Social Media News Among Iraqi Immigrants Before And After Immigration To Europe

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Abstract

This article discusses how Iraqi immigrants use social media to collect news for illegal immigration to Europe. Social media has a major and important role in the recent illegal migration of Iraqis to Europe. Because of the economic, political and security challenges that the Iraqis experienced during the period of confronting terrorism, it made the Iraqis think about emigrating and looking for other places to live in peace and far from crises and wars. The migrants used social media to obtain information on how to migrate and reach the destination country through the information provided by social media about immigration. Iraqi immigrants acquired participatory and deliberative skills in dealing with information and social media news about immigration, as well as the good timing of migration and the type of information related to immigration. The methodology of this research was based on the qualitative research method. Data were collected through in-depth individual interviews conducted with fifteen informants, those who previously had the experience of illegal immigration and are now in Iraq. The sampling technique has been reached with the "snowball" method.

Keywords: Immigrant, Immigration, Social Media, Qualitative Research

INTRODUCTION

The main idea of this research is to shed light on the news of social media and its role in Iraqi immigration to Europe and to understand the impact on the behavior of Iraqi immigrants, after exploring why and how Iraqi migrants use social media information, which constitutes an important role to become one of the most prominent media in influencing public opinion on an issue, problem or phenomenon related to a wide audience (McCluskey et al., 2016). The new media plays a major role in shaping opinions, trends and ideas through the news and information it provides (Lawlor & Tolley, 2017). New media are also more informative in dealing with issues of contemporary societies, and thus seek to direct public opinion on these issues (Zedadra et al., 2019). Many intellectuals regularly sound alarm bells about the dire effects of migration on economic health, the cultural fabric and in all aspects of life (Benesch et al., 2019). As the problem of migration has become

one of the big and important issues of concern in many countries in recent years (Seate & Mastro, 2017). As a result of its disturbing influence and increasing speed, many countries of the world, including the countries of the Arab region such as Yemen, Syria, Libya and especially Iraq, live in exceptional circumstances that prompted their citizens to take the decision of voluntary and forced migration to European countries in search of protection, prosperity, stability and employment.

Literature Review
Migrants' use of social media
In this new age of digital media, it has provided the opportunity for immigrants from the world as well as ethnic and cultural communities to use a range of diverse media platforms to meet all their information needs. Individual immigrants (who move from their home country to reside and live in another country temporarily or permanently) tend to use a variety of different electronic media sources to keep abreast of current affairs of what is happening in the world and to stay in touch with events and news in the home country or to obtain information to increase stability in the Their new social environments(Ahmed & Veronis, 2019).

The services provided by social networking sites are a global phenomenon, through its advantages that it offers services such as an online platform or website that helps individuals to form social relationships and networks in any community. Migrants use a variety of social networking sites for the purpose of adapting to the new society as well as to maintain their cultural identity(Chiu & Huang, 2015).

Immigrants also use social media to strengthen and maintain a relationship with their homeland and with their compatriots living in other countries, online they find rich material that maintains a constant sense of patriotism towards their cultures of origin as well as preserve their ethnic identity. Social media helps Iraqi migrants expand their lifestyle by continuing to connect in a deeper way with their homeland, family and relatives through the technological tools provided by social media

sites (Elias & Lemish, 2009). According to the theory of adaptation between different cultures, social networking sites play a large role between personal communication and mass communication in adapting to immigrant individuals and building a new cultural identity in society, which makes the use of electronic media play an important role in the lives of immigrants in accordance with the dynamics and diversity of cultural adaptation in new societies and the preservation of the cultural identity of immigrants (van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

Numerous literature and research interests in the study of immigrants' use of social networking sites indicate that it provides them with various sources of information that help to understand lifestyle in order to adapt to the new society. The only way to communicate with local peers can be described as a tool for the transmission of culture for generations(Arfken et al., 2014). Immigrant groups lacking economic and political resources have developed effective communication channels through the space provided by social networking sites on the internet to publish what is related to them and how they feel about their stay in the new society i.e., social media has become a forum. for the public discourse on the challenges of migration conditions and related issues among experienced migrants(Esfahani et al., 2019). Some studies, such as {(Elsouhag et al., 2015); (Lawlor & Tolley, 2017)}, study the dominant themes and content of immigrant websites on social media. They found that there are interesting insights about the social, cultural and national identity of users in social networking sites such as sharing their experiences of migration and expressing feelings of separation, homesickness and alienation in a new place, and also there is a desire and tendency to integrate into host societies.

