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Bratislava, Slovakia  
Gökmen Kantar,  
Namik Kemal University, Turkey

## \*CORRESPONDENCE

Mohammed Habes  
mohammad.habes@yu.edu.jo

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# Reputation management through social networking platforms for PR purposes: A SEM-based study in the Jordan

Farhan Al Olaimat, Mohammed Habes\*, Ali Yahya Al Hadeed and Marcelle Issa Al Jwaniat

Faculty of Mass Communication, Public Relations & Advertising, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan

Virtual social media platforms of greater importance for general and corporate purposes. Especially retailers today resort to these platforms to bridge a communication gap between their PR practitioners and consumers for reputation management purposes. This research also examines the virtual social media usage for Public Relations (PR), leading to Reputation Management in the Jordanian retail sector. The researchers developed the conceptual model at Theory of Reasoned Action, applied the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), and selected a sample of  $n= 250$  PR professionals. Results indicated by the Public Relations practitioners have a significant impact on controlling the customers' behavior. This Perceived Behavioral Control is an important factor in social network adoption for communication purposes. Accompanied by instant communication ability, these social networks and communication feasibility have a significant impact on Reputation Management. However, it is notable that, Attitude also mediated the Public Relations Practices concerning Perceived Behavioral Control, indicating that the Theory of Reasoned Action significantly determined the factors determining the Virtual social media usage and adoption for the reputation management purposes. Thus, it is concluded that using social networks for Public Relations practices is the need of the day. Especially when using them for reputation management, companies consider different factors that further assist their digital networks adoption process, leading to fruitful outcomes. Further, the researchers have discussed the study contributions and made recommendations for future researchers.

## KEYWORDS

public relations, social networks, reputation management, retail sector, consumer psychology

## Introduction

According to [Rahi and Ghani \(2016\)](#), retail stores and their overall product reputation are crucial to attracting potential customers. Those with prior experiences mainly talk about their experiences regarding overall services and product quality. Additionally, the business marketing strategies also come up with an idea to enhance

the products and services to create and sustain a better reputation among customers. However, service quality and product management are not always lined up (Sadler and Evans, 2016). On the contrary, a good quality product can face criticism or customer dissatisfaction due to poor marketing and communication abilities. In this regard, we assume that a skilled Public Relations (PR) practitioner plays a major role in maintaining a positive product image and improving a company's overall reputation. Bradlow et al. (2016) consider Public Relations (PR) as aiding reputation management while enhancing the reach of a business, particularly retail stores. As noted by Lockett and Lockett (2018), Public Relations (PR) is a complete communication process between customers and a retail store's customer support services. Yet it is not that an organization buys advertisements to make people pay attention. Instead, it works through employees working to sustain Public Relations (PR), providing more significance and positive influence than traditional advertising patterns. According to Ahmad and Benazirabad (2018), one of the most constructive impacts of Public Relations (PR) is that it does not involve any third party. Rather, it provides potential validation and appraisal depending mainly on how well an organization tends to meet the customers' needs and alleviates their uncertainties. Every business organization is interested in positioning itself in the spotlight by using its communication resources to provide persuasive yet logical information about the product. Although advertising is still a viable option, it mainly involves a third-party witnessing and providing product information, leading to many customer uncertainties (Ahmed and Khan, 2019).

Similarly, reputation management through social networks further helps business organizations to flourish both on the local and international levels. Accompanied by both increased communication and accessibility, social networks. Before buying a product, customers prefer to communicate and attain reliable advice about the desired product, its quality, features, and overall the relevant company's reputation (Singh and Balhara, 2016). However, here Ahmad et al. (2019) question the factors leading to social network adoption and usage for the Public Relations (PR) leading to reputation management among the retailers. For example, the retail sector in the Jordan is mainly interested in adopting social networking platforms. Notably, there are 9.84 million daily social media users in the Jordan, with an average of 7.2 h of daily usage (Statista, 2021). By keeping in view the increased social network usage, retailers aim to increase access to their customers and create strong relations with them. As a result, customers recognize a retailer and its products as they have attained direct communication and buying experience indicating online communities, i.e., blogs, community forums, online review systems, and online support systems. Using different social networks ensure that services are available, visible, and provided at any time through these online platforms (Amin et al., 2019). However, Radwan et al. (2021) question

the reason and factors behind the growing online presence among the retailers. As noted, growing e-commerce worldwide indicates retailers' dependency on online platforms for certain reasons, i.e., ease of usage, direct communication feasibility, and finally, the perceived useful outcomes. Consequently, these factors determine the retailers' behavior toward an active social networking adoption and their increased usage, as also anticipated by Ajzen (1991) and affirmed by Hadadgar et al. (2016), McLaughlin et al. (2020), and Dorce et al. (2021) and others. Besides, using these platforms also leads to improved product reviews and product management among the customers (Rashid et al., 2019).

