



## Designing a Comprehensive Framework for Political Marketing Models: Integrating Traditional and Digital Strategies in Modern Electoral Campaigns

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### **Abstract:**

This study proposes and empirically tests a comprehensive political marketing framework tailored to the socio-political context of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. As the region undergoes a complex democratic transition, electoral campaigns face the challenge of balancing traditional cultural expectations with modern digital engagement. Despite increasing scholarly attention to political marketing globally, limited research has explored its integrated application in emerging democracies such as Kurdistan. In this regard with using a mixed-methods approach, the study was conducted in two phases. The first, qualitative phase involved 17 in-depth interviews and focus groups with campaign managers, party media experts, and voters across four provinces. Thematic analysis revealed key behavioral, cultural, and communicative patterns influencing campaign success. Based on these insights, a revised conceptual model was developed. In the second, quantitative phase, a structured survey was administered to 389 voters using stratified random sampling. Data were analyzed using multiple regression and path analysis in SPSS. Results demonstrated that digital strategy use, cultural-emotional resonance, message credibility, and voter engagement significantly influence campaign effectiveness, which in turn strongly predicts voter participation. Religious framing and campaign tone showed more limited effects. The study offers both theoretical and practical contributions by integrating contextualized variables into a validated model of political marketing. It provides a practical roadmap for political actors to design emotionally resonant, digitally empowered, and culturally adaptive campaigns that enhance voter mobilization and democratic stability in transitional regions. **Keywords:** Political Marketing, Traditional Strategies, Digital Strategies, Electoral Campaigns.



## 1. Introduction

Nowadays Political marketing has evolved as an essential component of election campaigns globally, combining communication, branding, and voter engagement strategies. The available evidence shows in recent decades, political communication has undergone a significant transition. Traditional political marketing, which heavily relied on more conventional communication channels such as print media, television, and grassroots mobilization, is now integrating more complex and multifaceted strategies. These strategies integrate media management, branding, positioning, and voter segmentation, methods once exclusive to commercial enterprises. This broadening scope is highlighted by the manner electoral campaigns are managed today, as comprehensive strategic planning exercises incorporating extensive market research, message tailoring, and outreach efforts (Harris, 2001). Furthermore, these campaigns increasingly employ targeted voter outreach strategies traditionally uncommon in political arenas.

The digital revolution has been a pivotal force reshaping political campaign dynamics over the past two decades. Social media platforms, digital advertising tools, and online engagement mechanisms now occupy central roles in political marketing. Politicians and parties leverage sophisticated digital platforms as vital components of campaign strategy, deploying data-driven methods for micro-targeting, real-time messaging, and interactive communication with voters. This digital transformation has helped campaigns circumvent traditional media gatekeepers and reach voters directly, significantly altering the ways in which political marketing is conceptualized and implemented (Bright, 2019).

Despite the notable advances in political marketing theory and practice, existing models suffer from significant limitations, particularly in their compartmentalized approach to traditional and digital strategies. Many models focus solely on either traditional marketing frameworks, such as the 4P model (Product, Price, Place, Promotion), or on digital tactics that prioritize online engagement and data analytics. This separation fails to acknowledge the reality of modern electoral campaigns, which operate in “omnichannel communication environments” that integrate both offline and online mechanisms (Cui et al, 2020; Singh, Bisaria; 2024). Therefore, the lack of comprehensive frameworks that capture the “synergistic effects” and nuanced interactions between these channels is a critical gap in the literature. So, it seems that effective political marketing requires an integrated approach that considers how traditional and digital strategies can work together to enhance voter engagement and campaign effectiveness (Shkolenko et al, 2025). In this regard, designing a comprehensive and coherent framework that can bring these two approaches together in a combined model is a serious necessity and a research gap.



Alongside the evolving practices of political marketing and electoral campaigning in many established and emerging democracies around the world, the unique context of countries such as Iraq—and more specifically, the Kurdistan Region—presents both distinct challenges and promising opportunities for this field. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq, as a nascent democracy situated in a geopolitically sensitive area with complex ethnic, religious, and cultural dynamics, possesses a distinctive socio-political structure. With more than three decades of electoral experience since the first parliamentary elections in 1992, and the central role of prominent regional parties such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and the Gorran Movement, an electoral culture has taken root to a considerable extent. However, despite these institutional developments, traditional tribal affiliations and the influence of religious leaders continue to play a significant role in shaping public opinion and mobilizing voters. Furthermore, emerging challenges such as declining public participation, a widening digital divide between generations, and the absence of targeted electoral messaging mechanisms have increasingly constrained the effectiveness of political campaigns in the region. According to the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), voter turnout in the 2024 Kurdistan parliamentary elections stood at approximately 72%, yet concerns were raised about transparency and allegations of electoral irregularities in some constituencies (IHEC, 2024).

Given that existing political marketing models in the Kurdistan Region often focus exclusively on either traditional or digital strategies—and have not been sufficiently localized to reflect the region's complex socio-political landscape—the development of a comprehensive framework tailored to such environments is both timely and necessary. Such a framework could enhance electoral participation, strengthen political transparency, and ultimately contribute to democratic stability.

In this regard, this research seeks to bridge this gap by designing an integrated conceptual model that not only combines the strengths of conventional and digital campaigning but also incorporates the unique cultural, tribal, and religious dynamics of the Kurdistan Region. By undertaking this study, our aim is to offer a scientifically grounded and practically applicable framework that can assist political actors in the region in designing and implementing more effective campaigns, increasing voter turnout, and reinforcing democratic institutions in a sustainable and locally responsive manner. So, this study aims to answer the following core question: "What is the comprehensive model for integrating traditional and digital strategies in modern electoral campaigns within the Kurdistan Region, and what are its key dimensions and components?"

## **2- Literature and Empirical Background Review**

### **2.1. political marketing**

Political marketing is a dynamic field that applies marketing principles to political contexts, aiming to influence public opinion and voter behavior. Political marketing involves the



application of various marketing techniques by political actors to achieve their organizational goals. It encompasses both descriptive aspects, explaining the dynamics of political exchanges, and prescriptive elements, offering strategies for engaging constituents (Perannagari, Chakrabarti; 2019).

The concept of marketing has significantly evolved over time, expanding well beyond its traditional association with commercial products and services to encompass the activities of nonbusiness entities, including political organizations (Kotler & Levy, 1969). Political parties, by virtue of their defined missions, structured hierarchies, internal competition, and formalized membership systems, clearly align with the characteristics of nonbusiness organizations (Katz & Mair, 1994). Much like corporate entities, these parties invest substantial effort in promoting their policy agendas and mobilizing support to secure electoral success (Lees-Marshment, 2001).

