

The Role of Iraqi Newspaper Websites in Enhancing Public Interest in Women's Empowerment Issues

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Abstract

The researcher summarized the definition of the research problem with the main question: (What is the role of Iraqi newspaper websites in enhancing public interest in women's empowerment issues?). The most prominent objectives of the research are the following: knowing the exposure patterns and habits of female respondents using Iraqi websites concerned with women's empowerment issues, and revealing the mechanisms of the research sample's interaction with women's empowerment issues on websites. The research is of the descriptive type, and the survey method and the scientific research tool (questionnaire) were used. The researcher adopted a comprehensive inventory of the audience, represented by female teachers in public and private media departments and colleges in Iraq, except for the Kurdistan region. The research sample consisted of (187) female teachers interested in empowerment issues. woman. The research reached a set of results, the most prominent of which are: More than half of the female respondents are exposed to Iraqi websites to a moderate degree, and that most of the female respondents use (the smartphone) to browse to follow up on women's empowerment issues, and that most of the female respondents discuss women's empowerment issues with (the family), as well as On the emergence of (social issues) women's empowerment issues that female respondents prefer to pursue.

Keywords: *Women's Empowerment, Online Newspapers, Women's Empowerment Issues.*

INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment forms a fundamental and essential pillar for the advancement of Iraqi society. This empowerment entails transforming the realities of women, developing their capabilities, increasing their self-confidence, overcoming barriers to achievement, expanding their choices, and increasing opportunities for effective participation in societal progress. Consequently, women play an active role not only within the family and work environments but also at administrative and leadership levels, and in any other fields they are involved in. Empowerment supports women in organizing their abilities and developing their skills, enabling them to make suitable choices, defend their interests, and secure their basic rights as first-class citizens.

In the twenty-first century, women's empowerment issues have become a top priority globally. However, government institutions, international organizations, and civil society organizations face numerous challenges in empowering women at various levels and making them key and active partners in societal progress. These challenges peak in the Arab world in general and Iraq in particular. Despite significant achievements made by Arab and Iraqi women in various fields over recent decades, particularly in education and cultural skills, their participation remains below aspirations in many sectors such as the labor market, political engagement, and general social life.

From the above, it is evident that women in developed societies have gained the strength and capability for empowerment across all fields, thanks to the efforts of governmental and non-governmental organizations and humanitarian bodies that have worked diligently to empower women and support their various causes over the past few decades. Conversely, women in developing societies still suffer from weak empowerment in making strategic decisions that affect both personal and societal levels. This is due to the patriarchal nature of society, cultural heritage, customs, traditions, and the political system. This situation requires more efforts to remove all obstacles hindering gender justice and equality and to ensure women can access their basic rights in various fields, thereby guaranteeing societal development and better investment in human resources.

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CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Problem

The research problem is summarized in the main question: "What role do Iraqi newspaper websites play in enhancing public interest in women's empowerment issues?"

Importance of the Research

Scientific – Academic Importance: The research attempts to add scientific value to the academic media library by studying topics that have not been clearly highlighted, specifically the issue of empowering Iraqi women from a media perspective.

Practical – Professional Importance: The research findings can benefit communication officials on Iraqi newspaper websites and institutions concerned with women's empowerment issues.

Research Objectives

The research aims to achieve the following objectives:

Understanding exposure patterns and habits of the surveyed individuals using Iraqi websites interested in women's empowerment issues.

Identifying the most preferred Iraqi websites among the surveyed individuals for following women's empowerment issues.

Determining the most preferred topics related to women's empowerment on Iraqi websites among the surveyed individuals.

Understanding the mechanisms of interaction of the surveyed individuals regarding women's empowerment issues on websites.

Type and Methodology of Research

The research is classified as descriptive, relying on the survey method.

Research Population and Sample

Research Population: The statistical population includes all types of individuals considered within the research framework and objectives. The researcher identified the research population as the female academic staff in the media departments and colleges of Iraqi governmental and private universities (excluding regional universities), given their professional and academic expertise and their continuous interaction with media outlets.

Research Sample: Defined as the model that includes and reflects a portion of the original population units under study. The researcher used comprehensive enumeration of all research population units through questionnaires and scales distributed electronically and in paper form to 187 out of 246 surveyed individuals representing female academic staff in media departments and colleges (excluding regional universities) to gather their opinions on women's empowerment issues.

Research Fields

Spatial Field: Media departments and colleges in Iraqi governmental and private universities (excluding regional universities).

