

Micro-Influencers, Macro-Impact: Embedding Csr In Influencer Marketing For Sustainable Corporate Reputation In Palestine

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of social media influencer marketing (SMIM) in managing corporate reputation within Palestinian corporates, emphasizing corporate social responsibility (CSR) as the missing link between short-term visibility and sustainable reputation. While previous scholarship has examined social media use, influencer credibility, and consumer behavior, limited attention has been given to how public relations (PR) practitioners strategically embed CSR into influencer collaborations. Addressing this gap, the study draws on data collected through electronic surveys, phone interviews, and selective face-to-face follow-ups with PR practitioners, marketing managers, and brand owners in the West Bank.

The findings demonstrate that influencer marketing in Palestine has evolved beyond advertising into a strategic PR function. Influencer credibility, authenticity, and alignment with organizational values emerged as critical factors, yet CSR integration was found to be weak. Respondents emphasized that influencers act not only as marketing partners but also as co-creators of trust who can amplify CSR narratives, contribute to brand legitimacy, and support crisis responsiveness. Reputation management, therefore, relies not just on visibility but on sustained influencer–corporate partnerships that frame campaigns around social responsibility, community empowerment, and stakeholder dialogue.

By situating CSR at the center of influencer marketing, this study underscores its potential to transform transactional campaigns into sustainable, trust-based communication strategies. It contributes to both theory and practice by shifting the focus from consumer persuasion to corporate-level reputation building, offering insights particularly relevant to emerging markets navigating rapid digital transformation.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Corporate Reputation, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Public Relations, Sustainable Communication, Palestine

INTRODUCTION

Corporate reputation is widely recognized as a strategic asset that shapes organizational success (Davies & Miles, 1998; Fombrun, 1996). In the digital era, firms increasingly rely on social media channels to build and protect their reputation (Aula & Mantere, 2020; Heinonen & Mickelsson, 2006). Among these, social media influencer marketing (SMIM) has emerged as a powerful tool, blending word-of-mouth credibility with the reach of visual branding (Freberg et al., 2011; Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Influencers provide authenticity and niche appeal (Glucksman, 2017), enabling organizations to connect with audiences in ways traditional advertising cannot. This development has blurred the boundaries between marketing and public relations: while influencers extend brand reach, campaigns increasingly center on trust-building, two-way engagement,

and corporate social responsibility (CSR)—core principles of public relations and relationship management (Pang et al., 2018; Grunig & Hung-Baesecke, 2015; Ledingham, 2003).

Yet, most research on influencer marketing emphasizes consumer behavior and persuasion outcomes (Delrue & Naida, 2017; De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017), leaving limited insight into how corporations strategically manage influencers within broader reputation strategies. This gap is particularly evident in the Middle East, where digital public relations remains underdeveloped. For example, Zahra (2023) found that while firms in the region value reputation, few manage it systematically, reflecting context-specific challenges and practices.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the role of social media influencer marketing (SMIM) in the underexplored Middle Eastern context of Palestine, with a particular focus on reputation-building and influencer relationship management. Specifically, the study examines four dimensions. First, it explores the extent to which Palestinian corporates rely on SMIM and the ways in which it is deployed as a strategic tool for corporate reputation management. Second, it investigates how relational practices with influencers—such as reciprocity, respect, and creative freedom—shape collaboration outcomes. Third, it assesses how public relations and marketing managers evaluate the effectiveness, credibility, and strategic role of influencer collaborations in corporate communication. Finally, it evaluates the degree to which influencer marketing practices and relationship management predict reputation outcomes and the fulfillment of stakeholder expectations.

By addressing these questions through a quantitative survey of Palestinian firms, the study advances understanding of the interplay between marketing and public relations in an emerging market. It extends reputation management theory by integrating corporate social responsibility (CSR) and contextual dynamics, while also offering practical guidance for organizations navigating influencer collaborations in comparable environments.