Political marketing, in this context, refers to the deliberate use of marketing principles and tools by political actors to advance the strategic objectives of their organizations (Ingram & Lees-Marshment, 2002). It functions both descriptively—by analyzing the exchange processes that underpin political interactions—and prescriptively—by offering insights into voter behavior, identifying potential supporters, and guiding the design of persuasive campaign strategies. The roots of this approach can be traced back to Stanley Kelley, who used marketing concepts to explore techniques of mass persuasion in political propaganda (Scammell, 1999). The formal recognition of "ideas" as a marketable entity by the American Marketing Association in its 1985 revision of the marketing definition further legitimized the inclusion of political marketing within the broader marketing discipline. In summary, political marketing is evolving rapidly, influenced by digital technologies and changing voter behaviors. The field continues to grapple with the implications of these changes for democratic processes and the nature of political engagement.

## 2.2. Election campaigns

The term *campaign*, in its literal sense, conveys meanings such as military expedition, successive attacks, struggle, movement, or assault (Aryan pour, 1963). In the context of political communication and marketing, a campaign refers to a comprehensive strategic plan encompassing a series of distinct yet interconnected and coordinated communication activities, implemented across various media and marketing channels over a defined period of time (Dehghan Tarzjani, 2019).

In developed societies, the concept of a campaign is well understood and widely applied. Citizens frequently encounter campaigns in economic, political, and cultural planning, and particularly as instruments for addressing socio-political and economic crises—most notably during election periods. Historically, political campaigns have been among the most powerful tools for securing or maintaining power and influence. The growing sophistication and effectiveness of these campaigns have elevated their status, turning them into professionalized



endeavors within competitive political landscapes. Several contemporary factors underscore the increasingly multidimensional and specialized nature of campaign management. These include: the expanding involvement of experts from various academic disciplines in campaign strategy, a noticeable decline in traditional forms of political participation, the growing complexity of voter behavior across social segments, the diversification of media platforms, and the increasing vulnerability of electoral constituencies. Together, these dynamics have transformed political campaigning into a complex, interdisciplinary field requiring scientific insight and strategic precision ([Lees-Marshment et al., 2019](#); [Cwalina et al., 2015](#)).

### 2.3 Political Marketing and Voter Behavior

The interaction between political marketing strategies and voter behavior has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate, particularly in the context of emerging democracies and shifting patterns of political engagement. A number of foundational studies have contributed to our understanding of how voters perceive, process, and respond to political marketing efforts.

[Hayes & Mcallister \(1996\)](#) propose that floating voters—those without strong partisan affiliation—tend to possess the lowest levels of political knowledge and demonstrate the least consistent participation in electoral processes. Consequently, they are seen as the least likely group to be effectively persuaded through political marketing. Based on this insight, the authors recommend that political parties initiate marketing efforts long before the formal campaign period, particularly targeting voters who make their decisions one to two years prior to elections. In the Greek context, [Yannas \(2002\)](#) finds that mass media play a substantial role in shaping electoral dynamics. Interestingly, due to low public trust in state-run media, private media outlets are perceived as more credible and influential. His study also reveals that many voters engage in strategic voting, altering their preferences in response to anticipated benefits or perceived party advantages—a behavior that reflects a rational-choice model of political behavior in Greek society.

Expanding on voter perception, [Apospori and Millar \(2005\)](#) identify a significant skepticism among the electorate regarding the use of marketing tactics in politics. Their research shows that over 50% of surveyed voters hold a negative view of political marketing strategies, viewing them as manipulative or insincere, which in turn affects the perceived legitimacy of the campaign process. [Pistolas \(2008\)](#) explores the degree to which voters from different demographic segments recognize and internalize the impact of political marketing on their own decision-making. While most respondents acknowledged the general effectiveness of political marketing on the broader electorate, many were reluctant to admit being personally influenced. Interestingly, among the various tools examined, television advertising and opinion polling emerged as having the greatest perceived impact, while other techniques were viewed as largely ineffective or negligible.



These findings collectively support the argument that political marketing is both influential and contested—its presence widely recognized, but its personal effect often denied. This paradox highlights the complexity of voter psychology and underscores the importance of culturally tailored campaign strategies. In regions like the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where political behavior is influenced by tribal affiliations, media trust, and shifting loyalties, understanding these dynamics is essential for the development of effective hybrid marketing frameworks.

## 2.4 Political Marketing Strategies and limitations

Despite the growing recognition of political marketing as both a theoretical framework and a practical approach in modern campaign management, many political organizations still lack the dynamism required to fully leverage the potential of contemporary political advertising techniques. This limitation can be attributed to several structural and contextual factors.

Firstly, the realm of politics is often deeply rooted in traditionalism, where political actors operate within the normative and cultural expectations of society. As a result, political institutions tend to exhibit a high degree of stability and resistance to rapid innovation. Secondly, because political organizations deal with large and heterogeneous audiences—the electorate—they typically rely on mass communication tools, rather than investing in personalized or targeted messaging. This reduces the potential impact of more nuanced, individualized marketing approaches. Thirdly, unlike commercial marketing, political marketing is not a continuous activity. Instead, its intensity tends to peak only during pre-election periods, leading to a campaign-centric mindset that undermines long-term engagement strategies (Kippen., 2005).

At the national level, political marketing strategies often include professionally produced television advertisements, the strategic use of media relations experts, campaign tours by party leaders, and televised debates. Within local constituencies, traditional promotional tools such as printed brochures and local newspapers are still commonly used. Although door-to-door canvassing has declined, voter outreach via telephone polling has become increasingly common for gauging public support. In recent years, one of the most significant innovations has been the use of party websites, which are regularly updated and occasionally supplemented by the online presence of amateur candidates, contributing to a new layer of digital interaction and voter engagement. This evolving mix of traditional and digital tactics reflects a gradual but uneven shift in political communication—where legacy tools remain influential, yet the digital transformation of campaigns is steadily gaining momentum. The challenge remains for political organizations, particularly in transitional democracies, to adopt hybrid strategies that balance cultural constraints with the opportunities of data-driven, interactive campaigning (Marland., 2003).