Temporal Field: Defined by the period from preparing the preliminary and final survey forms to completing the statistical analysis and interpretation of results.

Human Field: Includes female academic staff in media departments and colleges in Iraqi governmental and private universities (excluding regional universities).

Research Tools

The researcher relied on a questionnaire as the primary tool, suitable for the study topic and aimed at achieving the research objectives, and it is as the following:

A questionnaire form is a tool for collecting data on a specific topic through a form completed by the respondent, who holds the primary role in the process. It is used to gather information related to the beliefs and desires of the respondents, as well as facts that they are aware of and informed about. Therefore, it is primarily used in studies and research aimed at exploring the realities of current practices, opinion surveys, and individual attitudes (Al-Askari, 2004, p. 172) to obtain data that aid in addressing a particular problem (Al-Azzawi, 2008, p. 131).

Validity and Reliability Procedures

Questionnaire Tool: The researcher presented the questionnaire questions to a number of referees (experts) in the field, who indicated its suitability for application. Their agreement rate after adjustments was (94.44%) according to the following equation:

Reliability = Total agreed categories among referees / Total categories × 100

Reliability = 136 / 144 × 100 = (94.44%)

Previous Studies

The process of reviewing previous studies is essential for performing multiple tasks and demonstrating the relevance and proximity of past research to the current study by identifying the components of the research and determining the focal point of the study. This includes assessing the presence of these elements in each previous study (Sini, 2000, pp. 151-152).

The researcher reviewed several previous studies related to the main variables of the research and organized them according to different themes based on these variables.

Study by Dieb & Benneghrouzi (2023)

The researcher identified the problem of the study by investigating the strategies used by non-governmental women's organizations in Algeria to promote and advocate for issues affecting women's rights and empowerment. The study also examined the mechanisms employed by media to address issues impacting women's rights and empowerment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is categorized as descriptive research, employing a survey-analytical approach. The research sample consists of 200 respondents and includes 16 interviews with directors of non-governmental organizations.

STUDY FINDINGS

The study reached the following key conclusions:

Non-governmental organizations select media tools based on their relevance to the audience and the targeted practices.

Traditional media channels were not frequently used by non-governmental organizations, despite their effectiveness in achieving their promotional objectives.

The significant impact of non-governmental organizations' use of social media on the audience, enhancing activism and raising awareness about women's issues.

The importance of investigation, exploration, and evaluation in newly formed spaces in the empowerment process to help non-governmental organizations perform more effectively.

This study aligns with our research in terms of the empowerment variable, research sample, methodology, and tools used to study the audience. However, it differs as our research expands to include a larger sample beyond just civil society organizations.

Study by Peerzada, Bashir, & Bashir (2021)

The researchers identified the problem of the study through the following primary question: What is the role of social media in women's empowerment? This descriptive research reached the following key findings:

Social media has the potential to attract public attention and ensure accountability regarding women's rights, challenging the discrimination they face. It has helped formulate strategies to enhance women's empowerment by facilitating their access to technology.

The unprecedented use of social media by women provides opportunities to prioritize gender equality and women's rights in policy-making and media interests.

The findings indicated that the role of media is crucial for accelerating women's empowerment, leading to their economic and health empowerment.

The results showed that media always subconsciously influences societal thinking and behavior, and media outlets should portray women in a respectful and dignified manner to enhance their respect and dignity.

This study aligns with our research in terms of the variables of women's issues and empowerment, the use of new media, the survey methodology, and the use of questionnaires.

Definition of Terms

Women's Empowerment: Defined by the UN Development Fund as "the process of empowering women and increasing their awareness by providing cultural, educational, and material means so individuals can participate in decision-making and control resources." (Al-Dessouki, 2020, p. 3269).

Women's Empowerment Issues (Operationally): Topics that revolve around discussions, disputes, or questions with varying opinions and perspectives, including social, political, economic, cultural, legal, educational, psychological issues, etc.

Online Newspaper Websites: A collection of interlinked pages containing newspaper content, images, videos, and audio files published in that newspaper. These websites are hosted on the internet, accessible from any location with an internet connection, and open to the public, except for some subscription-based content. Al-Obaidi, 2022 CE, page 32

Chapter Two: Practical Results

Indicators of Survey Responses from Website Followers

Age Group Distribution

Table (1) shows the distribution of sample individuals by age group.