Therefore, this article also examines social network usage for Public Relations (PR), leading to Reputation Management in the Jordanian retail sector. Specifically, the causal factors indicated by the Theory of Planned Behavior. It is also notable that many studies in the Jordan have been conducted on Public Relations in the Jordan. Yet, no study has examined the causal factors for this online presence, indicating an explicit literature gap in the relevant area. The researcher in current research has structured this article formally in five sections. The first section comprises an introduction to the main topic and highlights the statement of the problem. The second section focuses on citing the supportive literature that is further followed by the main theory in the third section leading to hypotheses development. The fourth section involves highlighting the suitable methodological approaches. The fifth section involves data analyses, and finally, the sixth section discusses results, conclusions, and study limitations. Thus, the main questions addressed by this research involve:

- R1:** How do Public Relations practices impact the perceived behavioral control?
- R2a:** How does Perceived behavioral control impact the virtual social media?
- R2b:** How does Perceived behavioral impact the Communication?
- R3:** How does Virtual social media usage impact the Communication?
- R4:** How does virtual social media usage impact the improving reputation management?
- R5:** How does communication impact the improving reputation management?
- R6:** How does Attitude impacts the relationship between public relations practices and perceived behavioral control?

## Review of literature

### Public relations practices and perceived behavioral control

Public Relations is a strategic communication process to create and sustain a positive environment in an organization

or between the company and the potential customers. A Public Relations practitioner aims to create and employ effective strategies that help to achieve the desired business goals (Macnamara, 2016). According to Yang et al. (2020), despite two decades ago, Public Relations was possible mainly through direct, face-to-face communication or conventional media platforms forms, its importance is still the same. Even today, when online platforms are comparatively more preferred for communication purposes, companies focus on real-time, direct communication with the customers to provide the services and guidance accordingly.

It is notable that Public Relations primarily involve storytelling-based strategic communication. This approach provides services to the customers and controls audience behavior toward favorable decision-making (Britt et al., 2014). However, according to Banerjee and Ho (2020), understanding customer behavior is a complex phenomenon. Especially when it is about making a decision, Public Relations practitioners resort to different approaches that are necessarily logical and practical to attain the desired outcomes. As noted by Mellado and Barría (2016), when it is about building positive ties with the customers, Public Relations is about creating awareness, spreading the word, and convincing the customers to action. However, the audience is not always the same. Notably, another purpose of Public Relations is relationship building with the customers. As a result, other positive results, including customer loyalty and satisfaction, become inevitable.

**H1:** Public relations practices have a significant impact on perceived behavioral control.

## Perceived behavioral control through virtual social media and communication

Customers and their buying behavior are one of the prominent topics in research. However, today, when customers are more likely to be choosy and consider even delicate details, convincing them is a complex yet considerable phenomenon. According to Dwivedi et al. (2021), physical and virtual platforms enable customers to evaluate the products they need critically. Yet, the importance of communication to persuade is of greater significance. Here Svatošová (2018) cites an example of dissonance that often refrain from customers. Using communication and interacting directly with them helps to resolve this dissonance in a better possible manner. Another example of a lawnmower is cited by Vera et al. (2016). Before buying a product, customers like to seek opinions and guidance from existing customers and support agents. These customers seek confirmation that their buying decision will be fruitful to them. This example further magnifies the importance of Public Relations, which has become increasingly scientific, especially

today when the internet has provided us with communication feasibility. As noted by Aydin et al. (2021), now customers search for effortless shopping experiences. They lack time to observe and filter products, increasing how Public Relations can be a clear pathway to convince them.

In this regard, Public Relations practitioners can resort to digitalized two-way communication as it provides a detailed understanding of the company and customers. Gibson (2018) further highlighted the importance of PR practices through social networks. As noted, you can also see PR as a way of earning—and not interrupting—people's attention. A savvy communicator knows how to create compelling stories. And with that, gain publicity for free from trusted, unpaid, or earned channels. Public Relations is a source of interrupting rather than earning customers' attention and favorable decision. A Public Relations expert having savvy communication skills create innovative stories that sufficiently convince the customers. Thus, whether representing a brand or verbally persuading the customers, Public Relations is important to provide certain benefits to an organization (Klepek and Starzyczna, 2018).

**H2a:** Perceived behavioral control has a significant impact on social networks usage.

**H2b:** Perceived behavioral control has a significant impact on Communication.

## Virtual social media and communication

According to Froment et al. (2017), virtual social networks necessarily provide a place where people can create, share, and receive information and communication in virtual environments. Accompanied by these opportunities, today's virtual social networks are the center of attention for the companies especially running retail stores. As noted by Gudmanian et al. (2019), virtual social networks have emerged as a potential medium of communication, with a wide influence across the globe. The significance of communication through virtual social networks can be determined by the fact that, as of 2019, there were 3.3 billion internet users worldwide, 42.1% of the Earth's total population, indicating the growing dominance of social networks-based communication in our lives.

As Abdalli and Hassan (2019) argued, virtual social networks have given birth to a new and even improved genre of communication, where conversations are facilitated with ease of use and greater accessibility. Thus, due to its widespread influence, retail industry employers actively seek individuals knowing the usage and significance of these online platforms regarding customer support and services. Today virtual social networks are an integral part of the retail sector's considerations and present several opportunities to retailers and the customers (Bozkurt et al., 2017).