Conceptual Framework
The conceptual framework of this article builds on the concept of uses and gratification theory as a means of exploring how Iraqi immigrants use social media on the topic of illegal immigration. Many studies have focused on individuals as a focal point of analysis and thus ignore the interrelationships

between individuals and the media {(Mondi et al., 2007); (Dunn et al., 2010); (Azam, 2015), (Xing, 2019)}. To illustrate this void, the researcher relied on the concept of U&G theory in order to understand the Iraqi immigrants' use of social media. Such research would involve observing how changes in cognitive structures modify attitudes and influence the behavior of exposed persons directly or through interpersonal channels.

The conceptual framework of this study also clarifies the motivations behind individuals' use of media. While Iraqi immigrants to Europe have a range of social or psychological needs, they turn to the media in order to get news and information about immigration, and to meet their needs and people are energized and enthusiastic in choosing some media content for consumption. In other words, individuals who use the media are driven by self-defined goals and uses, and they actively participate in the communication process, which can improve, limit or influence the effects of exposure (Gan & Li, 2018). The conceptual framework of this research posits that immigrants

expect a sense of gratitude as a result of their media use experience and are more likely to visit the same media content again if their needs are met. Katz et al. explained that individuals' use of media leads to gratification in achieving three goals for the audience, namely: "Explaining how people use media to satisfy their needs; understanding the motivations for individual media behavior and determining the consequences of needs, motives and behavior"(Whiting & Williams, 2013). Through this research, we explain how Iraqi immigrants used social media before and after migrating to Europe, see Figure 1.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Fifteen in-depth individual interviews were conducted, all interviews were recorded by smartphone, for an hour to an hour and a half, from 3 April to 25 June 2021, with Iraqi immigrants who

reached by the "snowball" method. The ages of the informants participating in this research ranged between 27 and 48 years old.

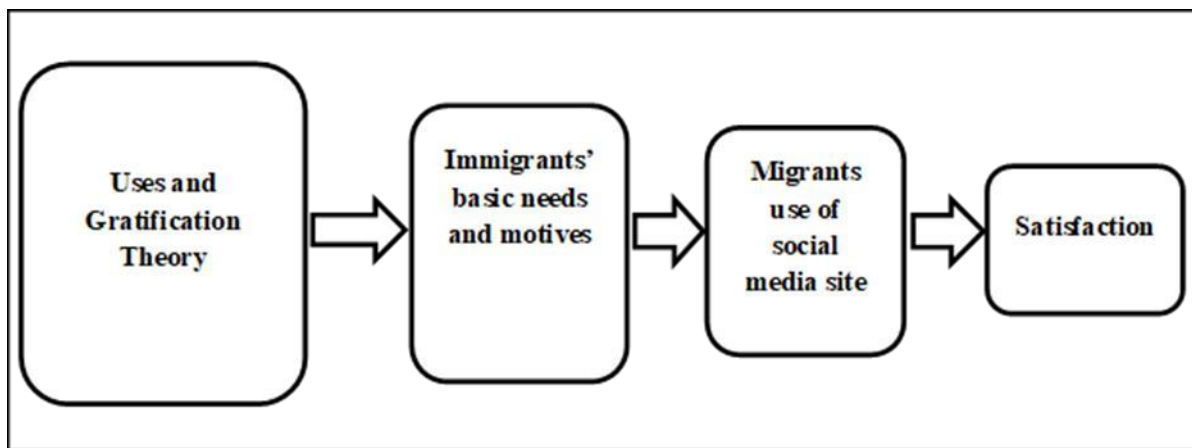Semi-structured interviews were conducted, creating conditions in

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for this article

had an experience of illegal immigration to Europe and are now in Iraq. All interviews were conducted face to face in Baghdad, Iraq. The informants were

which migrants could freely talk about their use of social media and view their favorite websites and apps, as well as share their personal photos while

migrating and in the destination country. The informants were asked about their favorite social media websites and apps and asked which ones they felt were the most popular and most used and why they preferred to use these websites. They were asked how they obtained information about illegal immigration (for example, how they found smugglers, what information did they obtain through their use of social media about immigration, how do they evaluate the information and news provided by social networking sites about immigration, they were also asked about the role of the social networking site in illegal immigration to Europe, and how they shared the stories of the immigration experience through social networking sites).