## 2.5. political marketing tools





Political parties often employ a range of marketing tools as part of their broader electoral campaign strategies. The study of political marketing involves more than just understanding campaign messaging—it focuses on how specific marketing instruments can be utilized to enhance both the technical and strategic aspects of political campaigning. As [Parasuraman \(1997\)](#) emphasizes, the core of political marketing lies in exploring how political actors apply marketing tools to achieve influence, persuasion, and ultimately, electoral success.

In this context, political marketing tools can generally be categorized into two main types: **Traditional tools**, that are foundational methods used by political actors to influence voter behavior and win elections. The main tools include television, radio, newspapers, face-to-face communication, and word of mouth. Each tool has unique strengths and is often chosen based on the target audience and campaign goals. **Modern tools** use a range of digital tools, with social media platforms, social bots, and sentiment analysis being the most prominent. Social media marketing, especially on platforms like Twitter, has become central due to its ability to reach and engage large audiences quickly and interactively. This tool also offers unique advantages and challenges which can be seen in the table below.

Table 1. Key Modern-Traditional Political Marketing Tools

	Tool/Approach	Main Features & Advantages	Key Differences/Limitations	Citations
Modern	Social Media Marketing	Direct engagement, rapid information spread, interactive content, targeted advertising	Fragmented research, mostly US-focused, lacks influencer/ads focus	<a href="#">Abid et al.,2023</a> <a href="#">Vergeer., 2015</a>
	Twitter Campaigning	Real-time updates, viral messaging, network effects, public dialogue	Limited to platform users, message brevity, echo chambers	<a href="#">Vergeer., 2015</a>
	Social Bots	Automated message amplification, agenda setting, artificial support creation	Can be detected, risk of backlash, ethical concerns	<a href="#">Vasilkova et al., 2019</a>
	Sentiment Analysis	Gauges public opinion, tracks campaign impact, informs strategy	Advanced AI tools (e.g., GPT-3) are resource-intensive	<a href="#">Rodríguez-Ibáñez et al.,2023</a>
	Digital Media (General)	Increases participation, information access, can polarize or build trust	Effects vary by context (democracy type, media literacy)	<a href="#">Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2023</a>
Traditional	Television	Wide reach, visual and emotional impact, trusted by many age groups	Strong influence on media trust and candidate evaluation, especially among older voters	<a href="#">Towner &amp; Muñoz, 2016</a>



	Radio	Broad accessibility, especially in rural areas, cost-effective	Good for repeated messaging and reaching non-readers	<a href="#">Towner &amp; Muñoz, 2016</a>
	Newspapers	Detailed information, credibility, targeted to literate and engaged audiences	Depth of coverage, trusted by traditional audiences	<a href="#">Towner &amp; Muñoz, 2016</a>
	Face-to-face (Rallies, Canvassing)	Personal connection, direct persuasion, builds trust and loyalty	Most effective for building strong voter relationships	<a href="#">Ozturk &amp; Coban., 2020</a>
	Word of Mouth (WOM)	Peer influence, high credibility, spreads organically	Acts as a mediator, amplifying the effect of other tools	<a href="#">Ozturk &amp; Coban., 2020</a>

Understanding the function and impact of both traditional and modern tools is essential for developing an integrated approach to campaign strategy—particularly in political environments where cultural norms, media access, and technological infrastructure vary widely.

2.6. Political Marketing Prominent Models

The literature on political marketing models highlights a variety of frameworks characterized by their distinct features and operational mechanisms. These models help explain how political parties and candidates use marketing strategies to win support and elections. These models have evolved over time and can be grouped into several main categories, each with distinct characteristics. The most prominent political marketing models are typically categorized into three main groups which is shown in the table below.

Table 2. Main Groups of Political Marketing Models

Model Group	Key Characteristics	Citations
Product-Oriented	Focuses on the party/candidate’s core values, ideology, and policies; minimal adaptation to voter preferences. The party “sells” what it stands for, regardless of market demand.	<a href="#">Wring, 1997</a> <a href="#">Bingarrayni, Kholisoh., 2021</a>
Sales-Oriented	Emphasizes persuasive communication and campaign techniques to “sell” the party or candidate, often using advertising and media to shape perceptions, but with limited adaptation of the core product.	<a href="#">Wring, 1997</a> <a href="#">Bingarrayni, Kholisoh., 2021</a>
Market-Oriented	Adapts policies, messages, and strategies based on systematic research into voter needs and preferences; treats voters as customers and tailors offerings to maximize appeal.	<a href="#">Ormrod., 2021</a> <a href="#">Wring, 1997</a> <a href="#">Bingarrayni, Kholisoh., 2021</a>





These three fundamental models illustrate a clear progression in how political campaigns approach voters. The Product-Oriented model is the most traditional, essentially pushing a party or candidate's fixed ideology with little regard for public opinion. Moving forward, the Sales-Oriented model shifts focus to actively persuading voters through advertising and campaign tactics, aiming to "sell" a consistent political offering while still limiting fundamental changes to the core message. Finally, the Market-Oriented model represents a significant evolution; it treats voters like customers, actively shaping policies and messages based on systematic research into their needs and preferences. This approach seeks to maximize appeal by directly responding to voter demands. Together, these models showcase a transition from an internal, conviction-driven stance to external persuasion, ultimately embracing a voter-centric strategy that closely mirrors commercial marketing principles.

Of course, we must keep in mind the way political campaigns engage with people is always changing. We've moved far beyond simple old methods, now embracing dynamic, connected strategies. This shift has led to evolving and hybrid models that truly capture how complex political communication has become in our digital, fragmented, and emotionally driven world. These newer approaches recognize that to connect effectively in politics today, we need a broader view of how influence and interaction actually work. It's not just about reaching traditional voters anymore; it's about involving all sorts of different groups, using every digital tool available, and understanding the very nature of political stories in fresh ways. These models are a big leap from older ideas, built to create deeper, more meaningful connections in today's intricate political landscape which is shown in the table below.

Table 3. Evolving and Hybrid Models of Political Marketing Models

Model Group	Key Characteristics	Citations
Stakeholder-Oriented Models	Expand influence beyond just voters to include other crucial groups like <b>party members, donors, and lobbyists</b> . The focus here is on <b>managing relationships and exchanging value</b> across these diverse groups.	<a href="#">Ormrod., 2021</a> <a href="#">Ormrod., 2020</a>
Digital and Omnichannel Models	Seamlessly integrate digital tools, social media, and data-driven targeting. The goal is to reach and engage voters consistently across multiple platforms and touchpoints.	<a href="#">Oklander, Haidaienko., 2021</a>



Political Marketing 3.0	Centers on co-creation, deep emotional engagement, and the use of post-truth narratives. This model directly reflects the most recent trends and shifts in political communication.	Abid et al.,2023 Abid et al.,2023 Verdugo,,Reyero Simón., 2021
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Now, considering the listed models, we can show their main Characteristics as shown in the table below.