**H3:** Social networks usage has a significant impact on Communication.

## Virtual social media and reputation management

Today retailers acknowledge that online presence is an important pathway to enhancing reputation management, which significantly adds to the business consistency. For instance, before buying a product, customers want to read the online reviews or interact directly with the company representatives (Gudmanian et al., 2019). According to new data, more than 90% of customers consider the company's overall reputation an important component of the decision-making process. This direct or indirect observation is important as it affects a retailer's overall reputation. Most customers directly communicate with the company's representatives when they want to buy products according to their considerations and requirements (Abdalli and Hassan, 2019). According to Bozkurt et al. (2017), social networks work as a dynamic platform that retailers use to increase their visibility and access. Retailer's communication experts/PR practitioners resort to interactive capabilities such as storytelling to engage the customers on online platforms.

However, despite positive experiences dominating, still many customers confront negative experiences. Most of these negative experiences result from poor customer service or communication errors between the retailers' representatives and customers (Kujur and Singh, 2020). Froment et al. (2017) consider negative feedback on social networks more harmful than conventional face-to-face communication patterns. As noted, negative experiences are lethal for a company's success. If social networks are used properly, reputation management becomes inevitable.

**H4:** Social networks usage has a significant impact on improving reputation management.

## Communication and reputation management

According to Dacko-Pikiewicz (2021), reputation management is crucial for Public Relations practitioners. A business depends on reputation management and needs consistent and constant attention from the Public Relations practitioners. In this regard, effective communication helps create and sustain brand loyalty among the customers and plays a critical role in brand management. For instance, during a crisis such as floods, when a business organization faces several challenges, communicating with the customers can positively

affect the company's reputation and crisis management approach (Berg and Blomqvist, 2019). In this regard, effective communication helps create and sustain brand loyalty among the customers and plays a critical role in brand management. For instance, during a crisis such as floods, when a business organization faces several challenges, communicating with the customers can positively affect the company's reputation and crisis management approach (Wæraas and Dahle, 2020).

As noted by Dimitrova (2016), listening and effectively communicating with the customers is most difficult yet significant for reputation management. A company's Public Relations team is trained to deal with and listen to the customers' issues and uncertainties. Having a strong and tactful Public Relations team for reputation management also maintain a positive brand image among the customers. As Desai (2018) argued, Public Relations practitioners adopt several communication strategies for reputation management. These communication strategies help provide the right information about the right products and services at the right time. Maor (2020) further describes different communication strategies adopted by Public Relations practitioners, such as service and product promotions, online product audits, external and internal communication, content marketing, social media management and auditing, and many others.

**H5:** Communication has a significant impact on improving reputation management.

## Attitude in public relations practices and perceived behavioral control

Public Relations teams use social networks and communication tools to organize strategies that can help address the customers' issues in the best possible manner. The goal of Public Relations practitioners is to focus on the company's reputation management by influencing customers' perceptions of products and services (Alturas and Oliveira, 2016). According to Bilgin (2018), online reputation management involves all the plans and strategies a company uses, including customer-centric approaches based on direct communication with potential customers. Reputation management through online platforms also involves interacting with other retailers and observing reviews leading to alleviating weaknesses that hinder a company's trust and customer loyalty. On the other hand, online reputation management also keeps its communication goals that are secretly tied with the required business goals. Especially when online communication with the customers results in customer persuasion, it also enhances brand credibility and brand image among the customers (Informatik, 2020).

According to Rust et al. (2021), a company's Public Relations practitioners are liable to create and sustain healthy

relationships with the customers. These practitioners have social and emotional intelligence skills, leading them to understand, respond to, and persuade the customers. A study [Iqbal and Khan \(2021\)](#) further validated the role of social networks in increasing brand reputation and leading to positive customer attitudes. The researchers applied the case study method in Pakistan and used structured questionnaires for data gathering purposes. Findings revealed that attaining while companies prefer social networks for communication, which is positively affecting customers' attitudes toward purchasing and repurchasing. These findings indicate the importance of communication through online networks leading to brand loyalty and customer satisfaction.

**H6:** Attitude significantly mediates the relationship between public relations practices and perceived behavioral control.