They were also asked to discuss the information and news provided by social networking sites about immigration to Europe and to discuss the news that affected their behavior and led to the consolidation of the concept of immigration, which made ethnic immigrants take the decision to illegally immigrate to Europe. In order to collect data, all interviews were conducted in Arabic and in different places according to the desired choice of the informant, and written consent was obtained from all participants. The researcher pledged not to reveal the identity and names of the informant. Pseudonyms have been used to protect participant confidentiality, and for data analysis, the (Atlas.ti 9) program was used in order to obtain accurate and realistic information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study examines the effect on the behavior of Iraqi immigrants from their use of social media in relation to illegal immigration to Europe from the point of view of the theory of uses and gratifications. It explains the relationship of what the public does with the mass media and not what the mass media does with the public{(Shao, 2009); (Gan & Wang, 2015); (Şentürk Kara, 2016)}. Consequently, this study is also concerned with understanding what Iraqi immigrants do with social media, and how Iraqi immigrants interact with the

news of social media when they use social media platforms.

In order to obtain an accurate understanding and conceptual depth about the results of use and influence among Iraqi immigrants, this study sheds light on four main axes that constitute practices and outcomes of use and impact.

The issues or news regarding immigrants that were interested by the Iraqi immigrants in social media

To understand and interpret of the impact of the use of social media on the behavior of immigrants, the study sheds light on the information and news that Iraqi immigrants were keen to follow about migration, as well as the Iraqi immigrants' use of social media after the decision to migrate and while they were in the countries of destination. Researchers have discovered that people do not appear randomly to the media but rather focus on specific information and topics, as a result of specific social or psychological needs or beliefs. Many of the literature has also indicated that selectivity to use media is the first feature of media effects theories that define the boundary conditions for media effects, including the model of selectivity. The two suggestions for this model are: (a) people bring only a limited number of messages from the group of messages that can grab their attention, and (b) only those messages that they choose have the power to influence them(Valkenburg et al., 2016), for more relevant information see{(Yanovitzky & Stryker, 2001); (Geschke et al., 2010); (Eberl et al., 2018)}. The informants' answers were based on four main topics when they answered the question about what are the most important topics that they were keen to follow when using social media for the stage after the decision to migrate, and while they were in the countries of destination based on the informants 'answers. Topics are: (Refugee Human Rights, Immigration-related, Law for Immigrants and Job Opportunities). As shown in Table 1 below, and for further understanding, see Figure 2.

Table 1. Themes on the topics regarding immigrants that were interested by the Iraqi immigrants

Themes
in social media
I.   Refugee Human Rights
II.   Immigration Related
III.   Law for Immigrants
IV.   Job Opportunities

This study reaches out to the most important topics that informants are interested in following about immigration, by looking at how informants use social media to adapt to the new environment. The studies also investigated empirically how migrants

Rights), such as the type of services and privileges that refugees receive in European countries. The ninth informant said:

> "I was primarily interested in topics related to the study of immigrants and how an
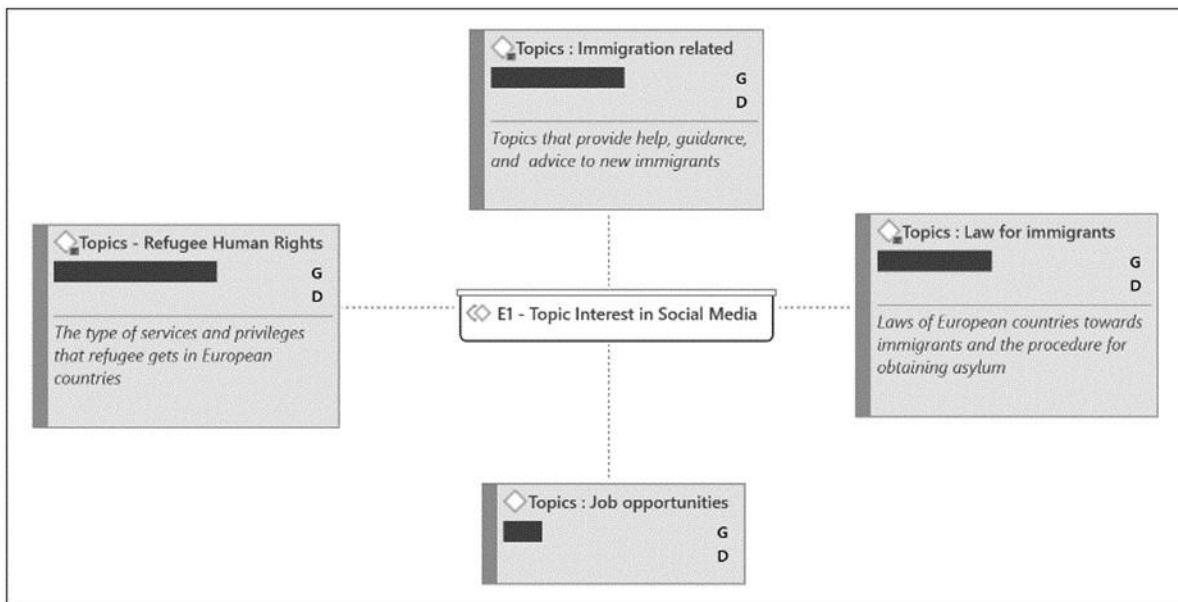

Figure 2. The topics regarding immigrants that were interested by the Iraqi immigrants in social media

interact with social media with the main areas that shape the practices and outcomes of integration (for example, employment, education, language competence, cultural affiliation, social capital, rights and citizenship(Dekker et al., 2018). Most of the informants' answers were also based on their interest in issues related to (Refugee Human

immigrant can complete his studies. I also followed the laws of European countries and how a person is guaranteed all his rights. I also stopped frequently to watch video sites that show the nature of life and how Iraqi

immigrants spend their daily time". (Ninth informant)

Among the most prominent themes and topics that were highlighted by informants while collecting data on knowing what are the most important news and topics that Iraqi immigrants were keen to follow was migration-related topics. Based on the informants 'answers, it became clear that after the Iraqi immigrants made the decision to migrate, the migrants went through a stage that the researcher called the "psychological preparation for migration". Migration can be seen as a major change in behavior, especially when immigrants decide to migrate on themselves (Tabor & Milfont, 2011). Where the majority of the respondents' answers indicated that their thinking and interest focused only on knowing how their lives would be after the migration. This is through what the third informant mentioned when they said that they were keen to follow up on news, issues and topics (related to immigration) such as topics that provide assistance, guidance and advice to new immigrants. He said:

"Mostly I search about topics that provide help, guidance and advice to new immigrants, as well as news whose topics are concerned with human rights and refugees". (Third informant)

Informants' answers indicate that their thinking has shifted to knowing how to integrate into European societies, this study enhanced the understanding of the use of social media and its impact on the behavior of Iraqi immigrants in seeking their integration into European societies. This inclusion perspective is that both refugees and members of the host community play a critical role in ensuring that refugees have access to jobs, education, housing, health, culture and language and that they feel part of the new environment(Dekker & Scholten, 2017). It also provides theoretical insights into the influences of individual and contextual forces on refugees' perceptions and experiences of integration, with implications for their social media practices during settlement(Zijlstra & Liempt,

2017). The answers of the fifth, sixth and thirteenth informants were based on the fact that they were keen to follow up on news and topics related to how the Iraqi immigrants spend their time, what treatment the immigrant gets by the Europeans and how the European community deals with refugees. An example of this is what the 13th Informant mentioned:

"I was very interested in learning about the nature of social life for Europeans, I was keen to know how Iraqi immigrants living in Europe spend their time, what are the general concerns and daily practices, how things are going there, and what they like to do". (Thirteenth informant)

More studies dealing with the predeparture period as part of the immigration process are needed, particularly for adult immigrants who have a wealth of experiences before leaving their country of origin. The informants also indicated that issues related to (Law for immigrants) also was among their interests that they were keen to follow when using social media sites on immigration.

Extent satisfaction of Iraqi immigrants with social media news about immigration to Europe.