Table 4: Characteristics of Main Political Marketing Models

Model Type	Voter Research	Message Adaptation	Stakeholder Focus	Digital Integration	Citations
Product-Oriented	Low	Low	Low	Low	Wring, 1997 Bingarrayni & Kholisoh., 2021
Sales-Oriented	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Wring, 1997 Bingarrayni & Kholisoh., 2021
Market-Oriented	High	High	Moderate	High	Wring, 1997 Bingarrayni & Kholisoh., 2021
Stakeholder/3.0	High	High	High	High	Ormrod., 2020 Ormrod., 2021 Verdugo, Reyero Simón., 2021

3. Recache Background

Political marketing, like commercial marketing, seeks to influence behavior, but in the political arena, the target is the voter, and the "product" is a candidate, policy, or ideology. Designing a comprehensive framework for political marketing models requires integrating various elements, including understanding voter behavior, crafting effective messages, utilizing appropriate channels, and evaluating campaign effectiveness. Several studies have contributed to the development of such frameworks.

Studies on designing a comprehensive framework for political marketing models integrate traditional marketing theories with contemporary digital and behavioral insights. They often propose models that incorporate voter segmentation, digital media, and ethical considerations to help political actors adapt to changing environments. A summary of these studies is provided in the table below.

Table 5. A Summary of Recache Background

Author(s)	Year	Research Method	Key Results
Ormrod	2006	Conceptual Model	Proposed a conceptual model of political market orientation where all party members are sensitive to internal and external stakeholders' attitudes, needs,



Author(s)	Year	Research Method	Key Results
		Development	and wants, synthesizing these within a framework of constraint.
Strömbäck	2009	Conceptual Framework Development	Suggested a framework for comparing political market-orientation, indicating that political marketing is a strategy that focuses on achieving organizational goals.
Lees-Marshment	2014	Integrated Model Development	Developed a model of political marketing that unifies two campaign types into a single, permanent marketing framework, providing a foundation for students of political science and marketing.
Weber	2014	Theoretical Framework Development	Proposed a testable conceptual framework of political marketing strategy modes, aiming to understand how political marketing strategy is developed, functions, and the antecedents for its success. This framework uses extant research and campaign examples to create a parsimonious model of campaign modes and strategy choices.
Savigny & Temple	2010	Theoretical Analysis	Argued that existing political marketing models, often grounded in management marketing theory, are flawed by assuming a passive media role and highlighted the media's active influence in shaping political messages.
O'Shaughnessy	2002	Theoretical Inquiry	Examined the application of ethical theory to political marketing, introducing principal ethical theories relevant to marketing and their illumination of political marketing issues.
Perannagari & Chakrabarti	2019	Theoretical Synthesis	Defined political marketing as the application of different marketing techniques and concepts by political actors to achieve political organization goals. This concept aids in understanding constituents, recognizing sympathizers, and providing recommendations to achieve organizational objectives.
Ra Verma, & Chandel	2019	Empirical Investigation (Survey)	Developed a conceptual model and empirically tested the impact of market orientation, market research, and building and managing a strong image on political marketing success. Findings indicated that market orientation, market research, and strong image management positively influence political marketing success.
Ahmad	2019	Conceptual Framework (Content Analysis)	Proposed a conceptual framework to explore modes of knowledge production in political marketing, revealing that the adaptation and use of the internet and social media contribute to operational, rudimentary-conceptual, or established-conceptual knowledge.
Behnampour et al.	2021	Qualitative (Grounded Theory)	Designed a model for agenda-setting of electoral policies using a political marketing approach, identifying executive issues, party system weakness, misunderstanding of political marketing, and legal problems as contextual factors. Strategies included solving executive/supervisory problems, reforming political marketing understanding, and strengthening the party system.

The cumulative body of literature on political marketing offers a multi-dimensional understanding of how marketing principles—rooted in commercial theory—can be effectively applied in the political domain. These studies reveal that political marketing is no longer limited to election-time advertising but has evolved into a strategic, ongoing, and multidimensional process involving message development, voter segmentation, behavioral targeting, and channel integration.



While earlier models (e.g., Ormrod, 2006; Strömbäck, 2009) provided a foundation by framing political marketing as market-oriented behavior, more recent contributions—such as Lees-Marshment's (2014) integrated approach and Weber's (2014) strategy mode typologies—reflect a deeper concern with adapting to changing voter expectations, media environments, and ethical considerations.

#### 4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to develop, validate, and refine a context-sensitive political marketing framework specifically tailored for modern electoral campaigns in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This integrative approach is chosen to ensure both contextual depth and empirical rigor, enabling the exploration of local socio-political dynamics while also testing theoretical relationships statistically.

In the first phase, the study utilizes a qualitative exploratory approach aimed at uncovering the real-world application and perception of political marketing strategies—both traditional and digital. To achieve this, a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions will be conducted. Participants will include campaign managers from major political parties (KDP, PUK, Gorran, and New Generation), digital and media consultants, field-level campaign organizers, and voters. Additionally, focus groups will be formed with a deliberate mix of youth, women, and ethnically or tribally affiliated participants, capturing the diversity of perspectives in the region. The qualitative data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, employing **MAXQDA** software for coding and interpretation across open, axial, and selective coding stages.

The second phase of the research employs a quantitative confirmatory approach, designed to empirically test the conceptual model derived from both the literature and the findings of the qualitative stage. A structured questionnaire will be developed based on validated scales from prior studies, refined through a pilot test with 30 participants to ensure clarity and reliability. Based on the estimated sample size in an unlimited population, 385 people are needed, then 400 questionnaires were distributed. Ultimately, 389 complete questionnaires were returned, all of which were used. The survey distributed among a stratified random sample, selected across key districts including Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Duhok, and Halabja to ensure geographic and demographic representativeness. The reliability of the questionnaires will be verified by 3 university professors, and their validity will be examined by calculating Cronbach's alpha. Data collected in this phase will be analyzed using regression and *path analysis* techniques with **SPSS** software.