No.	Age group	percentage	Frequency	Rank
1	30-40 years old	47.59	89	1
2	41-50 years old	22.45	42	2
3	Less than 30 years old	14.97	28	3
4	51 years old and above	14.97	28	4
	Total	100	187	

The table above indicates the advancement of the age group (30-40) years old with (89) occurrences, constituting (47.6%) of the sample. This can be attributed to the requirement for completing master's and

doctoral studies at this age. Given the sample's bias towards women with higher degrees, the agedistribution in the table becomes logical and acceptable, with the (41-50) age group following with (42) occurrences, representing (22.5%). This group likely spent time in higher education after obtaining advanced degrees. The last two age groups, (Less than 30 years old) and (51 years old and above), both have (28) occurrences, each representing an equal percentage of (14.9%). The group (Less than 30 years old) likely consists of recent graduates with advanced degrees, while the (51 years old and above) group includes individuals who spent a considerable time in higher education, considering their acceptance rate for postgraduate studies at that time.

Educational Qualification

Table (2) shows the distribution of sample individuals according to their educational attainment.

No.	The academic achievement	percentage	Frequency	Rank
1	Master's degree	54.5	102	1
2	Doctorate (Ph.D.)	45.5	85	2
3	Total	100%	187	

The results of the table above indicate that the proportion of female lecturers in media colleges and departments holding a Master's degree is the highest, as it ranked first with (102) occurrences, representing a percentage of (54.5%). This is evident because there are more applicants pursuing a Master's degree than those pursuing a Ph.D. both within Iraq and abroad. Additionally, the percentage of appointments by the service council for holders of Master's degrees is higher than those appointed with Ph.D. degrees, indicating that (Ph.D.) holders rank second with (85) occurrences, representing a percentage of (45.5%).

Years of Academic Work

Table (3) illustrates the distribution of the sample according to years of academic work experience.

Total

NO.	Years of work experience	Percentage	Frequency	Rank
1	Less than 5 years	43.9	82	1
2	6-10 years	19.8	37	2
3	11-15	13.4	25	4
4	16 years of and above	23	43	3
5	Total	100%	187	

The results of the table above indicate that the majority of female lecturers in government and private media colleges and departments have professional experience of (Less than 5 years), as it ranked first with (82) occurrences, representing a percentage of (43.9%). These results are expected since the newly appointed researchers, aged between 30-40 years with a Master's degree, fall into this category. Following that, in the second position, are those with (16 years and above) of experience with (43) occurrences, representing (23%). Then, (6-10 years) of experience ranked third with (37) occurrences, accounting for (19.8%). Meanwhile, the category of (11-15 years) of experience ranked fourth with (25) occurrences, representing (13.4%).

Secondly: Patterns Of Audience Engagement with Iraqi Websites Concerned with Women's Empowerment Issues

Intensity of Exposure to Iraqi Websites

NO.	Exposure Intensity:	Percentage	Frequency	Rank
1	Moderate	53.5	100	1
2	High	40.11	75	2
3	Low	6.42	12	3
4	Total	%100	187	

The results of the table above indicate that the majority of the respondents are exposed to electronic websites to a moderate extent, as it ranked first with (107) occurrences, accounting for (57.2%). This can be attributed to their busy schedules with teaching tasks at work and family responsibilities, which limits the time available

for exposure. Following that, in the second position, is the category of high exposure with (51) occurrences, representing (27.3%). Subsequently, low exposure ranked third with (29) occurrences, accounting for (15.5%).

This underscores the importance of the role of electronic websites in enhancing the public's interest, especially in women's empowerment issues and their various topics, as will be further illustrated in the subsequent table (Table 7) below.

Device Used for Browsing

Table (5) illustrates the device used for browsing to follow women's empowerment issues addressed on Iraqi electronic websites.

NO.	Device Used for Browsing:	Percentage	Frequency	Rank
1	Smartphone	82.65	181	1
2	Laptop	11.87	26	2
3	Tablet (iPad)	3.65	8	3
4	Desktop Computer	1.83	4	4
5	Total	%100	2019	

Note: The answer may include selecting more than one alternative

The results of the table above indicate that the device most commonly used for browsing and following by the majority of female lecturers in government and private media colleges and departments is the smartphone. It ranked first with (181) occurrences, representing (82.65%). Following that, in the second position, is the laptop with (26) occurrences, accounting for (11.87%). Subsequently, the tablet (iPad) ranked third with (8) occurrences, representing (3.65%). Meanwhile, the desktop computer ranked fourth with (4) occurrences, accounting for (1.83%). This is because smartphones have features not available in other devices, such as their small size, portability, and the abundance of applications that can replace dozens of other electronic devices in one compact device.