## Theoretical and conceptual framework

This research is theoretically and conceptually supported by the Theory of Reasoned Action. Generally speaking, Theory of Reasoned Action tends to examine the relationship between attitudes and behavior that further their actions and decision-making process ([Hagger, 2019](#)). As an important part of social psychology, theory of reasoned action was proposed in 1967 by Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishben. The relevant theory is further evaluated and enhanced by Icek and their colleagues further witnessing how attitudes further help to shape and reshape the human behavior accordingly ([Bergstrom and Poor, 2022](#)). Theory of reasoned action is widely used in the communication studies, as it helps to examine the primary factors behind a certain attitude that results in a certain behavior among the individuals ([Ali et al., 2021](#)). Thus, under the assumption made by theory of reasoned action, this research also proposes the impact of Public Relations practices as ensuring the behavioral change among the individuals. According to [Jeljeli et al. \(2018\)](#), the role of Public Relations practices is persuasion through communication. This communication is accompanied by all those approaches, that further ensure the favorable behavior development especially among the consumers and clients of an organization ([Urena et al., 2019](#)). On the other hand, virtual social media based platforms further fuel the process of persuasion and behavioral change through communication process, that helps an organization to improve their reputation through rapid and efficient services and product development process ([Doorley and Garcia, 2015](#); [Kazankova, 2021](#); [Kuan et al., 2021](#); [Tosyali, 2021](#)). However, it is important to mention that, above all the whole persuasion process starts with the attitudes of the PR professional that further leave the similar attitudinal effects on the clients ([Bradlow et al., 2016](#)). As once the PR professional is motivated to show a positive attitude toward customer persuasion, they will more likely to gain a favorable

behavioral change among them through rapid communication in a virtual environment ([Ahmad and Benazirabad, 2018](#)). [Figure 1](#) below illustrates the conceptualization of the relevant issue with the help of the theory of reason action.

## Research methods

As the current research aimed to assess different causal factors accelerating virtual social media usage for reputation management, the approaches remained focused on extracting best possible responses to obtain the generalizable results. Notably, this research was guided by  $n = 6$  root questions, that are further addressed by the cited literature to propose the preliminary research hypotheses. This section involves briefly highlights the approaches executive to answer the relevant questions that are followed by a number of sub-questions in the survey questionnaire. The approaches were kept consistent with the study objectives, questions, and problem to ensure that the research followed a systematic and empirical process of investigation.

## Research design and data gathering tool

This research is based on a cross-sectional design due to the study problem and goals. According to [McDonough \(2017\)](#), cross-sectional studies are based on a short period, with potentially generalizable results. Further, the researchers utilized the survey method for data gathering purposes. Survey questionnaires were based on the Five-Point Likert scale (Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree) as suggested by [Krosnick \(1999\)](#). [Table 1](#) summarizes the sources of the survey scales and items. Data gathering was done from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2022 to June 18<sup>th</sup> 2022. Notably, the researcher manipulated, coded, and entered data for statistical analysis. For the analysis, the researcher has applied Statistical Package for Social Sciences and IBM Amos for the Structural Equation Modeling. As noted by [Weston and Gore \(2006\)](#), Structural Equation Modeling is one of the most preferred data analysis techniques. Although it is much similar to a regression, it offers some additional features, i.e., examining the suitability of the measurement model and the strength of latent variables.

## Study sample

According to the study requirements and problem statement, the research population involves all the retail stores having official online accounts. However, as per the sampling requirements ([Wani, 2017](#)), the researcher randomly selected a sample of  $n = 250$  individuals working as Public Relations (PR) practitioners in  $n = 8$  retail stores currently functioning in the United Arab Emirates. Notably, [Taherdoost \(2018\)](#) suggested

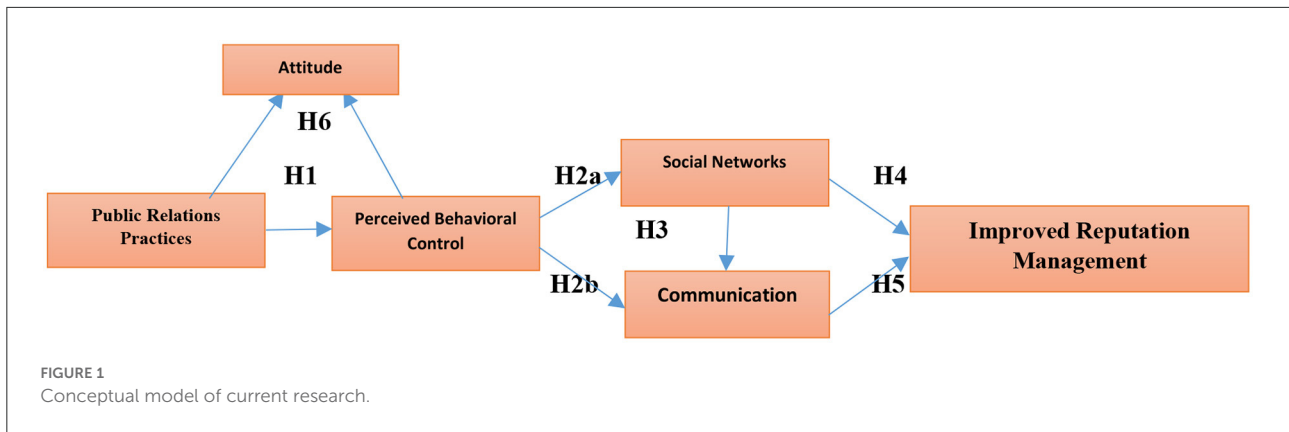
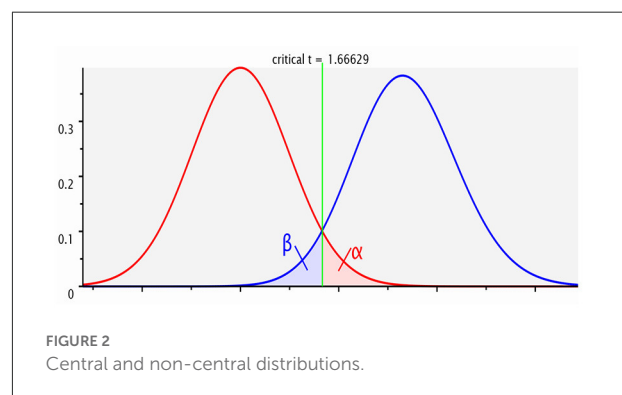