#### 5. Research Findings

##### 5.1. Qualitative Phase Findings



A: Participant Profile and Sampling Rationale

In the qualitative phase of the research, 17 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders involved in political campaigning across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. These participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance, diversity of perspectives, and active roles within the electoral landscape. The sample included party officials, media advisors, campaign field organizers, digital strategists, and voters representing both tribal and urban constituencies. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached—that is, the point at which additional interviews yielded no new themes or concepts relevant to the study.

To ensure a rich contextual understanding, participants were selected from four major cities—Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Duhok, and Halabja—and spanned across multiple political parties, including the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Gorran Movement, New Generation, and independent or unaffiliated voices. The demographic characteristics of these people are as follows.

Table 6. Demographic Grouping of Interview Participants (n = 17)

<i>Grouping Criterion</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Number of Participants</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Political Affiliation</i>	KDP, PUK, Gorran, New Generation	11	Party-affiliated campaign staff and officials
	Independent/Non-affiliated	6	Consultants, civil society representatives, and voters
<i>Role in Campaign</i>	Party Leadership & Advisors	5	Senior strategists, political consultants
	Media & Digital Managers	4	Social media coordinators, TV/radio messaging experts
	Field Organizers	3	Constituency-level mobilizers and outreach workers
	General Voters	5	Tribal elders, young voters, and non-partisan community members
<i>Gender</i>	Male	10	Diverse backgrounds (political, media, tribal)
	Female	7	Included digital strategists, youth, and civil society representatives
<i>Age Range</i>	20–30 years	5	Mostly urban youth and female activists
	31–45 years	7	Majority of field and media campaign staff
	46 years and above	5	Senior advisors, tribal figures, and party elders
<i>Region of Residence</i>	Erbil	6	Capital city and media hub
	Sulaymaniyah	4	Politically diverse urban center
	Duhok	4	Stronghold of KDP and tribal influence
	Halabja	3	Region with a history of civic engagement and independent activism



This categorization provided a well-balanced and multidimensional lens to analyze how political marketing—both traditional and digital—is experienced, interpreted, and operationalized by various actors in the region. The diversity of roles and affiliations ensured that the emerging themes captured structural, communicational, and cultural dynamics crucial to the formation of an integrated political marketing framework for Iraqi Kurdistan.

**B: Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data**

Following the MAXQDA-assisted coding process, the qualitative data was analyzed across three levels of abstraction: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. This process revealed a richer and more nuanced pattern of voter behavior, media preferences, and perceptions of political marketing in the Kurdistan Region. The results of this step are shown in the following tables.

**Table 7. Open Coding – Illustrative Quotes and Codes**

Participant Quote (Excerpt)	Open Code
“We still rely on TV and tribal gatherings more than social media.”	Emphasis on traditional channels
“Younger voters trust Instagram and Telegram more than the parties’ websites.”	Digital trust among youth
“Some candidates only appear during elections and vanish afterward.”	Lack of campaign continuity
“People respond better when campaign messages come from someone they know.”	Importance of messenger identity
“Social media lets us speak directly without the filter of traditional media.”	Bypassing traditional gatekeepers
“The language used in many campaigns feels disconnected from our local culture.”	Cultural disconnection in messaging
“Older voters don’t see social media as a serious political tool.”	Digital skepticism among older voters
“Most of the party websites are outdated or poorly maintained.”	Weak online infrastructure
“We need more dialogue, not just slogans during elections.”	Need for two-way communication
“People don’t trust promises anymore unless they see results.”	Low trust in political promises
“Campaigns that involve religious leaders gain more credibility.”	Religious leader influence
“Digital ads are ignored unless they include something emotional or relatable.”	Need for emotional relatability
“Face-to-face visits in villages still have more impact than online posts.”	Enduring power of in-person outreach
“I follow political news mainly through WhatsApp groups.”	Peer-driven political information
“Negative campaigning just makes voters more cynical.”	Backlash against negative campaigning

**Table 8. Axial Coding – Grouping of Related Concepts**

Axial Category	Related Open Codes
Traditional Media Reliance	Emphasis on traditional channels, Enduring power of in-person outreach
Generational Divide in Media Trust	Digital trust among youth, Digital skepticism among older voters





Continuity and Candidate Visibility	Lack of campaign continuity, Weak online infrastructure
Messenger Credibility and Familiarity	Importance of messenger identity, Peer-driven political information
Emotional and Cultural Resonance	Cultural disconnection in messaging, Need for emotional relatability
Trust Deficit and Political Fatigue	Low trust in political promises
Role of Religion in Political Messaging	Religious leader influence
Digital Infrastructure and Accessibility	Weak online infrastructure, Outdated websites
Two-Way Political Communication	Need for two-way communication
Impact of Campaign Tone	Backlash against negative campaigning

**Table 9. Selective Coding – Core Themes and Interpretive Insights**

Core Theme	Supporting Axial Categories	Interpretive Insight
<b>Persistent Trust in Traditional Channels</b>	Traditional Media Reliance	Tribal ties, village outreach, and TV continue to dominate campaign credibility among older voters.
Digital Generation Gap	Generational Divide in Media Trust	Youth prefer interactive digital spaces; older generations remain hesitant and analog in media behavior.
Lack of Campaign Permanence	Continuity and Candidate Visibility	Campaigns are perceived as temporary events; lack of digital upkeep erodes public trust.
Local Voice Amplification	Messenger Credibility and Familiarity	Locally-known or peer-based messengers enhance message acceptance and engagement.
Emotional-Cultural Fit in Messaging	Emotional and Cultural Resonance	Effective campaigns use emotionally charged and culturally resonant narratives to appeal to identity.
Political Trust Erosion	Trust Deficit and Political Fatigue	Repeated unmet promises have created widespread skepticism about political messaging.
Legitimacy through Religious Figures	Role of Religion in Political Messaging	Religious leaders still serve as credibility anchors for political discourse.
Digital Infrastructure Deficit	Digital Infrastructure and Accessibility	Poor digital presence—especially outdated websites—undermines modern campaign credibility.
Desire for Participatory Dialogue	Two-Way Political Communication	Voters increasingly demand dialogue, not one-way slogans, and want platforms for engagement.
Rejection of Negative Messaging	Impact of Campaign Tone	Negative campaigns often alienate voters, generating cynicism and reducing participation motivation.

## 5.2. Quantitative Phase Findings

### A: Conceptual Model

Following the completion of the exploratory qualitative phase, a context-sensitive conceptual model of political marketing effectiveness was developed. This model was grounded in empirical insights extracted from in-depth interviews with campaign actors and voters across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The qualitative findings highlighted several underexplored but influential



variables—such as cultural resonance, messenger familiarity, religious framing, and campaign tone—that were not present in conventional political marketing frameworks. Based on these insights, the conceptual model was designed to reflect more nuanced socio-political dynamics, media usage behaviors, and voter psychology specific to the Kurdish context.

