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The Role of Corporate Social Responsibility Communication in Shaping the Reputation of Private Hospitals in the UAE: Patients' Perception

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Abstract:

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication has become an essential tool for healthcare organizations in competitive and diverse markets like the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This study examines how CSR communication influence the reputation of four private hospitals in the UAE recognized for their socially responsible practices. These hospitals are winners of the highly coveted CSR label, which shows evidence of their involvement in socially responsible practices. Using a patient-focused survey (n=246) and grounded by Stakeholder Theory and Impression Management Theory, the findings reveal that while hospitals implement various CSR communication strategies, their overall effectiveness in improving patient trust and enhancing reputation remains moderate. Transparent and consistent CSR communication showed a strong positive correlation with favorable patient attitudes.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), CSR Communication, UAE Healthcare Sector, Corporate reputation, Public Relations

1. Introduction

Any company's commitment to minimize or prevent any adverse outcomes and optimize its long-term positive impact on society perfectly describes the phrase CSR (Wirba, 2024). CSR is an important strategic tool in healthcare since it makes it possible to achieve employee satisfaction and a good reputation. These factors, as simple as they may sound, are key aspects of organizational success since they earn healthcare institutions loyalty from clients and foster trust. CSR is mainly visible in the ethical governance, transparency of operations, and community initiatives, which in this case would be health-related.

CSR is essential for organizations' identity, trustworthiness, and stakeholder engagement, including healthcare organizations (Abzari et al.,2011). They are very interested in how global businesses keep social responsibility issues in line with the reputation management they produce (Troise & Camilleri, 2021; Parray et al., 2024). Several private healthcare institutions in the UAE have adopted CSR because it has become increasingly important to ensure ethical imperatives and market-driven expectations (Ghaffar et al., 2025; Al Sakkaf et al., 2023). Hospitals also become vital because they provide essential services, creating environments where public trust and reputational capital are necessary for sustainability (Erpurini, 2022). More than that, CSR to hospitals means more than making

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donations; it includes ethical governance, environmental stewardship, community health initiatives, as well as transparent communication strategies that enhance built legitimacy among patients and other stakeholders (Aldaihani et al., 2023; AlDhaen, 2022; Alsahli et al., 2024; Aguerrebere et al., 2023).

Nationally, CSR has taken a more significant role in the UAE through frameworks such as UAE Vision 2021 (Kopecký, 2023; Zamoum & Serra Gorpe, 2020). The most important goals included sustainability, social cohesion, and community development. Therefore, the private healthcare sector in the UAE has introduced CSR practices governed by rules and market incentives that match local cultural values and stakeholders' expectations (Kopecký, 2023; Zamoum & Serra Gorpe, 2020). The urgent call for effective CSR communication has become a strategic concern with the rising number of CSR initiatives. The transparency of private hospitals about their CSR efforts can powerfully shape their public image, perceptions among stakeholders, and competitive positioning in this rapidly changing space known as healthcare (Upadhyay, 2024; Wang et al., 2022).

Moving forward, independent of the rapid adoption of CSR in healthcare, there is limited empirical research examining how private hospitals in the UAE use CSR communication to build and sustain their organization's reputation. Most available literature generally addresses CSR across industries in general or solely based on public institutions, often overlooking the needs of communication of private healthcare providers in culture-rich and economically dynamic regions like the UAE. At the same time, there is evidence that hospitals struggle to effectively communicate their CSR initiatives despite recruiting different groups to be a part of them. There is a clear gap in understanding the effectiveness of these communication approaches, especially regarding how they shape the attitudes and behaviors of stakeholders.

This study addresses this research gap by examining how CSR communication influences stakeholder engagement and the reputation of private hospitals in the UAE. These hospitals were awarded the CSR Label by the Dubai Chambers of Commerce and Industry, as these private hospitals exemplify recognized engagement in socially responsible practices. The study explores how private hospitals communicate with stakeholders regarding their CSR initiatives and how such communication affects hospitals' external images.