TABLE 1 Source of scales used in the questionnaire.

S/R.Scale	Source
1. Public relations practices	(Macnamara, 2016; Rust et al., 2021)
2. Perceived behavioral control	(Ajzen, 1991; Hagger, 2019)
3. Social networks	(Bradlow et al., 2016; Bilgin, 2018; Desai, 2018)
4. Communication	(Dimitrova, 2016; Abdalli and Hassan, 2019)
5. Improved reputation management	(Berg and Blomqvist, 2019; Dacko-Pikiewicz, 2021)
6. Attitudes	(Ajzen, 1991)



studies conducting Structural Equation Modeling should have a minimum sample size of  $n = 200$  participants to ensure the validity and reliability of the measurement model. Further, the researcher also determined the sample size using the power analysis, which is also recommended by Gabler and Häder (2016). Thus, GPower analysis revealed a sample size of  $n = 74$  ideas for the current study. In this regard, the chosen sample size of  $n = 250$  remained suitable for the current research. Figure 2 below illustrates the central and non-central distributions of the sample in the current research. Besides, the researcher used a convenient sampling method to select participants. According to Taherdoost (2018), despite criticism and certain limitations of the convenient sampling method, it is one of the most preferred sampling techniques due to the reliability and generalizability of results obtained from the relevant sampling method.

### Research ethics

The researcher kept basic research ethics under consideration while conducting this study. First, the researchers remained unbiased while the data manipulation process. Second, as suggested by Roache (2014), the researcher provided informed consent (Roache, 2014) to the participants, including

study details, the significance of the topic, and results, and ensured them that their data would be kept confidential. Finally, the researcher was free to withdraw while recording their responses at any time without any justifications and further obligations. Notably, the response rate in the current research remained 100% as none of the questionnaires was incomplete or wrongly filled. The researcher carefully finalized all the questionnaires and proceeded with the data analysis process.

## Data analysis and results

### Convergent validity

Structural Equation Modeling involves convergent validity analysis to examine the internal consistency of research items (Farizawani et al., 2020). Hence, convergent validity in the current research involved the calculation of Factor Loading, Average Variance Extracted, Composite Reliability, and Cronbach Alpha values. First, the researcher calculated the Factor Loading values and found that most of them surpassed the threshold value of 0.5. Notably, the values that are  $< 0.50$  or on the borderline, are carefully alleviated to ensure and sustain the reliability and validity of the measurement model (Mazouz et al., 2019). Besides, Average Variance Extracted values are also

TABLE 2 Convergent validity assessment.

Constructs	Items	FL	AVE	CA	CR
Public relations practices	PRP1	0.756	0.749	0.761	0.765
	PRP2	0.468			
	PRP3	0.743			
Perceived behavioral control	PBH1	0.824	0.811	0.797	0.793
	PBH2	0.799			
	PBH3	0.500			
Social networking	SNG1	0.772	0.857	0.780	0.791
	SNG2	0.866			
	SNG3	0.848			
Communication	CMN1	0.399	0.688	0.811	0.820
	CMN2	0.655			
	CMN3	0.721			
Attitude	ADE1	0.288	0.608	0.803	0.711
	ADE2	0.565			
	ADE3	0.651			
Improved reputation management	IRM1	0.847	0.791	0.715	0.730
	IRM2	0.735			
	IRM3	0.580			

found to surpass the threshold value of 0.5, as suggested by Schermelleh-Engel et al. (2003). Further, the Cronbach Alpha values are found to range from 0.715 to 0.811, and Composite Reliability values range from 0.711 to 0.820, surpassing the threshold value of 0.7. Thus, it is concluded that the convergent validity of the measurement model is successfully established. Table 2 summarizes the results of convergent validity analysis.

### Discriminant validity

After examining the convergent validity, the researcher conducted the discriminant validity analysis. According to Henseler et al. (2015), there is a two-criterion rule to examine the discriminant validity of a measurement model, including the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio and Fornell-Larcker Criterion. Thus, discriminant validity analysis in this research revealed that the square of all the Average Variance Extracted values is greater than the correlation values given in Table 3. Further, the researchers manually calculated the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (see Table 4), indicating the value at 0.430, which is smaller than the threshold value of 0.9 (Habes et al., 2018). Thus, it is found that the discriminant validity of the measurement model is fully established.