Preferred Iraqi Electronic News Websites Interested in Women's Empowerment Issues

Table (6) illustrates the top Iraqi electronic news websites interested in women's empowerment issues preferred for following.

NO.	Preferred Iraqi Electronic News Websites Interested in Women's Empowerment Issues:	Percentage	Frequency	Rank
1	- Al-Sabah Newspaper website	35.05	129	1
2	- Al-Zaman Newspaper website	21.20	78	2
3	- Tareeq Al-Shaab Newspaper website	12.77	47	3
4	- Al-Mada Newspaper website	11.96	44	4
5	- Al-Zawraa Newspaper website	4.35	16	5
6	- Al-Sabah Al-Jadeed Newspaper website	2.99	11	7
7	- Al-Bayyna Al-Jadeeda Newspaper website	2.99	11	7
18	- Al-Alam Newspaper website	2.17	8	8
9	- Al-Dustoor Newspaper website	1.63	6	9
10	- Al-Taakhi Newspaper website	1.09	4	10
	- Other	3.80	14	6
	Total	%100	368	

For government and private media colleges and departments, the preferred Iraqi electronic news websites interested in women's empowerment issues are as follows:

Al-Sabah Newspaper website: ranked first with (129) occurrences, accounting for (35.05%).

Al-Zaman Newspaper website: ranked second with (78) occurrences, representing (21.20%).

Tareeq Al-Shaab Newspaper website: ranked third with (47) occurrences, accounting for (12.77%).

This can be interpreted as these three websites being the most focused on women's issues. Al-Sabah Newspaper is considered the prominent Iraqi newspaper currently, being official, published daily, staffed by specialized personnel, and funded to achieve the widest circulation meeting public needs. Al-Zaman Newspaper, on the other hand, is one of the oldest and most reputable Iraqi newspapers, widely followed by the public. Tareeq Al-Shaab Newspaper is known as a partisan Iraqi newspaper with a wide following and a focus on women's issues.

The categories (Al-Mada Newspaper website, Al-Zawraa Newspaper website, Al-Sabah Al-Jadeed Newspaper website, Al-Bayna Al-Jadeeda Newspaper website, Al-Alam Newspaper website, Al-Dustoor Newspaper website, Al-Taakhi Newspaper website, Other) ranked from fourth to tenth, representing percentages ranging from (11.96%) to (1.09%).

Top Preferred Women's Empowerment Issues to Follow

Table (7) illustrates the top women's empowerment issues preferred for following on Iraqi electronic websites.

NO.	Top Preferred Women's Empowerment Issues to Follow:	Percentage	Frequency	Rank
1	Social	26.99	159	1
2	Cultural	13.58	80	2
3	Educational	13.58	80	2
4	Psychological	12.90	76	3
5	Political	8.83	52	4
6	Educational	8.49	50	5
7	Economic	5.60	33	6
8	Sports	5.09	30	7
9	Legal	4.41	26	8
10	Other	0.51	3	9
	Total	%100	589	

Note: The answer may include selecting more than one alternative.

The results of the table above indicate that the top women's empowerment issues followed by female lecturers in government and private media colleges and departments are as follows:

Social: ranked first with (159) occurrences, accounting for (26.99%).

Cultural and Educational: tied for second place with (80) occurrences each, representing (13.58%).

Psychological: ranked third with (76) occurrences, accounting for (12.90%).

This highlights the interest of the respondents in these issues as they are directly related to their personal and familial life needs. Meanwhile, the categories (Political, Educational, Economic, Sports, Legal) ranked from fourth to ninth, representing percentages ranging from (8.83%) to (0.51%).

Thirdly: Interaction with Women's Empowerment Issues Addressed on Iraqi Electronic Websites

With Whom Women's Empowerment Issues Are Discussed

Table (8) illustrates with whom women's empowerment issues are discussed, as followed on Iraqi electronic websites.

NO.	With Whom Women's Empowerment Issues Are Discussed:	Percentage	Frequency	Rank
1	- Family	24.47	115	1
2	- Friends	22.77	107	2
3	- Colleagues	22.34	105	3
4	- Students	12.13	57	4
5	- Social media platforms	11.06	52	5
6	- Scientific conferences and discussion sessions	7.23	34	6
	Total	%100	470	

Note: You can choose more than one option.

The results of the table above indicate that the primary individuals with whom female lecturers in government and private media colleges and departments discuss women's empowerment issues are as follows:

Family: ranked first with (115) occurrences, representing (24.47%).

Friends: ranked second with (107) occurrences, accounting for (22.77%).