"This study builds upon and significantly extends preliminary research conducted as part of the first author's master's thesis (Joudeh, 2021), introducing a new theoretical framework centered on Corporate Social Responsibility and providing enhanced analysis with strategic implications for practitioners."

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Corporate Reputation Management

Corporate reputation is widely recognized as a vital intangible asset that shapes legitimacy, stakeholder trust, and long-term competitiveness (Eccles, Newquist, & Schatz, 2007; Hillenbrand & Money, 2007; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004). Recent scholarship emphasizes that reputation is constructed through real-time stakeholder perceptions, with online engagement and crisis responsiveness at the core (Nuortimo, Harkonen, & Breznik, 2024). Increasingly, public relations professionals view social media influencers as “custodians of trust” who humanize brand communication and co-create reputational value (Reinikainen & Erkkilä, 2025; Geysler, 2024). This perspective highlights that reputation management is no longer confined to corporate messaging but is embedded in social networks and digital narratives shaped by influencers.

Corporate reputation theory therefore suggests that influencer collaborations should be treated as reputation-building partnerships rather than one-off promotional tools—linking directly to relationship management principles. *Relationship Management in Public Relations*

Relationship management theory positions public relations as the strategic management of mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and stakeholders (Ledingham, 2003). Its key dimensions—trust, openness, reciprocity, and commitment (Hutton et al., 2001; Morgan & Hunt, 1994)—translate within SMIM into practices such as granting influencers creative freedom, recognizing their credibility, and sustaining two-way engagement (Pang et al., 2018). Grunig and Hung-Baesecke (2015) further argue that long-term relational outcomes are more valuable than short-term visibility, reinforcing that influencer partnerships should be evaluated on shared trust and value rather than transactional metrics.

Influencer Marketing and PR Overlap

Influencer marketing has emerged as a hybrid practice at the boundary of advertising and public relations,

blending persuasive reach with authentic dialogue (Zietek, 2016; Lee & Youn, 2015). Influencers function as authenticity providers who shape both transactional outcomes (e.g., sales) and non-transactional outcomes

(e.g., trust, loyalty) (Pan et al., 2024). Their effectiveness depends on credibility, message consistency, and alignment with brand identity (Glucksman, 2017). Hallahan et al. (2007) describe strategic communication as a mediated process that requires careful management to align organizational and audience interests. Extending this idea, social media influencers can be conceptualized as a contemporary form of “controlled intermediation,” underscoring the need for strategic oversight within PR practice.

CSR and Regional Context

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) remains a critical driver of reputation, reflecting how organizations meet stakeholder expectations. Research in the Middle East indicates that although firms acknowledge the importance of reputation, systematic CSR and PR strategies remain limited (Zahra, 2023). More recent analyses suggest that influencers increasingly play a role in CSR communication, acting as “organizational listening agents” who amplify stakeholder concerns and validate corporate values (Mohammad et al., 2024; McKinsey & Company, 2023). In emerging markets such as Palestine, CSR functions not only as a reputational necessity but also as a socio-political imperative. Neglecting CSR integration in SMIM would therefore contradict the foundational assumptions of both reputation management and relationship management theories, highlighting the need to explore how Palestinian corporates connect influencer practices with CSR-driven reputation strategies.

Previous Studies

Research on public relations and digital platforms has increasingly highlighted how organizations employ social media to engage publics and manage reputation. Early work, such as Eyrich, Padman, and Sweetser (2008), documented how PR practitioners began adopting blogs and podcasts alongside traditional channels, while Sakali (2017) showed that governmental institutions, such as Kenya’s Immigration Department, relied heavily on Facebook and Twitter to achieve communication objectives. These studies confirm the growing role of digital platforms in PR practice.