### Goodness of fit

Finally, in the third stage of measurement model analysis, the researchers examined the Goodness of Fit. According to

TABLE 3 Fornell–Larcker criterion.

	PRP	PBH	SNG	CMN	ADE	IRM
PRP						
PBH	−0.470					
SNG	−0.285	−0.244				
CMN	−0.074	−0.056	−0.376			
ADE	−0.089	−0.101	−0.134	−0.355		
IRM	0.013	−0.140	−0.073	0.057	−0.006	

TABLE 4 Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio scale.

	PRP	PBH	SNG	CMN	ADE	IRM
PRP						
PBH	0.752					
SNG	0.715	0.702				
CMN	0.596	0.582	0.707			
ADE	0.553	0.549	0.608	0.647		
IRM	0.189	0.249	0.210	0.125	0.139	

TABLE 5 Coefficients of determination R<sup>2</sup>.

Variables	R <sup>2</sup>
Public relations practices	0.380
Perceived behavioral control	0.289
Social networks	0.410
Communication	0.425
Attitude	0.419

Stage et al. (2004), the goodness of fit is a model that determines the difference between the values expected under a statistical model and observed values. Thus, Goodness of Fit in this research revealed a chi-square value at  $\chi^2 = 0.610$  (57) and a probability level at 0.004. Further, the Standardized Root Mean Square value remained at 0.008, which is lower than the threshold value of 0.9, indicating a good fit. Besides, the other notable values were CFI at 0.166, NFI value at 0.631, AGFI value at 367, RMR value at 0.045, and Akaike information criterion (AIC) value at 0.0210.

### Coefficients of determination R<sup>2</sup>

According to Figueiredo Filho et al. (2011), Coefficients of Determination R<sup>2</sup>, also known as R<sup>2</sup>, helps determine the predictive power of latent variables. It also explains the extent to which the exogenous variable is causing variance in the endogenous variables. Thus, coefficients of determination R<sup>2</sup> in this research revealed the R<sup>2</sup> values ranging from 0.289 to 0.425, which shows the fundamental, predictive power of latent variables. Table 5 summarizes the findings of the Coefficients of Determination R<sup>2</sup>.

TABLE 6 Hypotheses testing (regression weights).

S/R	Hypotheses	Path	t-value	Sign
H1	PRP > PBH	0.579	6.856	0.000
H2a	PBH > SNG	-0.598	-0.835	0.404
H2b	PBH > CMN	2.463	1.978	0.048
H3	SNG > CMN	0.746	11.698	0.000
H4	SNG > IRM	0.361	2.114	0.035
H5	CMN > IRM	0.603	2.959	0.003
H6	PRP > ADE > PBH	0.348	1.884	0.060

## Hypotheses testing (regression weights, path analysis)

Finally, the researchers conducted the path analysis as the second and most important step in structural model analysis. According to Murti (2016), path analysis involves the traditional regression analysis, yet it provides an in-depth understanding of the relationships proposed in the conceptual model. Thus, the researchers first examine the proposed impact of Public Relations Practices on Perceived Behavioral Control. Results revealed a significant impact of Public Relations Practices on Perceived Behavioral Control, with the significance value at 0.000 and path value at 0.579. Further in the H2a and H2b of the study, the researchers proposed a significant impact of Perceived Behavioral Control on Social Networks (usage) and Communication. However, H2a assuming a significant impact of Perceived Behavioral Control on Social Networks remained insignificant. In contrast, the impact of Perceived Behavioral Control on Communication remained significant, with the significance value at 0.048 and path value at 2.463. Further, H3 of the study proposed an impact of Social Networks on Communication that also remained significant with the  $p$ -value at  $p > 0.000$  and path value at 0.000.

Similarly, H4 and H5 of the study proposed a potential impact of Social Networks (H4) and Communication (H5) on Improved Reputation Management. Results revealed that, both propositions remained significant with the  $p$ -values at  $p > 0.035$  and  $p > 0.003$  (respectively). Finally, the researchers proposed the mediating impact of Attitude on Public Relations Practices and Perceived Behavioral Control. Results revealed a significant mediation of Attitude on Public Relations Practices and Perceived Behavioral Control. Thus, path analysis revealed that the majority of hypotheses remained significant, indicating that the proposed conceptual model is strongly validated. Table 6 and Figure 3 indicate the findings of the path analysis.

