrounds on common issues in which the use of social media affects the decision-making process. A great deal of information on social media, such as text, photos, and videos shared by users, indicates that there are some common issues that the use of social media affects in its decision-making process, such as economic, social, and political issues (Spren, Hertwig, Oswald, & Lewandowsky, 2023).

In addition, there have been limited studies on common issues that influence social media in decision-making, and research has focused on common issues that have been affected by social media use; therefore, many articles have been examined to look for common issues that have been affected by this phenomenon. Accordingly, this study aims to contribute to and enrich the literature on the impact of social media on the decision-making process on some common issues from the point of view of Iraqi parliament members by highlighting the perception of practitioners and participants in the decision-making process. Thus, finding this paper would be a significant contribution to investigating the impact of social media on decision-making (Pop, Săplăcan, Dabija, & Alt, 2021).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the extensive use of social media as a channel for the dissemination of information as well as political engagement, the influence of social media networks on decision-making in the Iraqi legislature has not been thoroughly investigated to understand the impact of these networks on the laws that are passed, the decisions that are made, prioritization, and the conduct of legislation in the Iraqi legislature. There has been a lack of investigation into this topic surrounding the impact that social media has on the decision-making processes of the Iraqi legislators, which could have implications for the legitimacy of the decision-making processes in the Iraqi legislature, as well as the impact that this has on the legislation that is passed due to social media networks. Therefore, this study has the goal of filling this existing gap in social sciences for understanding the influence that social media networks have on the decision-making processes of the Iraqi legislators.

Objectives

The principal objective of this article will be to explain the effects of social networking on the decision-making process with respect to several issues, based on the perceptions of the Iraqi parliamentarians, which are as follows.

1. To investigate the role of social media in political decision-making.
2. To explore the role of social media in economic decision-making.
3. To identify the challenges facing the practice of social media in the decision-making process in social terms.

Method of study

In this research, the chosen approach was qualitative, where in-depth interviews were carried out among twenty representatives of the Iraqi parliament. The research applies purposeful sampling to get an accurate and varied range of information. Data analysis was carried out in an objective manner using NVivo software.

The study used the qualitative approach, involving detailed interviews, to explain the participants' views about the impact of social media on decision-making in the Iraqi parliament. The sample design was based on a purposeful sampling technique. This technique is very suitable for this study. This is because it is a technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a given idea in a rich and detailed form (Thomas, 2022). However, the total sample number for this study consists of twenty respondents from members of the Iraqi parliament.

The collected data was written down and categorized under a topic and sub-topics using NVivo8 software. Thematic data analysis technology was used to analyze interview data. Thematic data analysis is the process of identifying patterns or topics within qualitative data. It is based on participants' concepts of actual communication episodes (Elliott, 2022). Within qualitative data, this technique is not related to a specific epistemological or theoretical point of view. This makes it a very flexible method and has given a great advantage to the diversity of work in learning and teaching (Villamin, Lopez, Thapa, & Cleary, 2024).

Data analysis was carried out systematically in stages. The first phase began with the transcription of interview recordings. Transcripts of the interviews were then read and re-read to enable the researcher to have an in-depth understanding of the data. Therefore, each time the transcription interviews were read, it gave the researcher richer information, orienting the style in which the coding appeared. After that, the second stage was to import the data into the NVivo8 software to be encoded. However, coding is an

important aspect of qualitative data analysis; it is one of the basic steps used during data analysis to shape data and make it logical to the data. Accordingly, each relevant piece of written data was encoded using three stages of encryption: open, pivotal, and selected (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021).

All interviewees were asked about their perceptions of the impact of social media on decision-making. In the end, this paper's topic generated two sub-themes. Thus, during this process, the researcher was able to systematically analyze the data of this study, and based on this, the focus of the research was determined.