This research contributes to the emerging body of CSR literature by providing context-specific insights into the private healthcare sector in the Middle East. This region has received limited academic attention in the area of CSR communication. The findings of this research would benefit healthcare administrators, policymakers, and public relations professionals in developing more effective CSR communication strategies that enhance stakeholder engagement and hospitals' reputation through effective CSR communication strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility in Healthcare

For years, there has been a significant change happening in the healthcare industry in the engagement of stakeholders and ethical governance. Central to this evolution is the mechanism of CSR, which is a business model wherein an organization goes out of its way, without specific obligatory requirements, to integrate social, ethical, and environmental issues into its main business practices and its relationships with other stakeholders. In the healthcare context, CSR is not limited by traditional philanthropic gestures and is becoming another essential constituent of the organization's identity, the transparency and public trust (Carroll & Shabana, 2010).

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CSR has improved hospital management through the healthcare domains, influencing patients' trust levels, institutional reputations, and long-term sustainability. For a long time, socially responsible healthcare practices have included philanthropy, steering toward patient empowerment, ethical governance, and environmental responsibility (Aldaihani et al., 2023; Dion & Evans, 2024; Al-Sharif et al., 2021). However, changes in social accountability and the demands of consumers have forced hospitals to adopt a more renewed approach to CSR that includes sustainable healthcare practices and compliance with labor ethical policies (AlDhaen, 2022; Erpurini, 2022). CSR in the UAE has been increasingly explained by policy frameworks from the government, mainly through UAE Vision 2021, which encompasses issues of sustainability and corporate governance (Zamoum & Serra Gorpe, 2020; Alsahli et al., 2024). Private hospitals now face the double-barreled effect of being financially viable while being socially accountable. Therefore, the integrated CSR approach to hospitals in the UAE has a strategic and ethical endeavor to ensure hospitals comply with regulations while retaining a favorable public image (Kopecký, 2023).

The hallmark of effective CSR communication is exposure, which enhances stakeholder engagement and hospital reputation. Transparency in CSR initiatives engenders patient trust, employee commitment, and investors' confidence (Ghaffar et al., 2025; Troise & Camilleri, 2021; Ahn & Kwon, 2020). So, they enhance their statements in CSR promotion so that they might result in the strong alignment of their mission with stakeholder expectations, thus strengthening the brand equity of the hospitals (Al Sakkaf et al., 2023; Parray et al., 2024). Nevertheless, CSR messaging has different characteristics across the various stakeholder groups. For example, messages emphasizing patient safety and service quality generally elicit positive responses from patients. On the other hand, for employees, positive correlates would emanate from linking CSR with enhancing workplace well-being and professional development (Liu et al., 2023; Al-Sharif et al., 2021). Thus, differential CSR communication strategies are necessary, especially in private UAE hospitals, to address the stakeholder composition's various cultural and demographic constituents (Aguerrebere et al., 2023; Harichandran, 2023). Communication localities and multicultural sensitivity ensure that CSR issues resonate well with different stakeholder groups (Alameddine et al., 2022). Digital transformation provides new channels for CSR communications, including hospitals undergoing technology changes, which now have social media and websites as two channels for real-time engagements and feedback (Abd El & Arslan, 2024; Bernardino, 2021).

2.2 CSR Communication Strategies in Private Hospitals

CSR communications forge trust in patients and perceptions of quality of service toward the brand. Hospitals that employ CSR programs for education and communicative transparency will earn a better corporate image and maintain legitimacy in the eyes of their patrons (Ghaffar et al., 2025; Al Sakkaf et al., 2023). Integrating community needs into CSR strategies improves patient satisfaction, loyalty, and corporate image (Zamoum & Serra Gorpe, 2020; Kopecký, 2023; Rinenggo et al., 2024). Stakeholder-related attitude policies further deepen ethical responsibility and long-term sustainability (Aldaihani et al., 2023; AlDhaen, 2022; Ali et al., 2022). Beyond positive reputations, CSR healthcare actions like patient welfare build credibly recognized services (Arzubiaga et al., 2022; Erpurini, 2022). Transparent application of CSR will mitigate medical insurance reputational risks while enhancing institutional trustworthiness (Harichandran, 2023; Darwazeh et al., 2021). Hospitals prioritizing the welfare of their employees in CSR initiatives increase employee satisfaction and stakeholder engagement (Liu et al., 2023; Troise et al., 2021). A thoughtful CSR strategy integrating patient feedback, socially responsible behavior, and environmental sustainability forms a competitive advantage

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(Belghachi & Soussi, 2024; Kurnia et al., 2023). For these reasons, it is generally formulated that hospitals with a more excellent and efficiently developed CSR communication channel enjoy higher levels of patient satisfaction and prolonged brand loyalty (Wang et al., 2022; Rinenggo et al., 2024).