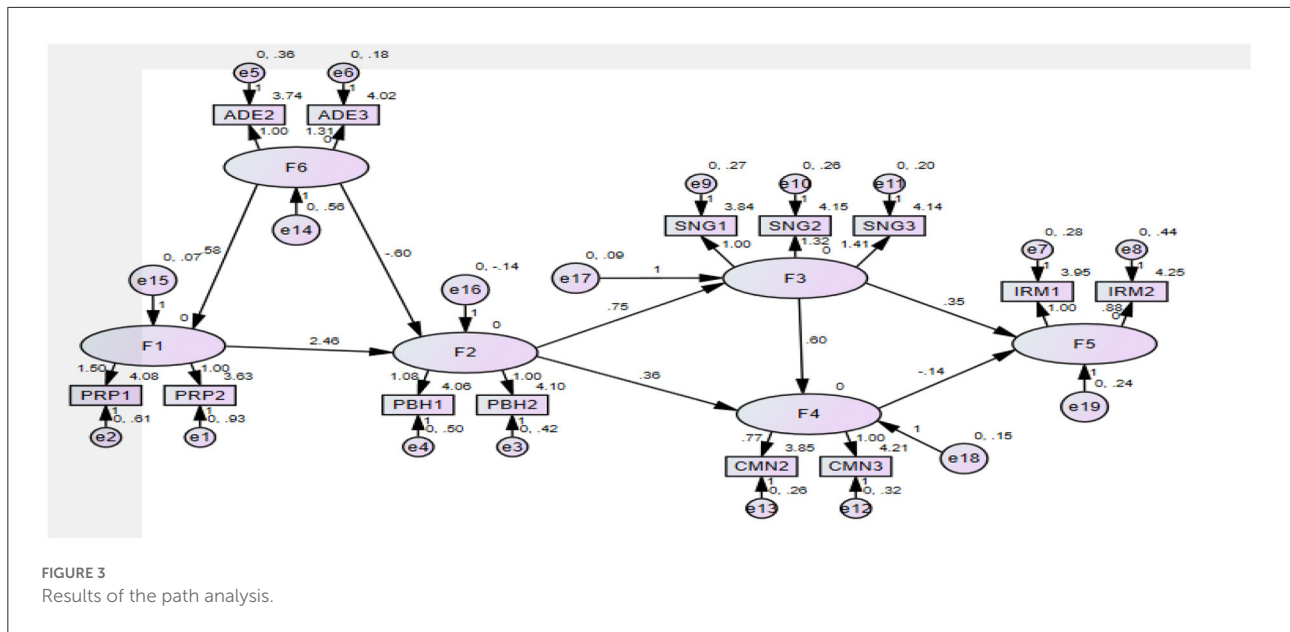
## Discussion on results

According to Hagger (2019), a substantial body of research-tested and witnessed the Theory of Reasoned Action

as providing strong support to the technology adoption process. Recently, the studies concerning social network usage also executed and found the Theory of Reasoned Action as describing primary yet fundamental factors determining adoption, particularly a certain technology adoption process. Similarly, adopting social networks by the Public Relations practitioners indicated a similar phenomenon in this study, where cognitive beliefs are attributed to behavioral adoption leading to expectations fulfillment (Radwan et al., 2021). In this regard, these findings also showed potential consistency with the existing literature, providing an overview of the relevance of the Theory of Reasoned Action with adopting the social network. First, the researchers proposed a significant impact of Public Relations Practices on Perceived Behavioral Control (H1). Findings revealed that the relevant hypothesis remained significant, with the significance value at 0.000. These findings were consistent with the study Yang et al. (2020) as they also found Public Relations practices aimed at dominating the consumers' behavior through the communication process. Notably, the respondents of current research mainly agreed with the fact that, their PR practices are focused on the perceived behavioral change and control process. As according to Hall (2020), the primary focus of PR practices is to target and change the customers' behavior. The more PR professionals aim to achieve this goal, the more they will experience behavioral change among the potential customer's. Further, the researchers proposed significant impacts of Perceived Behavioral Control on Social Networks (usage) (H2a) and Communication (H2b). However, the impact of Perceived Behavioral Control on virtual social media (usage) remained insignificant ( $p > 0.404$ ). Notably, the majority of the respondents strongly disagreed with the fact that, behavioral control is not primarily attributed to communication through virtual networks. Instead, a conventional pattern of communication is equally significant in behavioral change among the customers as also witnessed by Froment et al. (2017). On the other hand, the impact of Perceived Behavioral Control on Communication remained significant, with the significance value at  $p > 0.048$  showing consistency with the study Klepek and Starzyczna (2018) as they found Behavioral Control as primarily caused by communication.

Further, the H3 of the current research proposed a significant impact of Virtual social media (usage) on communication and also remained validated with a significance value of  $p > 0.000$ . These findings showed potential compatibility with Abdalli and Hassan (2019) as they considered social networks highly accompanied by communication, getting a maximum benefit through interaction and connectivity. The study respondents remained agreed that virtual networks facilitate the communication process. These virtual networks are accompanied by ease of use and ease of accessibility, that further bring out chances to easily communicate with the customers (Dwivedi et al., 2021).





Similarly, in the H4 and H5 of the study, the researchers proposed significant impacts of Social Networks and Communication on Reputation Management. Results revealed that Virtual Social Media have a significant impact on Reputation Management ( $p > 0.035$ ), and communication also has a significant impact on Reputation Management. Notably, the study respondents agreed that virtual networks not only help to communicate, also this communication is direct, effective, and efficient that further helps to answer the customers' queries, fulfill their needs, and satisfy them that further have a positive effect on organization's reputation. Thus, these findings are consistent with the existing literature (See Dimitrova, 2016; Froment et al., 2017; Gudmanian et al., 2019; Dacko-Pikiewicz, 2021). As noted by Wæraas and Dahle (2020), social networks enable users to communicate and interact with greater accessibility; Especially for corporate purposes, these digital platforms are useful in providing direct access to customers and their queries.