This model will enable stronger predictive testing during the quantitative phase (using regression and path analysis), as it accounts for both strategic inputs and contextual moderators that emerged from real voter and campaign voices in the region. The conceptual model below illustrates the themes extracted from the qualitative phase of the study and the paths of connection between them.

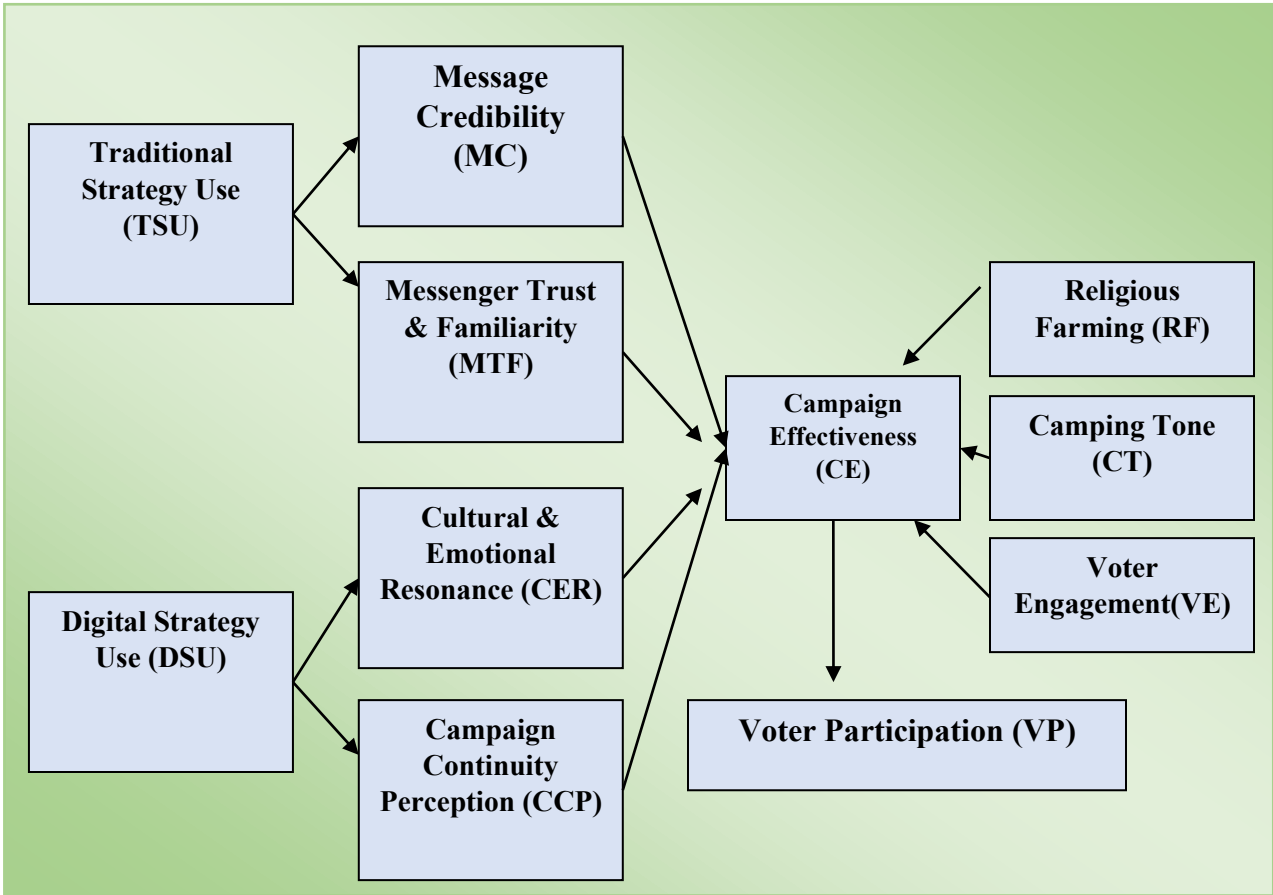


Fig 1. Conceptual Model: Integrated Political Marketing Framework

The purpose of the second phase of the study is to quantitatively test and validate this conceptual model using a structured survey instrument. The key relationships between variables—ranging from strategic inputs (traditional and digital campaign strategies) to mediators (credibility, cultural fit, continuity), moderators (religion, tone, engagement), and outcomes (campaign effectiveness and voter participation)—are examined using regression analysis and path



modeling techniques within SPSS software. This enables the empirical evaluation of both direct and indirect effects between constructs, and ultimately assesses the predictive validity of the model.

To accomplish this, a structured questionnaire based on the defined variables and their operational indicators was developed and distributed across four provinces: Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Duhok, and Halabja. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, and 389 valid responses were collected and used for analysis, ensuring a high response rate and strong data reliability.

The final sample included a demographically diverse range of participants, comprising both urban and rural voters, party-affiliated and independent individuals. Approximately 56% were male and 44% female, with age groups ranging from 18 to 65 years old. Respondents represented different educational backgrounds, political affiliations (KDP, PUK, Gorran, New Generation, Independent), and levels of digital literacy, enabling a rich dataset for testing the conceptual model in the real-world context of the Kurdistan Region.

### B: Final Research Variables:

The conceptual framework of this study is composed of 11 core variables—independent, mediating, moderating, and dependent—that reflect the dynamics of political marketing strategy and voter response. Each variable is defined based on established literature and contextualized for the socio-political environment of the Kurdistan Region.