Building on this, research on influencer marketing has explored its mechanisms, credibility factors, and strategic value. Zietek (2016) identified authenticity, co-creation, and long-term partnerships as defining features of influencer campaigns, while Glucksman (2017) emphasized how such campaigns blur the line between consumer and brand communication. Booth and Matic (2011) developed a valuation algorithm to identify effective influencers, and Sweet, Rothwell, and Luo (2019) applied machine-learning techniques to optimize brand–influencer matchmaking, highlighting the importance of aligning influencer content with brand identity. De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017) demonstrated that follower numbers shape perceived popularity and likability, though not always opinion leadership. More recently, Pan et al.’s (2024) meta-analysis confirmed that influencer marketing significantly influences both transactional outcomes (e.g., sales, purchase decisions) and non-transactional outcomes (e.g., attitudes, engagement), with effectiveness shaped by influencer credibility, content quality, and follower identity.

The conceptualization of social media influencers continues to evolve. Industry analyses (McKinsey & Company, 2023) define influencer marketing as collaborations between popular social media users and brands to promote products and services. Academic studies further show that influencers shape consumer perceptions and brand trust (Baig & Shahzad, 2022; Pan et al., 2024). Baghel (2023) emphasizes that when influencer messages are authentic and consistent with brand identity, they foster visibility, engagement, and long-term loyalty.

Parallel to this, scholarship has addressed the broader relationship between influencer activity and corporate reputation management. Reputation is increasingly defined as the collective perception of stakeholders (Nuortimo, Harkonen, & Breznik, 2024), regarded as an intangible but strategic asset maintained through communication strategies such as real-time online engagement and crisis responsiveness. Influencers are described as “co-creators of trust and meaning” (Reinikainen & Erkkilä,

2025) and “custodians of trust” who humanize brand messages (Geysler, 2024). Similarly, Khasawneh (2024) notes that PR practitioners engage influencers not only for product launches but also for reputation building and crisis management, while

Amrozi et al. (2024) demonstrate that digital reputation emerges through feedback, reviews, and shared content, with influencers acting as critical agents in shaping stakeholder perceptions.

Other studies focus more broadly on the role of reputation in PR and corporate success. Hutton et al. (2001) and Macleod (2024) underline its centrality to competitiveness, while Pires and Trez (2018) point to persistent challenges in defining and measuring the construct. On the consumer side, Delrue and Naida (2017) and Sudha and Sheena (2017) demonstrate that influencer credibility and disclosure affect trust and purchase behavior, particularly in lifestyle industries. Relationship management studies (Pang et al., 2018; Ledingham, 2003) further highlight openness, involvement, and commitment as critical to sustaining long-term organization–public and influencer–corporate relations.

In the Palestinian context, empirical studies have begun to shed light on similar dynamics. Haddadeh and Qasem (2023) demonstrated that influencers significantly shape consumer purchase intentions and buying behavior among Palestinian audiences. Harb (2024) further expanded the scope by analyzing how Palestinian influencers contribute to public opinion formation across the Middle East, emphasizing their political and societal influence. Together, these works highlight that influencer marketing in Palestine intersects with both consumer behavior and corporate reputation, while also carrying broader communicative and socio-political implications.

Taken together, prior research has examined social media, influencer marketing, reputation, and influencer–corporate relations, but often in isolation. Much of the literature emphasizes either consumer perspectives (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017; Delrue & Naida, 2017; Sudha & Sheena, 2017) or influencer characteristics (McKinsey & Company, 2023; Glucksman, 2017; Zietek, 2016), with limited focus on how PR practitioners strategically employ influencer marketing for corporate reputation management. While some studies highlight the centrality of reputation as a strategic asset (Nuortimo, Harkonen, & Breznik, 2024; Macleod, 2024) and emphasize influencers as “custodians of trust” in digital environments (Reinikainen & Erkkilä, 2025; Geysler, 2024), the intersection between influencer engagement and corporate-level PR strategies remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap by situating influencer marketing within the Palestinian corporate context, examining how practitioners perceive influencers and manage these relationships to enhance reputation (Harb, 2024; Haddadeh & Qasem, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative survey design to examine how Palestinian corporates use social media influencer marketing (SMIM) in reputation management. A survey was appropriate as it enabled the generation of measurable indicators of corporate practices, perceptions, and relational dynamics with influencers across different sectors. The design also allowed systematic testing of theoretical constructs—reputation management, relationship management, influencer marketing, and public expectations—using established scales. To minimize potential sampling bias, observation of influencer–corporate collaborations was used to refine the sampling frame.