CSR communication enormously affects private hospitals, especially in competitive markets like the UAE. Stakeholder confidence may be built, loyalty enhanced, and risk levels lowered through CSR communication (Kurnia et al., 2023; Rinenggo et al., 2024). Upadhyay (2024) states that patient satisfaction is higher when hospitals communicate with patients about CSR initiatives and develop a community-focused atmosphere. CSR makes reputation management more strategic among private hospitals, considering the competition for health services in the UAE (Almodawer et al., 2025; Rahman, 2020; Singh & Dixit, 2020). Authenticity and stakeholder expectation alignment determine the success of CSR messaging. Well-laid CSR messages positively portray what a patient perceives about the hospital. Those messages should also be exposed through multi-channels, including digital platforms and social media (Aldaihani et al., 2023; Al Sakkaf et al., 2023). Transparency in CSR also boosts employer branding, attracting skilled professionals in the healthcare field who value ethical practice and social responsibilities (Ghaffar et al., 2025; AlDhaen, 2022; Chellam Singh & Arulappan, 2023).

Leadership and governance play a big part in the credibility of CSR communication and in strengthening a hospital's reputation. Ethical leadership guarantees that CSR efforts do not appear as public relations but as genuine commitments to social responsibility (Ali & Niaz, 2024; Ahn & Kwon, 2020). Transparent governance structures contribute even more confidence to stakeholders under these CSR initiatives and thus provide stability for the long-term reputation (Belghachi & Soussi, 2024). Research findings indicate that hospitals with a stronger governance framework towards CSR reap higher trust and satisfaction ratings by patients, owing to their consideration of social responsibility in making decisions relating to health care (Zamoum & Serra Gorpe, 2020; Kopecký, 2023; Al-Alawy et al., 2021; Ahmed et al., 2025). Furthermore, community health programs, environmental sustainability, and employee health and wellness initiatives strengthen the hospital brand by improving the perception among its stakeholders (Wang et al., 2022). By institutionalizing CSR plans into the overall management model of a hospital, the communication and message impact is placed into a long-term and effective hospital moving towards a socially responsible institution in safeguarding patient interests and welfare in society (Du Preez et al., 2024).

Active stakeholder participation is an essential part of successful CSR communication in private hospitals. Patients, staff, and community members are active participants whose opinions and comments guide the creation of communication plans. Internal employee involvement improves corporate commitment, engagement, and message consistency. Hospitals may improve transparency, credibility, and brand reputation by customizing CSR efforts to match stakeholder expectations with external feedback from patients and the community. Stakeholders play a dual function that supports the efficacy of internal and external communication and synchronizes CSR initiatives with corporate objectives.

2.3 Challenges in CSR Communication

Private hospitals encounter challenges regarding CSR in their external communications. Such challenges include stakeholders' skepticism, cultural diversity, and regulatory complexity, complicating many local health organizations. Stakeholders view the CSR motives as publicity stunts that mar trust and weaken the building of an image (Ghaffar et al., 2025; Al

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Sakkaf et al., 2023). Messaging in the UAE is more complicated by cultural diversity because different value systems and languages have customization of messages (Zamoum & Serra Gorpe, 2020; Aldaihani et al., 2023). With such rapid regulatory changes, operational challenges increase further (Wang et al., 2022; Rahman, 2020). It is essential to see that there is alignment of CSR communication with hospital branding and what the patients expect, because that is where a core ingredient is to ensure transparency in promotional messaging to avoid opportunism (Aldaihani et al., 2023; Bernardino, 2021). Patients demand proof of the impacts of CSR in an evidence-based reporting format, whereas employee involvement is vital to ensure effective communication (AlDhaen, 2022; Upadhyay, 2024). The staff can be trained to convey the message of CSR efforts, as an ineffectively communicated CSR message can damage the reputation of the hospital and stakeholder trust (Arzubiaga et al., 2022; Harichandran, 2023).