Finally, H6 of the study proposed a significant mediating impact of Attitude on Public Relation Practices that further lead to Perceived Behavioral Control. Attitude remains an important component of the Theory of Reasoned Action, accelerating the cognitive process of individuals in general and PR practitioners in particular (Hagger, 2019). Thus, results indicated that Attitude has a significant mediating impact with the  $p$ -value at  $p > 0.060$  and indirect effects value at 1.884. Also, the path value remained at 0.348. Thus, these results are in line with the argumentation made by Rust et al. (2021). As Rust and their colleagues noted, the personal Attitude of PR practitioners to adopt and use

online platforms for behavioral control purposes is of greater significance. Especially, building the relevant assumption on the Theory of Reasoned Action, it is shown that cognitive Attitude works as a primary determinant of the adoption process that determines the adoption and usage purposes. Existing research on the Theory of Reasoned Action indicates individuals hold cognitive beliefs that assume the goals are fulfilled according to their expectations and demands (Radwan et al., 2021).

### Conclusion

Reputation management is one of the core concerns of the company's stakeholders. For the relevant purposes, the company uses different tactics that further facilitate its goals. However, today, digital dependence is increasing, and companies are actively adopting social networking platforms to meet their requirements. This study also provides a detailed insight regarding the role of Public Relations practices for the reputation management among the Emirati organizations. As notably, the study respondents widely agreed with the fact that, organizational reputation management is one of the core concerns for them. For this purpose, they are provided with a set of guidelines prepared, approved, constantly monitored and evaluated by the policymakers, managers and leaders. These findings come up with an important consideration for the organizations to focus and design practical communication strategies for the reputation management purposes.

Further, this research also emphasizes the importance of attitudes and behavior that remain under consideration for the Public Relations practices and professionals for the reputation management purposes. According to the study findings, the respondents indicated a mutual consensus with the fact that their PR practices are accompanied by strategies to control the customers' behavior through persuasive communication tactics. On the other hand, this behavioral control, as per the respondents revealed, is possible through using different virtual social media platforms where accessibility, visibility, and communication is comparatively strong, efficient, and effective in many ways. According to the respondents, eventually the increased virtual social media presence further helps to manage the organizational presence online. However, the mutual agreement regarding the role of Attitudes of PR professionals remained influential in a sense that, respondents considered personal attitudes as a strong factor in motivating them to adopt the strategies and tactics to control the audience behavior and later their opinion.

Thus, organizations provide their Public Relations practitioners with different options, strategies, and opportunities to select and use these online networks to communicate and interact with their customers. As a result, communication bridges the gap between the company and customers, alleviating their uncertainties and improving their satisfaction. Finally, it is concluded that using social networks for Public Relations practices is the need of the day. Especially when using them for reputation management, companies consider different factors that further assist their digital networks adoption process, leading to fruitful outcomes.

## Study implications

As the current research highlights reputation management as an important consideration for Public Relations practices, it has some practical and social implications. First, the theory of reasoned action provides theoretical support to this research, which implies examining reputation management as important. Reputation management, through the theory of reasoned action, can further help examine other aspects of the relevant topic in other organizations. Further, Public Relations practitioners should be provided piratical approaches to work and ensure the reputation management of an organization. Here it is also notable that reputation management weighs the success of an organization; continuously examining it in the context of Public Relations (Elbasir et al., 2021) and Communication practices can further magnify its importance. Finally, this research highlights the opinions of PR professionals on both individual and collaborative levels, which also implicates examining PR and reputation management as an important part of PR practices and agendas (Jeljeli et al., 2022).

## Study limitations

This study has two primary limitations. First, the researchers employed a convenience sampling technique that narrowed down its scope. Second, then researchers did not select any particular virtual social network, rather, the researchers examined an overall virtual social media adoption that limits the scope of current research.

## Study contributions and recommendations

This research focused on the role of PR practices in Reputation Management. The researchers designed and focused on self-proposed conceptual model. Further, self-proposed questionnaire is also used and validated by the relevant analyses techniques. Both, conceptual model and research instrument can be further utilized by the future researchers to examine the PR in Reputation Management. This study also provides with a baseline to further research studies, as it significantly fills out the literature gap. Based on the nature and scope of current research, the researchers suggest more investigations on social network usage for reputation management purposes. Especially conducting a comparative analysis between selecting the two social networking platforms can bring out even more useful outcomes.

## Data availability statement

The data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

## Author contributions

FA conceived the first draft of the research. MH gathered data and conducted the analysis. AA contributed to formatting, instructing, and revising. MA work with the references and also contributed to the subsequent revisions. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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