Measures and Constructs

The questionnaire was adapted from validated scales in reputation management and relationship marketing (Aula & Mantere, 2020; Pires & Trez, 2018; Pang et al., 2018; Kitchen & Watson, 2010). Items reflected theoretical constructs drawn from reputation and relationship management theory (Ledingham, 2003; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Four main constructs guided the instrument design:

1. Reputation management – measured by alignment with corporate strategy, CSR practices, transparency, customer expectations, profitability, and social media presence.

2. Influencer marketing outcomes – including brand awareness, engagement rates, audience reach, and performance tracking.
3. Relationship management – based on trust and relational dimensions such as interaction quality, mutual respect, creative freedom, and timeliness (Grunig & Hung-Baesecke, 2015; Ledingham, 2003).
4. Public needs and expectations – covering trust, responsiveness to feedback, and alignment with stakeholder expectations (Eccles, Newquist, & Schatz, 2007).

All items were measured using five-point Likert scales to ensure comparability with prior empirical studies.

Sampling and Data Collection

The target population consisted of corporates in the West Bank that engaged influencers in their PR or marketing strategies. Purposive sampling was employed (Lavrakas, 2008), complemented by observation and social listening tools. In particular, the researchers utilized Modash, an influencer marketing platform that identifies and analyzes influencers on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Modash helped identify the most popular influencers in the West Bank who frequently collaborate with corporates, thereby refining the sampling frame. Out of 131 corporates identified, 107 responded to the survey, with 98 valid cases retained (valid response rate = 74.8%). The sample represented key industries such as telecommunications, consumer goods, fashion and beauty, and local services. Most firms were headquartered in Ramallah (81.3%), reflecting its role as Palestine's business hub. More than half of the companies (64.0%) were founded between 2018 and 2023, indicating rapid digital adoption. Respondents included brand managers (36.2%), marketing officers (21.5%), and corporate owners (18.6%), ensuring managerial-level insight into SMIM practices. Data were collected via electronic surveys, supplemented by phone calls and limited face-to-face follow-ups.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Results demonstrated strong internal consistency across constructs ($\alpha = .92$ overall; reputation management = .88; relationship management = .90; influencer marketing = .90), exceeding the recommended threshold of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Validity was assessed through face and content validation by academic experts (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Construct validity was supported by Pearson correlations, which confirmed strong alignment of items with their respective dimensions.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize corporate practices, Pearson correlations to examine associations among constructs, and multiple regression to test the predictive power of SMIM and relationship management on corporate reputation outcomes and alignment with public expectations.

RQ1: SMIM usage for reputation

Findings show a strong digital shift in Palestinian corporate communication. Nearly all firms (97%) used Facebook and Instagram for campaigns, with 90% treating these platforms as interactive spaces where likes, comments, and engagement were integral to reputation building. Advertising practices reflected this shift: 43% relied exclusively on online advertising, 54% combined online and offline tools, and only 3% depended solely on offline channels.

Reputation was widely recognized as a strategic asset. A large majority (84%) reported that profitability depended heavily on maintaining a positive reputation. When asked about the main drivers of market share, product/service quality (66%) and corporate reputation (63%) ranked higher than financial resources (21%). Influencers played a clear strategic role. Companies most often engaged them for raising awareness (40%), launching new products (34%), and repositioning brands (13%). Importantly, 62% stated that they integrated influencers into PR strategies because the results of such collaborations were measurable. Most corporates worked with one to five influencers per campaign, with a preference for micro-influencers (44%).