RESULTS OF STUDY

The participants in this study looked at the common issues that were influenced by the use of social media in their decision-making processes. Therefore, social media platforms have been one of the vital concerns affecting many common issues in Iraq that have affected decision-making in the House of Representatives. Several studies have shown that social media is an important communication tool that people use to communicate with other people or organizations. People use social media to share their knowledge, reviews, materials, advice, or any kind of problem that concerns them. Considering that this information is a useful resource that can influence the decision-making process (Enríquez, Larreguy, Marshall, & Simpser, 2024).

The above criteria suggest that social media has a significant impact on various common issues, particularly those that affect the needs and requirements of citizens. When analyzing the data, it was found that participants asserted that several common issues influenced social media in the approval process. Topics in this regard can be categorized into three topics that refer to issues that have been affected by social media, and which informants have encountered in their work. These are political, economic, and social issues. Figure 3.1 below illustrates the topics and encrypted resources.

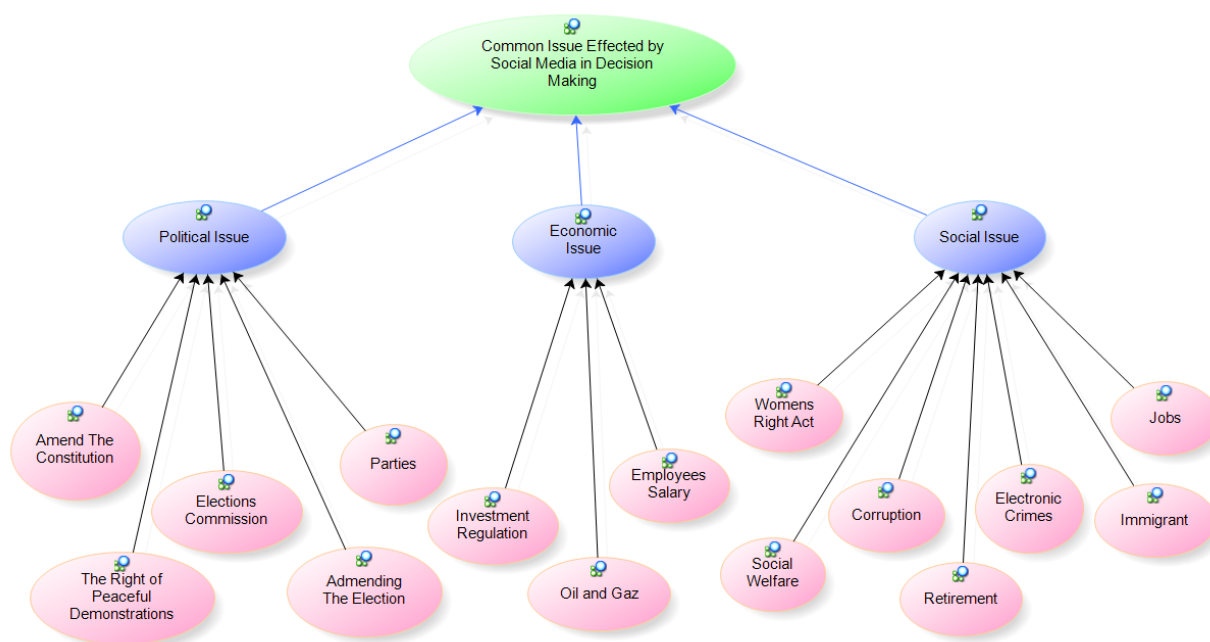


Figure 4.1: Issues that social media influences its decision-making process

Political issues

Political issues have come to be one of the most imperative and significant subject matters engaged by the participants in their discussions on the direct influences of social media on the lives of citizens and the stability of the nation. As a result, social media has come to be a fundamental tool for individuals to present their political stands and opinions. The use of social media platforms presents a major venue that gives rise to greater engagement and openness. The use of social media has come to be a major source of political information for the Iraqi people (Farkas & Bene, 2021).

