

## **SOCIAL MEDIA AS PLATFORM FOR ACTIVISM AMONG IRAQ YOUTH: AN ANALYSIS**

**Adeeb Obaid Hassoon\* & Prof. C.K. Puttaswamy\*\***

\*Research Scholar, Dept. of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Mysore, Mysuru. \*\*Professor and Guide, Dept. of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Mysore, Mysuru.

### **Abstract:**

*Over the years, social media has gained popularity across the world. Iraq is no exception to this trend. Social media has spread its reach and become a platform that has given voice to the voiceless. The purpose of social media today has moved beyond just entertainment. It is being used across the world for various social, political, and business needs. There have been instances where the political parties in power have used social media to influence the audience. On the other hand, there have also been instances of the youth using social media to voice out their concerns and overthrow a government. Using secondary method of research, the paper analyses the use of social media for activism among the youth in Iraq.*

**Keywords:** Social media, Protests, Iraq, Iraq youth.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social media has become an essential tool for communication and information in many parts of the world, including Iraq. Social media has changed the way people communicate, interact, and access information, making it a must-have tool for both personal and professional use. It could be said that today youth use social media beyond entertainment. It is being used for education, primary source of information and exchange of ideas across the globe. This holds true with the youth of Iraq as well. Due to advancement in technology the youth in Iraq are not just able to receive information about the current situation in the country but are also able to contribute to the information by leveraging social media platforms.

In the recent times it can be observed how the youth in Iraq are using social media platforms to counter the depiction of their country in mainstream TV

**Please cite this article as:** Adeeb Obaid Hassoon & C.K. Puttaswamy. (2023). Social media as platform for activism among Iraq youth: An analysis. *SRUJANI: Indian Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, 1(6), 123-127.

channels. In a study done by Dr.Haider Shaheed Hashim & Dr. Ali Muwafaq Flayyih on '*The role of social media in prioritizing Iraqi youth regarding political events*' it is stated that the youth of Iraq use social media sites to stay updated with current and political events.

### **Methodology**

The method of analysis is secondary research. It is research that has already been compiled, collected, organised, and published by someone else. Reports and studies by government agencies, trade associations, and other businesses in your industry are included.

Qualitative method is being adapted to analyse and understand the role of social media platform for activism among Iraq Youth. The following characteristics are shared by qualitative research methods: natural setting, researcher as participant, subject-based communication, subject intentionality, and pragmatic. Similarly, qualitative research methods are critical in developing an understanding of human and social sciences in order to discover how people think (Anas. N & Ishaq.K., 2022).

### **Analysis**

Social media has led to an unprecedented level of connectivity. People can now connect with friends and family from anywhere in the world, share updates on their lives, and stay informed about what is happening in their communities. Social media has made it possible for individuals to build virtual communities based on shared interests, beliefs, and values, and has created a platform for collective action. Around the world, social media are becoming commonplace tools for political and social activism. (Mayfield.TD., 2008).

It was observed that Iraqis use social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube to connect with friends and family, share news, opinions, promote businesses and events. The widespread use of social media in Iraq can be attributed to a few factors. First, Iraq young population with more than half of the population under the age of 25. This demographic details is more likely to be tech-savvy and to adopt new communication technologies such as social media, than older generations.

Second, Iraq has experienced a significant increase in internet penetration over the past few years. According to a report by *We Are Social* and *Hootsuite*, the number of internet Iraq increased by 24% between January 2020 and January 2021, bringing the tuber of internet users to 14 million. This increase in internet penetration has facilitated of social media usage in the country.

It is estimated that there are 700,000 Facebook users in Iraq. This indicates that some of one-third of Iraq's Internet users use social networking platforms. According to the media research firm Inter media's Survey of 2010, 21% of adults use the Internet to gather news.

By examining the preferences of young people among social networking sites, Facebook emerged as the most effective in terms of organising their priorities regarding current political events. (Hashim.H.S, Flayyih. A.M., 2021). The users of Facebook are estimated to be around 11 million. Iraqi Facebook users primarily use the platform to connect with friends and family share news and opinions and join interest groups. Many businesses in Iraq also use Facebook to promote their products and services.