Colleagues: ranked third with (105) occurrences, representing (22.34%).

This can be interpreted as the respondents having more trust, freedom, and time to discuss their issues with family members, followed by close friends. Colleagues come next because they share interests, tasks, and responsibilities within the work environment. Meanwhile, the categories (Students, Social media platforms, Scientific conferences and discussion sessions) ranked from fourth to sixth, representing percentages ranging from (12.13%) to (7.23%).

Nature of Interaction with Women's Empowerment Issues

Table (9) illustrates the nature of interaction with women's empowerment issues addressed on Iraqi electronic websites.

NO.	Nature of Interaction with Women's Empowerment Issues:	Percentage	Frequency	Rank
1	Sending the topic to friends	25.33	97	1
2	Sharing the topic	21.93	84	2
3	Commenting on the topic	18.02	69	3
4	Engaging in dialogue or conversation with specialists	15.93	61	4
5	Saving the text	8.88	34	5
6	Saving the article link	6.53	25	6
	Printing the article	1.57	6	7
	Other / No interaction	1.83	7	8
	Total	%100	383	

Note: You can choose more than one option.

The results of the table above indicate that the primary nature of interaction among female lecturers in government and private media colleges and departments with women's empowerment issues is as follows:

Sending the topic to friends: ranked first with (97) occurrences, representing (25.33%).

Sharing the topic: ranked second with (84) occurrences, accounting for (21.93%).

Commenting on the topic: ranked third with (69) occurrences, representing (18.02%).

This suggests that the respondents engage in sharing information, ideas, and opinions about women's issues among themselves using digital communication applications for ease of participation and interaction through

comments. Meanwhile, the categories (Engaging in dialogue or conversation with specialists, Saving the text, Saving the article link, Printing the article, Other / No interaction) ranked from fourth to eighth, representing percentages ranging from (15.93%) to (1.83%).

The Mechanisms Used to Follow Women's Empowerment Issues

Table (10) illustrates the mechanisms used to follow women's empowerment issues on Iraqi electronic websites.

NO.	The mechanisms used to follow women's empowerment issues are:	Percentage	Frequency	Rank
2	Through social media platforms	60.24	153	1
3	Directly accessing the newspaper's website	24.02	61	2
4	Via a link sent by friends	15.75	40	3
5	Total	%100	254	

Note: You can choose more than one option.

The results of the table indicate that the most prominent mechanism adopted by female lecturers in government and private media colleges and departments to follow women's empowerment issues is primarily through social media platforms. It ranked first with (153) occurrences, representing (60.24%). Following that is direct access to the newspaper's website, ranked second with (61) occurrences, accounting for (24.02%). Then, through a link sent by friends, ranked third with (40) occurrences, representing (15.75%).

This can be explained by the ease of access to social media platforms and the high exposure levels compared to other media outlets. Direct access to the newspaper's website reflects the respondents' primary interest in accessing the latest journalistic content related to women's issues directly from the newspapers. Additionally, access to these issues can be facilitated through following links shared by friends who share similar interests.

Recommendations

Raising awareness among women about their fundamental legal rights and their potential to combat violence and discrimination against them, to emphasize their role within the family as the nucleus in societal development.

The necessity for media outlets to alter the stereotypical image of women through intensive and diverse media campaigns, by highlighting women's roles as active citizens, visionaries, and critical thinkers, shaping a modern image that showcases their capability to achieve accomplishments across all domains.

Encouraging women to enhance their self-capacities through participation in training programs and educational courses that enhance their competencies and empower them to make informed decisions and choices.

Establishing legislative and legal measures to prevent gender discrimination in employment and responsibilities, promoting equal opportunities within the workplace, and taking actions to encourage women's access to high-level administrative positions, fostering their integration into the workforce beyond traditional roles limited to them.

Efforts must be consolidated and coordination established between non-governmental organizations and governmental institutions concerned with women's issues regarding the formulation of policies and developmental plans aimed at enhancing women's empowerment in all its aspects. Monitoring and evaluation of implemented policies are also essential.

Conducting similar and in-depth scientific studies in the field of women's empowerment to identify the real obstacles behind the lack of empowerment of Iraqi women, especially in the current stage given the societal changes, developments, and modernization across all sectors.

Organizing conferences, seminars, and workshops to elucidate the role of women and their right to active participation and decision-making in nation-building, while educating them on all aspects of life to uplift their status.

Establishing centers dedicated to women's empowerment issues that provide accurate and authentic statistics and data concerning women's realities, encouraging them towards educational and developmental empowerment for societal advancement.

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