In addition, social media gives citizens the ability to access millions of books, magazines, and other sources of information through various social media platforms. This vast amount of information helps shape public opinion and influences the decision-making process within parliament. By analyzing the data and information available on these platforms, legislators can make more informed decisions that respond to citizens' aspirations and contribute to political stability (Guerola-Navarro, Stratu-Strelet, Botella-Carrubi, & Gil-Gomez, 2023). Based on the above, the informants interviewed shared some political issues regarding how the use of social media affects the decision-making process within the Iraqi parliament, as these platforms have become one of the most important sources for the public to obtain political information. As shown in Figure 5.1.1

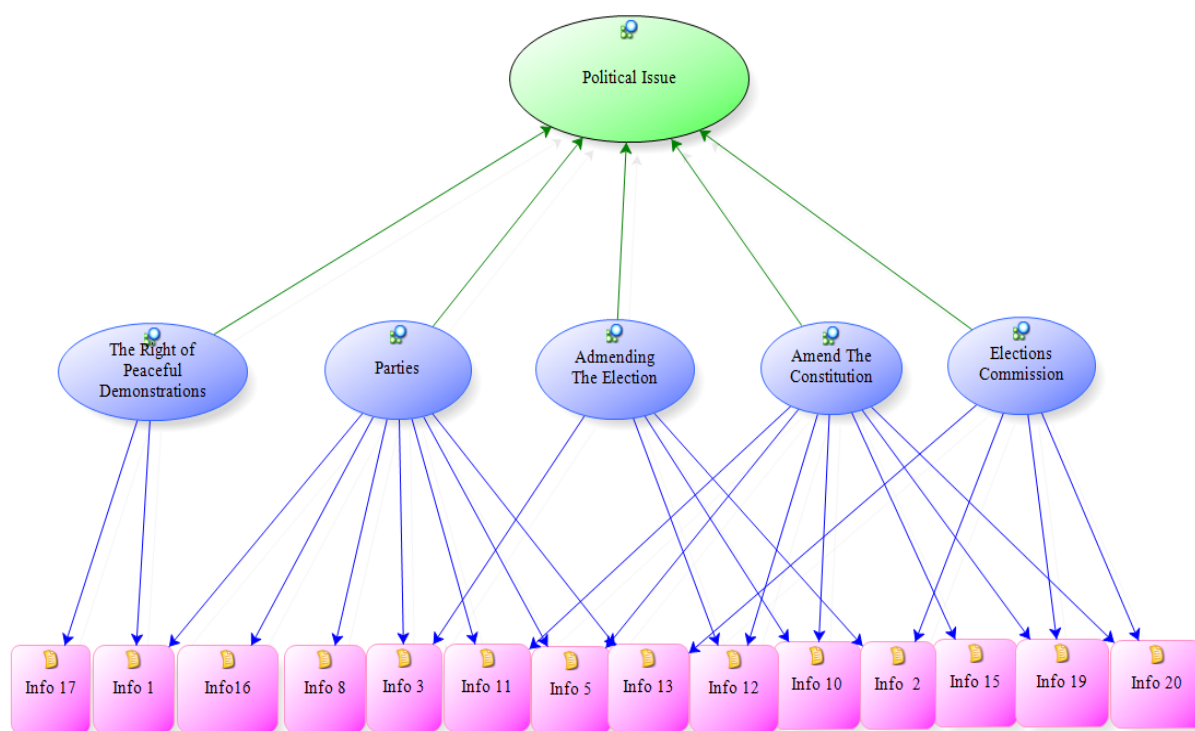


Figure 5.1.1: Illustrates the sub-themes of political issues.