On the other hand, Twitter is often used to share news and opinions, engage in political discourse, follow public figures and influencers. Instagram and YouTube are used for entertainment and educational content. Social media has become an important tool for activism and social change. Today the platform is being used by activists and journalists to share information and organising protests particularly during the 2019 anti-government protests.

The protest began with civil activists setting a date on social media calling for protest against the government in power. The situation escalated quickly resulting in the overthrowing the government. The protest spread primarily throughout Iraq's central and southern provinces. to protest corruption, unemployment, political sectarianism, inefficient public services, and interventionism.

The story of Iraq's anti-government protests was shared online in various forms like stories, live streaming from the protest camps. The protestors used Facebook as an effective tool to contradict state media, and tweeting in English to reach a global audience. During this period people took platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to share the updates about the protests, inform the others about latest updates resulting in many people stop trusting the conventional outlets (Dolan.T, Toriello. A., 2011)

Despite restriction by the government the protests found alternate ways to spread their message to the public. Once such example was use of telegram, an encryptover WhatsApp. The protesters during the preliminary posts used the hashtag #Save\_Iraqi\_people. People used live streaming to show the world how the police unleashed volleys of tear gas and stun grenades at the protesters.

In Haley Bobseine's article *Iraqi youth protesters: Who they are, what they want, and what's next* he states that the protesters would get threat calls every

morning at 5:00am asking them to stop the protest else their mothers would be killed. Such youth activism with the use of social media can be dated back to 2011. This when a group of young Iraqi intellectuals, journalists, students, government workers, and unemployed youngsters revealed their plan to stage protests against the government on social media (Srahed.J.N., Al-Shijari. S.H., 2021)

During this period the youth used social media platforms to bypass government's efforts to limit the coverage of these protests. Protesters made complete use of social media and blogging to tell the world about the protests and inform the world about the atrocities. Since February 2011, several Iraqi cities have witnessed demonstrations calling for reforms to fight corruption and improve social services. These developments have had a significant impact on the mainstream media in Iraq and the Kurdish region.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, social media use in Iraq has dramatically increased in recent years, offering fresh and effective channels for communication and information exchange in a nation ravaged by war and conflict. While social technology has given Iraqis a forum and effective communication tools. It has also provided a platform for people to openly express themselves and participate in public conversation. This is one of the biggest shifts social media has brought about in Iraq. Before the advent of social media Iraqis had very little access to information and were subject to tight government control. Social media platforms have made it possible for Iraqis to communicate, exchange knowledge, and open up about topics that were formerly considered as a taboo.

### Reference

- Al-Juboori, A. F. M. A., Fashakh, A. M., & Bayat, O. (2020). The impacts of social media on University students in Iraq. *Egyptian Informatics Journal*, 21(3), 139–144. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eij.2019.12.003>
- Al-Rawi. A. (2014). Arab Revolutions: Breaking Fear. | *The Arab Spring & Online Protests in Iraq*, Vol 8
- Al-Rawi. A. (2014). The Arab Spring and Online Protests in Iraq. *International Journal of Communication* 8.
- Anas. N & Ishaq. K, (March, 2022) Social Media Usage: 2005-2015 65% of adults now use social networking sites – a nearly tenfold jump in the past decade., Vol.5 No.1
- Bobseine.H (2019) . *Iraqi youth protesters: Who they are, what they want, and what's next*. (n.d.). Middle East Institute.

<https://www.mei.edu/publications/iraqi-youth-protesters-who-they-are-what-they-want-and-whats-next>

- *Iraqi Youth in Flux: Survey of their Perceptions and Trajectories after the 2014 Conflict with ISIS*. (2022, December 12). Arab Reform Initiative. <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/iraqi-youth-in-flux-survey-of-their-perceptions-and-trajectories-after-the-2014-conflict-with-isis/>
- Kalia, G. (2013). A Research Paper on Social media: An Innovative Educational Tool. *Issues and Ideas in Education*, 1(1), 43–50. <https://doi.org/10.15415/iie.2013.11003>
- Mingle, J., & Adams, M. (2015). Social Media Network Participation and Academic Performance In Senior High Schools in Ghana. *Library Philosophy and Practice*, 1. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3446&context=libphilprac>
- Narula, S. (2016). Role of Youth in Peace Building via New Media: A Study on Use of New Media by Youth for Peace Building Tasks. *Journal of Mass Communication & Journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.4172/2165-7912.1000311>