3. Theoretical Frameworks

3.1 Impression Management Theory (IMT)

Impression management theory (IMT) was introduced by Goffman (1959), posits that public communication is a tool of organizations to shape the public perception of reputation and gain stakeholder trust (Zamoum & Serra Gorpe, 2020). IMT is based on the idea that individuals and institutions engage in planned communication to influence how others perceive them. Social interaction can be understood as a form of performance, where individuals or institutions stage a controlled representation of themselves to shape public impressions (Hur & Chun, 2023). Organizations, including hospitals, carefully manage the information they present and the context in which interactions occur to build credibility and trust.

In the UAE healthcare context, IMT provides a framework to examine how private hospitals use CSR as a strategic communication tool. Hospitals engage in CSR activities to demonstrate ethical conduct, community engagement, and social responsibility. These initiatives help differentiate hospitals in a competitive market and position them as patient-friendly and sustainable (Aldaihani et al., 2023; Chellam Singh & Arulappan, 2023). By selectively framing CSR messages—highlighting contributions to patient care, environmental sustainability, and community welfare while minimizing negative aspects—hospitals actively manage their public image (Al Sakkaf et al., 2023).

However, the effectiveness of these efforts depends on the perceived sincerity of CSR communication. Misalignment between stated intentions and actions can lead to cynicism and undermine trust (Lim & Jiang, 2021; Joo et al., 2019).

In this study, patients, employees, and community members are treated as active elements whose feedback is essential for assessing the effectiveness of CSR communication. Stakeholders' perceptions provide insights into how hospitals manage impressions in both internal communication—enhancing employee engagement and advocacy—and external communication—building trust and credibility with patients and the wider community. Their input ensures that CSR initiatives reflect societal expectations, contributing to authentic organizational reputation management.

3.2 Stakeholder Theory (ST)

Stakeholder Theory (ST), developed by Freeman (1984), emphasizes that organizations should consider the interests of all stakeholders, not just shareholders, in decision-making.

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Stakeholders are individuals or groups who can affect or are affected by business activities. They include employees, customers, suppliers, government agencies, the public, etc. ST promotes a more inclusive approach to strategic and ethical obligations, ensuring that organizations address the needs of diverse groups.

In the context of private hospitals in the UAE, ST provides a framework for recognizing both ethical and strategic responsibilities toward key stakeholders. By integrating stakeholders' feedback into CSR initiatives, hospitals can foster trust, strengthen relationships, and enhance their organizational reputation. This approach ensures that CSR practices align with societal expectations while complying with regulatory frameworks, thereby improving patient satisfaction, employee engagement, and community trust (Ghaffar, Zamoum, & Serra Gorpe, 2020).

Stakeholder Theory also helps differentiate between genuine CSR initiatives and reputational-driven "window dressing." By actively involving stakeholders in CSR planning and evaluation, hospitals can ensure that initiatives address real needs rather than serving purely promotional purposes (Kopecký, 2023). The theory emphasizes the importance of two-way communication: internal communication channels engage employees in CSR activities, fostering commitment and advocacy, while external channels incorporate patient and community feedback to refine messaging and improve transparency (Aldaihani et al., 2023).

In this study, stakeholders are treated as active elements, with their input directly informing both internal and external organizational communication. This allows the research to assess how well CSR initiatives address stakeholder needs, strengthen trust and satisfaction, and contribute to broader societal welfare. By integrating stakeholder feedback, hospitals can ensure CSR strategies are both ethical and effective, reinforcing their long-term reputation and social impact.

4. Research Questions

To meet the research objectives, this study aims to address the following research questions:

RQ1: How does CSR communication in private hospitals vary based on stakeholder characteristics?

RQ2: What CSR communication strategies do private hospitals employ to engage stakeholders, and how do these impact stakeholder behavior?

RQ3: What factors influence private hospitals when deciding to adopt and implement CSR communication programs?

RQ4: How does CSR communication affect the image and reputation of private hospitals, and does this impact vary by stakeholder group?

5. Methodology

5.1 Research design

This article adopts a quantitative research design to relationships among CSR communication, stakeholder trust, and hospital reputation within private hospitals in the UAE. By examining stakeholder perceptions, the study seeks to understand the communicative mechanisms through which CSR contributes to relational and reputational outcomes in the healthcare sector.