For example, an informant shared his experience on the use of information circulating on social media and its clear impact on their decision-making process in the ethnic parliament, especially concerning political issues that have a direct impact on the life of society, by saying:

"There are some issues that have been affected by social media, such as the adoption of the Political Cybercrime Law, and these platforms have also contributed negatively to the process of adopting this law. Many other common issues have been affected by social media, such as issues of political exclusion and political targeting of some active parties in the Iraqi arena as a result of taking some positions that do not correspond to the aspirations of other forces" (informant 6)

In addition, another informant added that there are political issues that have been greatly affected by reactions on social media platforms, where he stated, "There are platforms that affected the decisions taken by the House of Representatives in decision-making processes, especially political issues, we are attending today an emergency session of the House of Representatives to take decisions on the demands of the masses that came out of the demonstrations and investigate the circulation of social media violations against demonstrators. The common laws affected by the use of social media sites are political laws, such as amending the parties' law,

changing the electoral commission, and social regulations, such as the pension law and the economics of restarting idle factories" (informant 13)
In addition, an informant from members of the Iraqi Council of Representatives stated that "there are some social media platforms that have affected the decisions taken by the Council of Representatives, foremost of which are political issues, we are at the head of today's meeting to discuss the demands of the demonstrators that have been circulated on social media and take decisions on them. Among the common issues that have affected social media are the right to peaceful protest, laws related to the regulation of investment operations, etc." (informant 17)

The circulation of important and useful information through social media allows the blogger and the official, in the decision-making process, through optimal interaction, and this reflects positively on decision-making in topics of common interest, especially political topics, as explained by detectives 2 and 4:

"There are many issues of common interest between the parliament and citizens that have affected the decision-making process, such as the demonstrations in Iraq in 2019 and the previous one in 2016 that had a clear impact on the decisions taken by the parliament and the demand for political reforms represented in the electoral law, changing the electoral commission, fighting corruption and operating factories" (informant 2)

"This is what the other informant pointed out, where he stressed that "the common issues affecting the use of social media are multiple, whether political or social, embodied in the ongoing demonstrations demanding political reforms such as the parties' law, the election law, and the provision of services" (informant 4).

Many participants stressed that the influence of social media contributed positively to the decision-making process within the House of Representatives in general. This study also found that the impact on political issues was the result of political mismanagement that the country witnessed during the recent period, as this process was marred by many mistakes that led to the resentment of the Iraqi masses and resentment against the political class under the pretext of its failure to manage the crises that occurred in the country. This political mismanagement can also lead to demonstrations demanding political changes. This is what informants 5 and 8 stated in the interview:

"Yes, there are a lot of laws that have been enacted and received negative feedback not only from the House of Representatives but even by the government, forcing us to back down from them due to social media pressure. This is good for correcting the course of political action, and the political mismanagement of the country since 2003 has caused demonstrations demanding the correction of the political course of the country, and I see this as positive" (informant 5)

"There are many issues that have already affected some of the decisions taken by the House of Representatives, such as the ongoing protests in Iraq demanding political and service reforms as a result of political mismanagement in the country in recent years. Among these issues that affect the use of social media in the decision-making process in the Iraqi parliament, as mentioned earlier, are political, service, and health, such as the parties' law, the retirement law, and human rights" (informant 8)

Therefore, political issues and demands are widely discussed on social media platforms, especially on Facebook and Twitter, where these platforms have played a pivotal role in the decision-making process within the Iraqi parliament. These platforms reflect the needs and desires of audiences seeking to significantly improve political reality. In addition, the crises that the country has witnessed have directly affected the social and economic lives of citizens, which has increased the importance of these platforms as a means of expressing their aspirations and demands.

Economic issues

Economic issues have been one of the core concerns for both the people and policy-makers. With the advancement of technology and the use of social media, there exists a greater scope for people to effectively convey their views and economic requirements. These media give a clear perspective to policymakers regarding the economic requirements they can give importance to, which include improving employment options, raising wages, affordable housing, and sustainable growth of the economy (Infante & Mardikaningsih, 2022). These requirements can be effectively met with policy decisions formulated with the help of data analysis from social media.

Therefore, Social media plays a pivotal role in highlighting these issues, where citizens can share their personal experiences and demand change. These platforms provide legislators with valuable data that helps them understand economic challenges more deeply and make decisions that respond to the needs of society. By listening to citizens' voices and analyzing available data, more effective and equitable economic policies can be achieved. So in the first place, legislators need to know the interests and needs of the people, so social media platforms provide a good image or vision to the decision-maker, including the economic issues that citizens are required to present, as shown in Figure 5.1.2.