In summary, RQ1 results show that Palestinian corporates are adopting digital-first strategies, linking profitability to reputation, and strategically using micro-influencers to strengthen visibility and awareness.

RQ2: Influencer relationship management

Survey results indicate that firms adopted several relational practices consistent with relationship management theory. Specifically, 67% personally engaged with influencers' posts (liking, commenting, sharing); 69% reported respecting and appreciating influencers; 71% allowed creative freedom in content creation; and 73% provided adequate time for authentic content development.

Corporations also identified collaboration success factors: 63% emphasized listening to public feedback, 60% valued maintaining a consistent presence alongside influencers, and 50% stressed fulfilling public needs. These practices demonstrate that companies considered influencer partnerships as trust-based rather than purely transactional.

Correlation analysis confirmed that relationship quality was positively associated with SMIM efforts. However, as detailed under RQ4, regression models showed that relationship quality alone did not significantly predict stakeholder satisfaction once SMIM strength was included.

These results suggest that corporates value respectful and trust-based influencer relationships, but relational quality contributed more to smooth collaboration than to direct public outcomes.

RQ3: Corporate perceptions of SMIM

Respondents expressed a highly positive view of influencer marketing. Nearly 88% were satisfied with influencer campaigns, crediting them with tangible business results, stronger credibility, and enhanced brand reputation.

When selecting influencers, companies emphasized reach and impact: 57% prioritized follower count, 52% emphasized engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares), and 38% highlighted confidence in the influencer's credibility and brand fit. Secondary factors included audience match (35%) and influencer loyalty to products (31%). These criteria indicate that while quantitative reach remains important, firms also weigh credibility and brand alignment when evaluating influencers.

Content preferences leaned strongly toward visual formats: 87% used images, 74% used videos, while only 18% relied on text. To drive interaction, 49% employed contests and 45% used giveaways.

The evidence from RQ3 therefore shows that corporates perceived SMIM as an effective and measurable PR strategy, with authenticity, engagement, and visual storytelling central to campaign design.

RQ4: Predicting stakeholder needs

Correlation analysis showed a moderately strong positive relationship between influencer marketing and relationship management ($r = .56, p < .05$), suggesting that firms investing in one practice tended to invest in the other.

Regression analysis highlighted the dominant role of influencer marketing. SMIM strength significantly predicted reputation outcomes, explaining 35.7% of the variance ($R^2 = .357, p < .05$). Each unit increase in SMIM practices was associated with a 0.603-point increase in reputation outcomes. Similarly, SMIM predicted 31.7% of the variance in meeting public expectations ($R^2 = .317, p < .05$). Relationship management alone, however, did not add significant predictive power once SMIM was included.

Overall, the RQ4 findings confirm that influencer marketing was the primary driver of both reputation outcomes and stakeholder satisfaction, whereas relational practices had only indirect effects.

Comparative Perspective

To place the Palestinian findings in a wider context, Table 1 compares results with MENA and international studies, highlighting departmental dominance, influencer types, CSR integration, and the link between influencer activity and reputation.

Table 1 Comparative Dimensions of Influencer Marketing and Corporate Reputation Management Across Contexts

Dimension	Palestine (current study)	MENA (e.g., Egypt, Gulf)	International (e.g., US/EU)
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<i>Dominant department (PR vs Marketing)</i>	Marketing dominates, PR less influential	Mixed: PR stronger in government/CSR-driven campaigns (Al-Kandari & Gaither, 2011)	Balanced: PR and Marketing collaboration (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Valentini, 2015)
<i>Primary influencer type</i>	Micro-influencers dominate	Macro and celebrity influencers more visible (Kasumovic, 2024)	Micro and niche influencers emphasized (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Guidry Moulard, 2020; Ki et al., 2020)
<i>Role of CSR in influencer marketing</i>	CSR underdeveloped but emerging	CSR integrated with national branding (Al-Kandari & Gaither, 2011; Dabbous & Barakat, 2020)	CSR central to influencer reputation management (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Fieseler & Fleck, 2013)
<i>Impact on reputation</i>	Reputation tied strongly to influencer campaigns	Reputation tied to visibility and political sensitivities (Kasumovic, 2024)	Reputation tied to authenticity and long-term stakeholder trust (Sen, Du & Bhattacharya, 2016; Lou & Yuan, 2019)