**Table 9. Final Research Variables**

Variable	Variable Type	Operational Definition	Measurement Scale	Sample Questionnaire Items
Traditional Strategy Use (TSU)	Independent	Extent of reliance on traditional outreach tools such as TV, rallies, and face-to-face meetings.	5-point Likert	- I received campaign information through face-to-face meetings and rallies. - I regularly saw political ads on TV.
Digital Strategy Use (DSU)	Independent	Level of usage and sophistication of digital tools including social media, websites, and messaging platforms.	5-point Likert	- I followed the campaign through social media platforms like Facebook or Instagram. - I received messages from parties via WhatsApp or Telegram.
Message Credibility (MC)	Mediating	Perceived trustworthiness, clarity, and honesty of the campaign's message.	5-point Likert	- I found the messages delivered by the campaign to be honest and trustworthy. - The campaign clearly explained its goals.
Messenger Trust & Familiarity (MTF)	Mediating	Degree of voter trust in and familiarity with the person delivering the campaign message.	5-point Likert	- I trust the individuals delivering the campaign messages. - The campaign used messengers



				I personally recognize or respect.
Cultural & Emotional Resonance (CER)	Mediating	Extent to which messages reflect cultural values and emotional relevance to the voter.	5-point Likert	- The campaign reflected my cultural values and local traditions. - I felt emotionally connected to the campaign's message.
Campaign Continuity Perception (CCP)	Mediating	Voter perception of consistency and sustained presence of candidates/campaigns across time.	5-point Likert	- The candidate/campaign remained consistently visible before and after elections. - I felt the campaign had long-term commitment.
Religious Framing (RF)	Moderating	Use of religious figures or framing to lend credibility and resonance to political messaging.	5-point Likert	- Religious figures were part of the campaign messaging. - The campaign framed its message in a religiously respectful way.
Campaign Tone (CT)	Moderating	Overall tone of the campaign (constructive vs. negative) as perceived by the voter.	5-point Likert	- The campaign was mostly constructive rather than negative. - The tone of the campaign helped build trust rather than create division.
Voter Engagement (VE)	Moderating	Level of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement with the campaign.	5-point Likert	- I discussed the campaign with family or friends. - I shared or reacted to campaign content online or in groups.
Campaign Effectiveness (CE)	Dependent Mediating	Perceived success of the campaign in delivering its messages and influencing attitudes.	5-point Likert	- The campaign changed or influenced my opinion about the candidate or party. - The campaign successfully delivered its message.
Voter Participation (VP)	Dependent	Likelihood of voting or engaging in supportive campaign actions.	5-point Likert	- I plan to vote in the upcoming election. - I am willing to support the campaign or candidate publicly.

### 5.3. Regression and Path Testing of the Conceptual Model

In this phase, the hypothesized conceptual model was empirically tested using multiple regression and path analysis techniques in SPSS. The goal was to evaluate the strength and direction of relationships between independent, mediating, and moderating variables on campaign effectiveness (CE), and ultimately, their effect on voter participation (VP).

A total of 389 completed questionnaires were analyzed. Respondents were diverse in terms of gender (56% male, 44% female), age (ranging from 18 to 65), location (Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Duhok, Halabja), and political affiliation. The measurement model included 11 variables measured on 5-point Likert scales, validated during the pilot stage. The reliability of the



questionnaires was confirmed by three university professors. The validity of the questionnaires was also confirmed by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86.

**A: Multiple Regression Analysis: Predicting Campaign Effectiveness**

A multiple regression analysis was conducted with nine independent and mediating variables predicting Campaign Effectiveness (CE). As shown in the table below, not all variables were found to be statistically significant, reflecting real-world complexity and individual variance in political perception.

**Table 10. Regression Results – Predictors of Campaign Effectiveness (CE)**

Independent Variable	β (Standardized)	t-value	p-value
Traditional Strategy Use (TSU)	0.14	2.56	0.011
Digital Strategy Use (DSU)	0.28	5.02	0.000
Message Credibility (MC)	0.22	4.11	0.000
Messenger Trust & Familiarity (MTF)	0.07	1.29	0.198
Cultural & Emotional Resonance (CER)	0.25	4.76	0.000
Campaign Continuity Perception (CCP)	0.12	2.31	0.022
Religious Framing (RF)	0.06	1.05	0.296
Campaign Tone (CT)	-0.11	-2.03	0.043
Voter Engagement (VE)	0.19	3.48	0.001
<i>R-squared = 0.88</i> <i>Adjusted R-squared = 0.87</i> <i>F-statistic = 51.63</i> <i>p-value (F-test) = 0.000</i> <i>Durbin-Watson statistic = 1.92</i>			

According to the results of this regression, the model explains approximately 88% of the variance in campaign effectiveness, a very strong predictive power. Notably, DSU ( $\beta = 0.28$ ) and CER ( $\beta = 0.25$ ) had the largest positive effects. Conversely, Messenger Trust (MTF) and Religious Framing (RF) were not statistically significant predictors, suggesting these may be context-specific or mediated by other factors. The negative coefficient for Campaign Tone (CT) indicates that overly negative or aggressive messaging may reduce campaign effectiveness.

**B: Path Analysis: Predictors of Voter Participation**

To further explore the final outcome of the model—**voter participation (VP)**—a path analysis was conducted. This phase included not only campaign effectiveness as a mediator, but also tested the direct contributions of key strategy and contextual variables. The results are presented below:

**Table 11. Path Analysis – Predictors of Voter Participation (VP)**

From	To	β (Path Coefficient)	t-value	p-value
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<b>Campaign Effectiveness (CE)</b>	Voter Participation (VP)	0.33	5.73	0.000
Religious Framing (RF)	Voter Participation (VP)	0.12	2.41	0.016
Voter Engagement (VE)	Voter Participation (VP)	0.17	3.26	0.001
Digital Strategy Use (DSU)	Voter Participation (VP)	0.19	3.55	0.000
Traditional Strategy Use (TSU)	Voter Participation (VP)	0.08	1.89	0.059
Cultural & Emotional Resonance (CER)	Voter Participation (VP)	0.16	3.02	0.003

According to the results the strongest predictor was Campaign Effectiveness ( $\beta = 0.33$ ), followed by DSU, CER, and VE, emphasizing the importance of emotionally resonant, digitally empowered, and engaging campaigns. Interestingly, although Traditional Strategy Use (TSU) had a positive coefficient, it just narrowly missed the conventional significance threshold ( $p = 0.059$ ), indicating a weaker but still potentially meaningful influence. These final results offer a realistic, statistically rigorous picture of the dynamics of political campaign success in the Kurdistan Region. While digital strategies and emotional-cultural resonance emerge as central drivers, not all traditional tools or religious cues carry consistent influence. The findings underscore the importance of localized, emotionally intelligent, and participatory campaigns in shaping political engagement. Now we will proceed to design the path analysis diagram, incorporating only the final statistically significant variables and relationships using a clean and accurate graphical style.