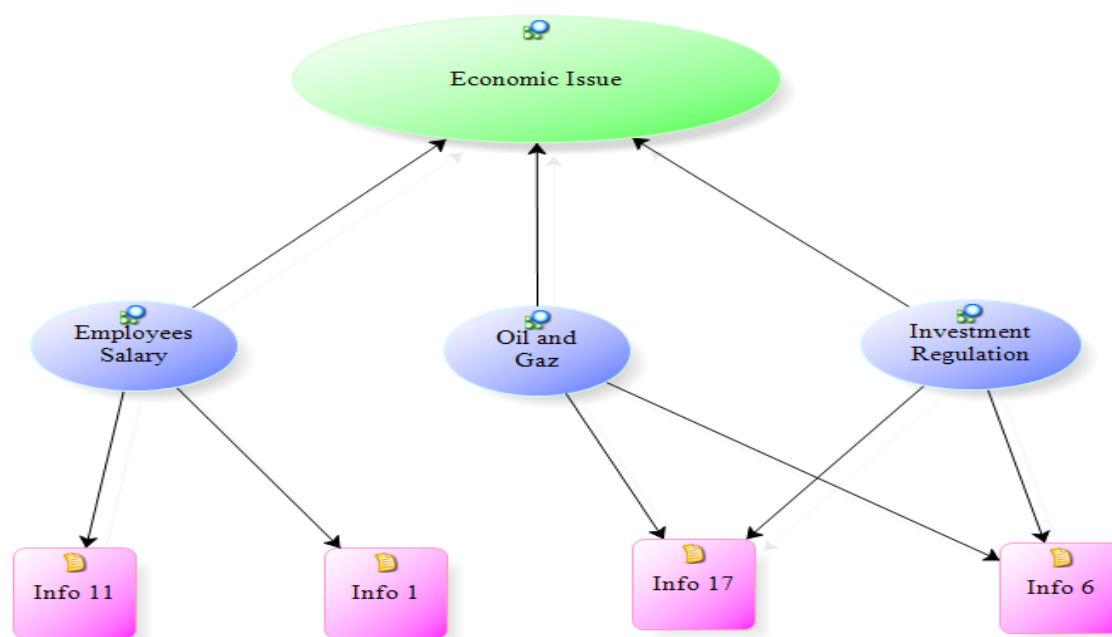


Figure 5.1.2: Sub-topic Economic Question

Therefore, some whistleblowers confirmed that social media platforms have affected decision-making from the economic side, as explained by whistleblowers 6 and 11:

"There are many other common issues that have been affected by social media, such as economic issues, the oil and gas law, the investment regulation law, and demands for job opportunities, where social media provided some important information that contributed to its adoption to legislate laws that meet the demands of the public" (informant 6)

Therefore, the other informant explained that based on the demands that were mobilized on social media platforms, they held meetings to discuss these demands, "We are at the head of today's meeting to discuss the demands of the demonstrators that have been circulated on social media and take decisions on them. Among the common issues that have affected social media are the adoption of the oil and gas law, laws related to the regulation of investment operations, etc., and demands for job creation and employment of young people" (informant 11)

However, there are some whistleblowers who said that economic issues circulating through social media platforms affect the decision-making process in the Iraqi parliament. Because citizens and professionals who do not have access to decision-makers use social platforms to influence economic decisions made by parliament. This is what informant 17 stated:

"There are issues that have greatly affected the decision-making process, such as mobilizing demonstrations now, and this affects state policy in general, in addition to many economic issues such as amending the pension

law, raising the salaries of employees, providing job opportunities for graduates, demanding accountability for the corrupt, and legislation encouraging investment in Iraq" (informant 17)

At the same time, Detective 1 confirmed that social media has significantly impacted the issue of raising workers' wages through constant pressure towards adjusting employee salaries:

"There are issues that have already affected the decisions of parliament, and the demonstrations that are now taking place in the country. The transmission of demonstrations and the reactions of citizens greatly influenced the decisions taken by parliament, such as the law on retirement and job creation, in addition to the law on parties, and contributed to the adoption of the law on parties, the right to peaceful demonstration, and the increase in the wages of employees" (informant 1)

Obviously, this attitude has proven that social media has an impact on the decision-making process regarding the economic aspect of investments and adjustment of employees' wages, the interest of decision-makers in social networks is the realization that These platforms are important channels for the transfer of information and communication with the public, so economists are increasingly using social media To know the opinions of the collective and social and economic interactions. Therefore, social media can participate in the adoption of laws that improve economic reality (Carter, 2024).

Social issues

The social factor is one of the main factors influencing the decision-making process, as these platforms reflect the pulse of the street and the aspirations of citizens towards improving their quality of life. From interaction and participation in social media platforms, citizens can formulate their opinions and demands, which in effect contribute to the formulation of social policies (Wukich, 2021).

Social media provides an open platform for discussion and dialogue on various social issues, such as education, health, and social justice. These discussions contribute to raising community awareness and guiding decision-makers towards taking effective action to improve social conditions. In addition, the social crises that society is going through are clearly reflected on these platforms, making them a powerful tool for social change and reform. Therefore, social media influences the decision-making process from the social side, as shown in Figure 5.3.1.

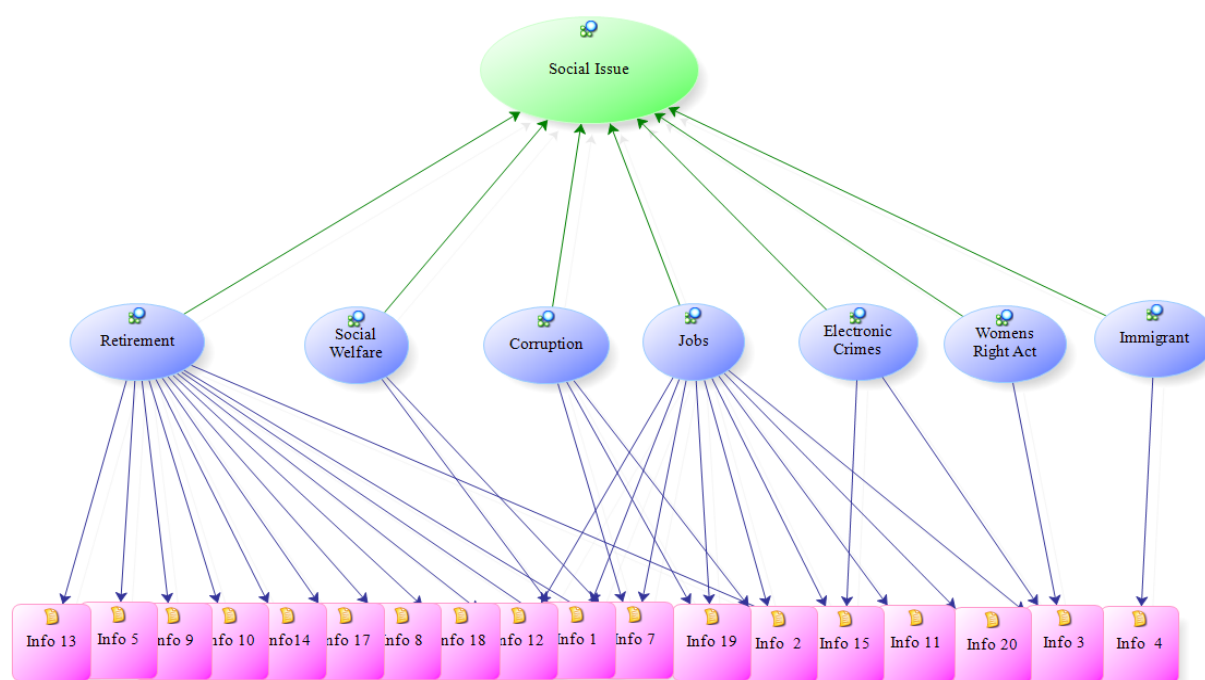


Figure 5.1.3: Sub-themes of Social Issues

The informants explained that they have received a lot of information, asking decision-makers to provide a set of needs and demands aimed at improving the social reality in the country. According to informants 3, 10, and 14, social issues are among the most important issues raised through digital platforms:

"Common issues where the use of social media has affected are social issues, such as the provision of services, the provision of job opportunities for graduates, and the amendment of the pension law, because information published on social media has a significant impact on the decision-making of the Klopoy in the House of Representatives" (informant 3)

"There are issues that have already affected the decisions of the House of Representatives, such as the ongoing demonstrations and demands for social, service, and educational reform. Therefore, there are many issues raised through social media platforms that affect the decision-making process in the Iraqi parliament, the most important of which are related to the provision of services and the adoption of the pension law, and others" (informant 10)

"The use of social media in decision-making affects many issues, especially social issues, such as the issue of information crimes, which have been negatively affected by social media, sit-ins on the issue of those with higher degrees, the retirement law, the demand for job opportunities, and others" (informant 14)

In addition, some whistleblowers pointed out that another important issue affecting the use of social media in the decision-making process is the issue of social justice and anti-corruption, and whistleblowers 7, 2, and 17 stated that there are social issues that the masses are required to provide, foremost of which is social justice and the fight against corruption:

"There are many issues that have affected the decision-making process, such as the demonstrations that took place in 2019 and preceded them in 2016 had a clear impact on the decisions taken by the parliament, and the demand for social reforms represented in job creation, social justice, fighting corruption, and operating factories" (informant 2).

The other expert said that "there are issues that greatly affected the decision-making process, such as mobilizing demonstrations that affected state policy in general, in addition to many social issues such as amending the retirement law, raising the salaries of employees, providing job opportunities for graduates, social justice, demanding accountability for the corrupt and legislation to encourage investment in Iraq" (informant 7).

...Another pointed out that "there are issues that affected the decisions taken by the House of Representatives in decision-making processes, whether political or social, stressing their discussion of the demands of the demonstrators that were circulated on social media and taking decisions on them. Among these issues that have been adopted are the retirement law, the anti-corruption law, the social justice law, the laws regulating investment operations, and others" (informant 17).

In addition, social media influences the adoption of issues related to women's and refugee rights. As several informants stated, there are cases in which decisions have been taken based on their circulation by civil activists and organizations concerned with human rights and women's rights. This is what informants 3 and 4 said:

..."There are issues that have affected social media significantly, such as women's rights issues, and these topics were absent from the media and traditional media channels are moving away from these topics, but social media contributed to the adoption of laws for these topics because of the possibility of raising or discussing them by these means and freely" (informant 3).

..."There are many issues that have been affected by social media, for example, refugee law. There were negative reactions on social media to this law, which prevented the legislation, although there was an urgent legislative situation due to a large number of displaced people and displaced within the country, the media was a direct cause after its adoption" (informant 4).

Thus, the views of whistleblowers indicate that social media plays a crucial role in the decision-making process regarding political, social, and economic issues in Iraq. Social media networks like Facebook and Twitter have become vital tools in the communication processes between citizens and policymakers. The influence of social media on the performance of the Iraqi parliament has the potential to produce both positive and negative effects. On one hand, these networks promote transparency in the policymaking processes. The citizens are capable of following the policymaking processes. They can also discuss the various policies being formulated. On the other hand, they have the potential to spread rumors that could negatively impact policymaking processes.

DISCUSSION

The results from the study show that there are various overarching elements that shape the integration and use of social media in decision-making in the Iraqi Parliament. Moreover, all the informants agree that social media applies to various issues and decision-making processes. This applicability is realized through the widespread use of social media as a means of relaying the needs and demands of the people to decision-makers. For the purpose of achieving the study's objectives, the sub-themes identified from the analyzed discussions are three and are significant in defining the use of social media in decision-making. The identified sub-themes are deemed to have been created by cross-cutting issues, hence are essential pillars in the decision-making process by the Iraqi Council of Representatives.