These comparisons indicate that while Palestine reflects global patterns in micro-influencer adoption, it diverges in CSR integration and departmental leadership, aligning more closely with emerging-market dynamics than with mature communication markets.

Discussion

The findings reveal that Palestinian companies have embraced social media influencer marketing (SMIM) as a central element of digital public relations. Consistent with global trends (Glucksman, 2017), corporates employ influencers to amplify visibility, generate engagement, and enhance brand legitimacy. The overwhelming reliance on Facebook and Instagram (97%), combined with the finding that 84% of firms perceive reputation as critical to profitability, underscores the digital dominance of SMIM as a reputational driver in the Palestinian context.

A key insight is the preference for micro-influencers (44%), aligning with authenticity theory: audiences tend to trust relatable, accessible figures more than distant celebrities (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017; Zietek, 2016). This preference is particularly relevant in a trust-fragile environment, where local culture, relatability, and perceived credibility carry more weight than follower counts alone. Campaign goals—

awareness (40%) and product launches (34%)—further reflect a pragmatic orientation toward visibility

and measurable outcomes.

Reputation and Relationship Theories

The results strongly affirm reputation management theory. Firms explicitly link profitability and market share to reputation, consistent with Fombrun's (1996) emphasis on trust, credibility, and excellence. Similarly, relationship management dimensions—trust, mutuality, reciprocity, and two-way engagement—are valued by firms: 71–73% allow creative freedom, and 69% explicitly value influencers. These findings echo Ledingham's (2003) contention that long-term relationship building is central to PR effectiveness. Yet, regression analysis highlights an important nuance: SMIM emerged as the strongest predictor of meeting public needs and managing reputation, while relational practices, though positively associated, had only indirect or complementary effects. This suggests a transitional PR environment in Palestine, where corporates prioritize transactional metrics (likes, shares, reach) over the less tangible but strategic benefits of relational trust.

Regional and Comparative Context

This pattern contrasts with more mature communication markets. In Western Europe, for instance, CSR engagement and long-term stakeholder trust are deeply intertwined with influencer marketing (Hillenbrand & Money, 2007; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004). Similarly, Mohammad et al. (2024) found that in Jordan, cultural resonance and authenticity were the primary drivers of brand trust in influencer collaborations. Palestinian corporates, by contrast, appear to concentrate on immediate reach and short-term outcomes, reflecting both the novelty of digital PR in the region and resource constraints. Future studies could extend this work by comparing Palestine with Jordan, Egypt, and the Gulf to examine whether relational trust and CSR integration become more pronounced as digital PR practices mature.

Practical Implications

The findings highlight that while Palestinian corporates have embraced social media influencer marketing (SMIM) as a central communication strategy, current practices remain anchored in transactional metrics such as visibility, likes, and reach. These indicators validate short-term campaign success but fall short of securing sustainable reputational capital. To advance beyond this transitional phase, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) must be positioned as the missing piece that transforms influencer marketing from a promotional practice into a strategic mechanism of legitimacy and trust-building.

Embedding CSR into influencer collaborations ensures that campaigns do more than raise awareness or launch products. Instead, they become vehicles for social value creation—promoting themes such as community empowerment, sustainability, education, and solidarity. This aligns with Reputation Management Theory (Fombrun, 1996; Eccles et al., 2007), which stresses that reputation is a fragile but strategic asset shaped by stakeholder perceptions, and with Relationship Management Theory (Ledingham, 2003), which highlights reciprocity and mutual benefit as central to durable relationships. By anchoring influencer partnerships in CSR narratives, corporates can enhance authenticity, strengthen stakeholder loyalty, and extend the life cycle of reputation gains well beyond single campaigns.