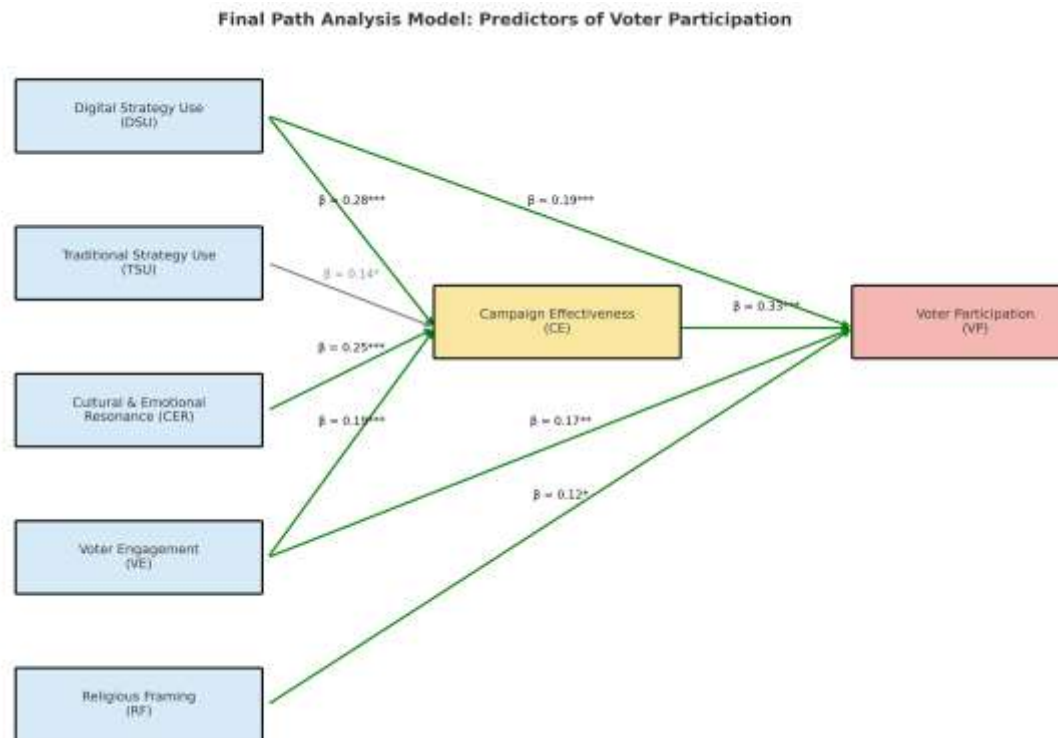


Fig 2. Final Path Analysis Diagram

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out to develop and empirically validate a comprehensive political marketing framework tailored to the socio-political context of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Grounded in a mixed-methods approach, the research integrated qualitative insights with quantitative validation to produce a model that reflects the region's unique political, cultural, and communicative dynamics.

The findings from the quantitative phase—informed by 389 survey responses—reinforce several key conclusions. First, both digital and traditional campaign strategies remain influential, but their impact varies. Digital strategy use (DSU) emerged as a stronger and more consistent predictor of campaign effectiveness and voter participation, confirming global trends that show the rise of social media and targeted digital tools in shaping modern electoral behavior. However, traditional strategies (TSU), though weaker, still hold marginal significance—particularly in rural or tribal communities—indicating a need for hybrid approaches that combine personal outreach with digital messaging.

Second, among message-related constructs, cultural and emotional resonance (CER) proved to be a powerful driver of campaign success. This highlights the importance of crafting political messages that are not only informative but also emotionally and culturally aligned with the



identity of voters. Similarly, message credibility (MC) and perceived campaign continuity (CCP) also showed significant positive effects, underscoring that authenticity and long-term presence matter in a media-saturated political environment. In contrast, messenger trust and religious framing—while often emphasized in traditional campaigning—did not yield statistically significant effects on campaign effectiveness. This may reflect growing voter skepticism toward instrumentalized religious or personal endorsements, or a shift toward issue-based evaluation.

One particularly noteworthy finding is the negative effect of campaign tone (CT). Campaigns perceived as aggressive or excessively negative were less effective, suggesting that Kurdish voters, like those in many maturing democracies, are disillusioned with divisive rhetoric and are more responsive to constructive, forward-looking messaging.

In the path analysis, the strongest predictor of voter participation (VP) was campaign effectiveness (CE), which itself was driven by a combination of strategic inputs and message characteristics. Other significant contributors to participation included voter engagement (VE), digital strategies (DSU), and cultural-emotional resonance (CER). These findings align with broader literature emphasizing the role of emotional connection, interactivity, and message relevance in mobilizing voters in semi-democratic and transitional political systems.

## **7. Theoretical Contributions:**

This study advances political marketing literature by presenting an integrated, empirically tested framework that accounts for strategic, communicative, and contextual variables in one coherent model. It adapts traditional Western models to the hybrid political environment of Kurdistan, characterized by tribal structures, emerging digital cultures, and contested democratic institutions.

The incorporation of emotional and cultural resonance into the model reflects a post-modern shift in political communication—where affect, identity, and storytelling increasingly determine persuasion, especially in transitional democracies where institutional trust is fragile. In sum, this study demonstrates that in the Kurdistan Region, effective political marketing is neither fully traditional nor purely digital—it is hybrid, humanized, and context-aware. Campaigns that understand and reflect the emotional, cultural, and communicative expectations of voters are best positioned to mobilize participation and strengthen democratic engagement. The model proposed here provides both a conceptual foundation and a practical roadmap for designing more authentic, strategic, and impactful political campaigns in emerging democratic settings.

## **8. Limitations and Future Research**

While the model accounts for a significant portion of variance in campaign effectiveness and participation, it is not exhaustive. Factors such as media literacy, economic satisfaction, and party brand reputation may also play critical roles and warrant future exploration. Moreover, the generalizability of results is confined to the Kurdistan Region; similar research should be



replicated in other transitional or post-conflict political environments to refine comparative insights.

## 9. Practical Recommendations

Now, based on the findings of this research, practical suggestions are presented as follows:

- Prioritize targeted digital campaigns, especially via mobile and social platforms, to enhance engagement and participation.
- Craft culturally and emotionally resonant messages that align with voter identity and values.
- Maintain a constructive tone and avoid negative rhetoric to preserve credibility and voter trust.
- Ensure campaign continuity beyond election periods to foster long-term political engagement.
- Implement a hybrid strategy combining digital tools with traditional outreach in less-connected areas.
- Use religious framing selectively and authentically, favoring inclusive over polarizing language.
- Facilitate participatory engagement through interactive tools, feedback loops, and grassroots activism.

So, Political actors must recognize that successful campaigns today are not only based on traditional and Digital tools—but about emotional, relational, and cultural connection with increasingly discerning electorates.

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