This study explores the extent of satisfaction of Iraqi immigrants with social media news about Iraqi immigration to Europe. This understanding helps to know the impact of the use of social media on the behavior of Iraqi immigrants. Many factors have played an important role in helping migrants search for information using the Internet, mobile phones, and especially social media(Borkert et al., 2018). Studies discussing the reliability of social media information on immigration show that asylum migrants use various strategies to validate rumors on social media that come from unknown sources{(Borkert et al., 2018); (Dekker et al., 2018); (Ohme, 2020)}. These strategies include checking the source of information, validating information through trusted social links, triangulating online

sources, and comparing the information with their own experiences (Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017). Accuracy and validity of information indicating not only issues of access to social media information but also about the reliability of social media information(Alencar, 2018).

This study also explores how Iraqi migrants assess the credibility of social media information and how they verify information, it turned out that there was no agreement about the correctness and accuracy of the information provided by social media about illegal immigration to Europe among Iraqi immigrants. Based on the answers of the informants, it appears that five out of the fifteen informants who participated in this study agreed that the information provided by social media about immigration to Europe is correct and realistic, while ten immigrants indicated that not all news and information are correct and realistic. For more understanding, see Table 3.

Table 2. Themes on the extent satisfaction of Iraqi immigrants with social media news about immigration to Europe

Themes
I.   Only half favorable
II.   Correct and realistic

The majority of informants participating in this study expressed doubts about the reliability of certain types of social media information about illegal immigration to Europe. Information from well-known social links and information from government authorities and NGOs are the most trusted, also for asylum immigrants (Dekker et al., 2018). Existing social links are still the most reliable source (Ohme, 2020). Publicly available information on social media that comes from unknown sources has been less reliable and is often categorized as "rumors" (Dekker et al., 2016). The informants pointed out that not all the news and

information available on the immigration social networking sites are true, only half of them were true because there is some information that turned out to be completely incorrect. The eighth informant stated that not all news and information on social media are true because the information about illegal immigration to Europe is the personal experiences of individuals, this is what he said:

"Not all the information published on social networking sites is correct. Half of the news can be said to be true and the other half depends on personal experiences, and this matter depends on circumstances and time, and it differs from one person to another". (Eighth informant) The fourth informant also mentioned that it is not possible to believe all the news and at the same time not all the news is incorrect, as he said: "Not all news and information can be believed because it depends on the experiences of others and they are different in time and place, and it cannot be said that all news is not true".

(Fourth informant)

Valuable information becomes of paramount importance by studying how migrants use asylum and evaluating social media information before and during migration (Wall et al., 2017). This study focused on the treatment of Iraqi immigrants with the accuracy of the information, the credibility of information via social media platforms was the primary concern of informants participating in this study. The results of a study conducted by Borkert and colleagues (2018) showed information sources about immigration to Europe by using mobile phones, social media and other people as sources of information, respondents did not receive accurate information throughout. In total, 51% stated that the information was "sometimes correct - two sources were just fine", while 25% received information that was "mostly correct a lot of valuable and accurate information", and 23% receive information that is "rarely true". When asked how they know when not to trust information, 24% answered "learning by experience" (Borkert et al., 2018). This indicates

that immigrants become aware of the timing of distrust of information only when they are faced with a different reality, the sixth informant also stated that half of the information is true and factual and that he himself discovered, upon his arrival in Germany, a lot of the information he had seen on Facebook was incorrect. This is what he said:

> "We can say that not all the news and information available on the immigration social networking sites is correct, (5050) half of it is correct, and as I mentioned earlier, some say when the immigrant arrives in Europe, he will obtain a monthly salary of more than ($ 1000), and upon arrival at Germany Nothing of the sort happened, and a lot of the information we were listening to or seeing on social media was not correct". (Sixth informant)

Role of social media in deciding whether to stay in Europe or to return to the homeland among Iraqi immigrants.

Despite the fact that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and social media have been recognized as major issues and tools in migration (Ennaji & Bignami, 2019), there is very little knowledge about how the use of information and communication technology affects the behavior of migrants in making the decision to return home after migration. In this study, we first investigated how the use of social media affected the behavior of Iraqi immigrants regarding illegal immigration to Europe. Now we explore and investigate the role of social media in deciding whether to stay in Europe or return home. Some studies indicate that the media's media framing of immigration can affect individuals, and reinforce different interpretations of the immigration system among immigrants (Lawlor & Tolley, 2017). According to the

informants' answers about the impact of the use of social media on the decision to return or remain in Europe, two themes were revealed based on the answers of the informants: (No, not dependent and Yes, has a role), as shown in Table 4 below, and for further understanding see Figure 4.