At a practical level, this requires shifting responsibility for influencer campaigns from purely marketing-driven departments toward PR-led units capable of aligning influencer content with corporate values and societal expectations. In doing so, corporates can rebalance the PR–marketing convergence (Hutton et al., 2001), ensuring that influencer marketing strategies privilege ethical alignment, stakeholder dialogue, and long-term legitimacy over immediate visibility.

In sum, CSR provides the transformative mechanism that allows Palestinian corporates to evolve from transactional influencer campaigns to sustainable, value-based communication strategies. By embedding CSR into SMIM, firms not only achieve reputational resilience but also fulfill broader societal responsibilities—positioning influencers as partners in shaping both brand reputation and public trust.

Synthesis

The evidence confirms that Palestinian corporates widely recognize social media influencer marketing (SMIM) as an effective mechanism for visibility and reputation building. However, the emphasis remains

predominantly transactional, with firms prioritizing short-term engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and reach. While these practices reflect the global trend toward digital-first communication (Glucksman, 2017), they do not yet embody the strategic depth required for sustainable reputation management.

The study suggests that the missing element is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) integration. CSR reframes influencer collaborations from temporary promotional tools into vehicles of long-term legitimacy and stakeholder trust. In contexts marked by fragile trust and socio-political pressures, such as Palestine, CSR-infused influencer campaigns can both strengthen corporate credibility and respond to broader societal expectations. This aligns with Reputation Management Theory (Fombrun, 1996; Eccles et al., 2007), which positions reputation as a fragile strategic asset, and with Relationship Management Theory (Ledingham, 2003), which underscores reciprocity and long-term mutuality.

Thus, CSR functions as the bridge between transactional outcomes and sustainable strategies, ensuring that SMIM is not only effective in the short run but also resilient and ethically grounded in the long term.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study demonstrates that SMIM has become a central tool for corporate reputation management in Palestine. Firms rely heavily on micro-influencers to amplify awareness, visibility, and engagement. Yet the findings reveal a structural gap: CSR remains underdeveloped, and public relations professionals are frequently sidelined in favor of marketing-driven approaches. Without CSR integration, influencer marketing risks remaining a short-term visibility tactic rather than evolving into a sustainable reputation-building strategy.

To address this, corporates should first institutionalize PR leadership by establishing dedicated units to ensure influencer collaborations are guided by ethical alignment, stakeholder dialogue, and long-term legitimacy. This step is consistent with Grunig's (1992) Excellence Theory, which underscores PR's central role in strategic decision-making.

Second, organizations should embed CSR into influencer campaigns. By framing collaborations around themes such as community empowerment, sustainability, and education, corporates can align influencer activity with stakeholder values and societal needs. This strengthens authenticity, builds reputational resilience, and transforms campaigns into vehicles of shared value creation.

Third, companies need to prioritize long-term partnerships. Moving beyond one-off campaigns, firms should cultivate sustained, trust-based relationships with influencers who embody both brand identity and CSR values. Granting creative freedom within this framework enhances authenticity and reinforces mutual trust. Finally, advancing analytics and segmentation is essential. Corporates must invest in audience insight tools that track not only engagement metrics but also stakeholder perceptions of CSR-linked initiatives. Such tools provide a more holistic measure of reputational impact and ensure that campaigns are evaluated beyond surface-level visibility.

Overall, CSR provides the missing piece that allows Palestinian corporates to transition from transactional metrics toward sustainable, reputation-based communication strategies. By embedding CSR into influencer marketing, companies can simultaneously meet business objectives and fulfill their societal responsibilities, thereby strengthening both reputational capital and public trust in the long term.

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