Political issues

From the findings of this research, most informants agreed that political issues are one of the most important factors that impact decision-making in the Iraqi parliament. The informants identified that political issues examined on social networks have significantly impacted parliamentary decisions in Iraq. From this implication, it is conclusive that social networks have a pivotal role in determining political decisions by offering a platform where citizens interact with decision-makers. Social networks have been identified by previous research to be a very effective instrument to reach a wide audience within a very short period; hence, the dissemination of information about contemporary political issues is easily facilitated by social networks. Social networks can disseminate information in formats that have been made more accessible; hence, the impact of the information on political decisions is significantly enhanced by social networks, and that apply on the Iraqi case (Abdullah, Hassan, Ahmad, Hassan, & Ismail, 2021)

Economic issues

The previous section of this study discussed economic issues, where the results of the research revealed that economic issues are among the most important issues that

social media platforms can affect decision-making. The whistleblowers pointed out that social media influences the decision-making process related to economic issues by demanding the regulation of investments, providing job opportunities, improving the economic reality, and other economic issues. All informants confirmed that the decision-making process is the primary task of the Iraqi parliament. Therefore, people are starting to direct their demands and positions on some laws and legislation through social media, which affects the decision-making process, and this is one of the findings of this study.

In addition, the parliament members noted that social media raises topics that actually affect the decision-making process. Therefore, the focus of social media on a particular issue and the large circulation around it can affect the decision-making process. The use of social media can have an undesirable impact on the decision-making process, according to some previous studies on the impact of social media on economic issues. So, social media is an influential force not only because it has changed the whole perception of online promotion or some economic issues, but the emergence of social media has led people to think of new ways and activities to pressure the decision-maker through increased awareness and public engagement (Long, Wang, & Zhang, 2024).

Social issues

The study also found that the third factor affected by social media use is social issues. Through calls on social media to improve the quality of services or provide opportunities for workers and achieve social justice, these platforms influence the decision-making process to meet the demands of society and know the opinions and aspirations of people in this respect, according to the whistleblowers.

Therefore, dealing with information circulating on social media applications requires members of the House of Representatives to have a deep understanding of how to develop and use this information to meet the demands of society in social issues. Many previous researchers have pointed to the impact of social media on social issues. According to Rao, David, & Kalyani (2022), there are many negative and positive effects that social media has had on society. By highlighting many of these phenomena in society, whether negative or positive, they are circulated on social media platforms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To optimize the use of social media platforms, the fostering of digital literacy enabling legislators to learn how to critically evaluate data available on social media platforms, represents a basic requirement that must be taken into consideration to optimize the use of these platforms within the decision-making process. Using digital literacy to optimize the use of social media platforms within the decision-making process will enable legislators to acquire a clearer understanding of data and make informed decisions that are more accurate and reliable. Digital data literacy training can include

knowledge acquisition on how to analyze algorithms, sources, and patterns that influence audience interactions within social media platforms (Singgalen, 2024).

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CONCLUSION

Social media plays a prominent role in influencing the decision-making processes of the Iraqi Parliament. Opportunities and challenges created in the major sectors are affected. Social media can be utilized effectively to obtain a positive legislative result while controlling the risks. This paper considered the recurring themes impacted by social media within the decision-making parliamentary environment in Iraq. Results reveal that social media represents an important and decisive element within the parliamentary decision-making process. A juxtaposition of the role of social media in decision-making, based on perspectives within the Iraqi Parliament members, considers the importance of these media platforms in the decision-making process based on valuable sources of information. Consistent with the Wang et al. (2024) study that identified the important effects of social media on business, shared concerns, and decision-making, the current paper confirms the important role of social media in political, economic, and societal decision-making in Iraq. Henceforth, the need for deeper investigation within this subject, as well as the communication of best practices in the identification of themes and issues impacted by social media on decision-making, arises.

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