Table 3. Themes on the role of social media in deciding whether to stay in Europe or return home for Iraqi immigrants

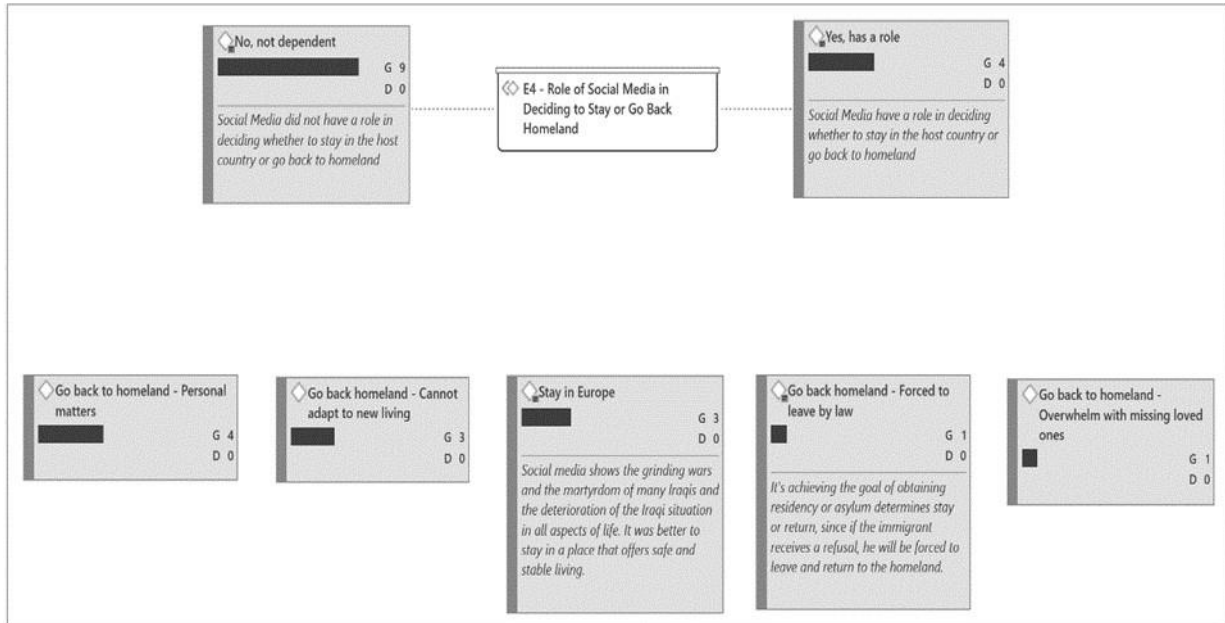| Themes |
| --- |
| I.   No, not dependent |
| a)   Personal matters |
| b)   Cannot adapt to new living |
| c)   Forced to leave by law |
| d)   Overwhelm with missing loved ones |
| II.   Yes, has a role |
| a)   Stay in Europe |
| b)   Go back to Homeland |

Figure 3. Role of social media in deciding whether to stay in Europe or to return to the homeland among Iraqi immigrants

According to the answers of the informants participating in this study, it was found that nine out of fifteen informants believed that "social networking sites had no role in deciding whether to stay in the host country or return home". The twelfth informant indicated that social media has no role in deciding whether to stay or return, but rather achieving the goal and obtaining residency is what makes the immigrant take the decision to return or stay, this is what he said:

> "In my opinion, it is not news, information, or social networking sites that determine stay or return, but rather achieving the goal and obtaining residency or asylum that determines stay or return, since if the immigrant receives a refusal, he will be forced to leave and return to the homeland". (Twelfth informant)

The informants' answers were also based on an important and basic reason that helped the Iraqi immigrants make the decision to return to Iraq, which is the difficulty of living and adapting to European societies, as recent studies have shown for European countries where public opinion towards newcomers is tighter than in other countries such as Canada (Lawlor & Tolley, 2017). The thirteenth informant, who believes that social media had no role in making the decision to return, indicated that it was rather the difficulty of adapting to European societies that made him take the decision to return, as he said:

> "There was no role for social media in deciding whether to stay or return to Iraq, but the reason was that I could not adapt and live in European societies. There are also other reasons that made me think of returning". (Thirteenth informant)

While other informants indicated that psychological factors played a major role among the Iraqi immigrants in Europe in making the decision to return home. Numerous studies have also pointed

out the need to understand the structural, institutional, and social drivers that make psychological factors and social pressures central to the analysis when studying migrants and asylum seekers (Ennaji & Bignami, 2019). The first informant mentioned that social media has a great role in deciding to migrate, while its role in making the decision to return is very weak, this immigrant thought that the reason had psychological dimensions, this is what he said:

> "Yes, it has a very big role in immigration from Iraq to Europe. As for its role in making the decision to return to Iraq, it is weak and did not have any impact because the issue has psychological
>
> dimensions". (First informant)

There are also personal and social reasons on which the informants' answers were based when asked about the role of social media in making the decision to return home or stay in Europe. The fourth informant also mentioned that social networking sites have no role, but rather personal and social reasons that made him take the decision to return. This is what he said:

> "For me, social media did not have any role in deciding to return to Iraq, but it was the special social reasons". (Fourth informant)

Through this study, five out of fifteen informants agreed that "Social Media has a role in deciding whether to stay in the host country or go back to the homeland." The sixth informant indicated that social media played a role in making the decision to return home. This informant mentioned that when he saw his children, wife and mother, he felt severe pain and could not control his feelings and wait for more time. This is what he said:

> "Yes, social media had a role in making the decision to return to the homeland, and that is when I was watching my children and my mother through video

calling, I felt great pain and I missed them very much".
(Sixth informant)

While the seventh informant mentioned that social media played a major role in making the decision to stay in Europe, this is due to the information and news about the war with terrorism and the political conflicts that were circulating on social media, and the information that this informant was receiving from family and friends about the bad life and the worsening situation made him decide to stay in Europe and continue to wait, this is what he said:

> "Yes, it had a very big role in relatives deciding to stay in Europe, and that is through what I was seeing on social media from the conditions of war and political conflicts in Iraq, sectarian differences, and also what friends and tell me about daily events in Iraq that makes me be patient Wait more time". (Seventh informant)

CONCLUSIONS

This research was able to determine the most prominent topics, news and information that the Iraqi immigrants were interested in following up when they used social media sites regarding illegal immigration to Europe after an immigration decision was made. They are as follows: (The type of services and privileges that refugee gets in European countries, Topics that provide help, guidance and advice to new immigrants, Laws of European countries towards immigrants and the procedure for obtaining asylum, Development and progress in many areas such as medicine and work, Social issues about the nature of life in Europe, The information about laws that the immigrant must follow or submit to, Topics about how an immigrant spend his time in Europe. Stories that immigrants share about their experiences, The risks of illegal immigration, European officials' interest in immigrants, The countries that provide good job opportunities for immigrants, Topics related to the

study of immigrants and how an immigrant can complete his studies, The topics about how to pass borders by sea or forests to move from one country to another, The means of transportation that immigrants use to travel from one country to another, Which one of European countries are better economically, Which one of European countries are better for living and stability).

Based on what was discussed, it was found that the extent of the Iraqi immigrants' satisfaction with news and social media information can be summarized (Not all the news and information available on the immigration social networking sites is correct, only about half of it is true, because there is some information that turns out to be untrue at all, but there is a difference in information from one person to another since the information that immigrants shared on Social Media is about personal

experiences that cannot be generalized.)   It is worth noting that all the informants who

              interacted   with   the

              publications   on immigration to Europe did not share the topics on their pages on social networking sites. Rather, they only read the comments, write the comments, liking publications, and send personal messages in order to obtain information on illegal immigration from Iraq to Europe.

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Competing Interest

The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

Ethical Standards and Informed Consent

ETHIC COMMITTEE FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECT (JKEUPM)

Ethics Review Panel of Universiti Putra Malaysia has approved the study. The participants voluntarily agree to take part in the research and have been informed about the nature of the research in terms of methodology, possible adverse effects, and complications. The participants understand that they have the right to withdraw from this research at any time without giving any reason whatsoever and understand that this study is confidential and all information provided about their identity will remain private and confidential.

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