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Guided by Stakeholder Theory and Impression Management Theory, CSR communication is a strategic communicative process aimed at managing relationships and shaping public impressions. From this perspective, communication is not treated as a technical activity, but as a meaning-making practice through which organizations interact with internal audiences (employees) and external audiences (patients and community members). Stakeholders are therefore approached as active participants whose interpretations provide insight into the effectiveness of hospital CSR communication strategies.

It is important to note that private hospitals in the UAE operate within a highly regulated and socially sensitive environment, where trust and reputation are central to organizational legitimacy. In this context, CSR communication encompasses initiatives related to ethical conduct, community engagement, patient care, and environmental responsibility, all of which are communicated through various organizational channels. These communicative practices play a critical role in shaping stakeholders' evaluations of hospitals as responsible and trustworthy institutions.

The study examines three key constructs: CSR communication, stakeholder trust, and hospital reputation. CSR communication is conceptualized as a dialogic process reflecting transparency, consistency, and responsiveness in conveying social responsibility initiatives. Stakeholder trust represents the relational confidence stakeholders place in hospitals as a result of these communicative practices, while hospital reputation reflects the broader public evaluation of organizational credibility and ethical standing.

The primary data collection method for this study was a survey conducted between November 11, 2024, and February 1, 2025, across selected private hospitals in the UAE. A total of 246 stakeholders from four hospitals recognized by the Dubai Chamber CSR Label—Aster DM Healthcare, International Modern Hospital, Zulekha Hospital, and NMC Hospital—participated using structured questionnaires with a five-point Likert scale. The sample was balanced across gender, age, education, and stakeholder type, ensuring diverse perspectives. Such diversification enhances confidence in capturing multiple stakeholder views regarding CSR communication practices within healthcare organizations.Their responses provided valuable insights into how CSR communication is perceived and how it influences trust and reputation both internally and externally. participants with severe mental illnesses were excluded to ensure participants could understand the survey and provide meaningful responses, maintaining the study's validity and reliability.

The study assessed three key constructs:

- CSR communication: Operationalized as transparency, consistency, and responsiveness, reflecting stakeholders' perceptions of of message clarity, reliability, and attentiveness.
- Stakeholder trust: Measured through perceived integrity, confidence, and dependability, capturing relational confidence in hospitals.
- Hospital reputation: Assessed through credibility, ethical conduct, and overall public image, indicating perceived legitimacy.

The Data were analyzed using SPSS version 28. Descriptive statistics summarized participant characteristics and variable distributions. Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha > 0.7$) confirmed internal reliability of the constructs.

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Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses examined relationships among variables, translating stakeholder input into measurable insights. This approach highlights the active role of stakeholders in shaping organizational communication strategies and their influence on trust and reputation outcomes.

Table 1.

Respondent Demographic Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	123	50.0
	Female	123	50.0
Age Group (Years)	18–25	40	16.3
	26–35	68	27.6
	36–45	65	26.4
	46–60	54	22.0
	60 and above	19	7.7
Education Level	Secondary	30	12.2
	Diploma	44	17.9
	Bachelor's Degree	118	48.0
	Master's Degree	41	16.7
	Doctorate/Other	13	5.2
Stakeholder Type	Patient	103	41.9
	Employee	88	35.8
	Community Member	55	22.3
Total Respondents		246	100.0

6. Results

6.1 Overview of Respondents

Stakeholders served as active contributors in this research. Their perceptions provided insight into how CSR initiatives are received, interpreted, and acted upon by internal audiences (employees) and external audiences (patients and community), thereby directly informing the assessment of communication effectiveness.

6.2 CSR Communication Effectiveness

CSR communication in UAE private hospitals demonstrated moderate effectiveness, with notable gaps in transparency (M = 2.47) and clarity of CSR objectives (M = 2.66). Responsiveness scored slightly higher (M = 3.33), indicating that hospitals reply to inquiries but do not provide comprehensive explanations of CSR goals or outcomes.

From a Stakeholder Theory perspective, these results reflect an overemphasis on information dissemination rather than engagement. Stakeholders are informed but not meaningfully consulted, limiting opportunities for co-creation and shared ownership of CSR initiatives.

Impression Management Theory helps explain the inconsistency between communication and credibility. Hospitals appear to be framing CSR narratives to strengthen public image, yet stakeholders detect selective or symbolic communication. As Goffman (1959) argues, credibility in self-presentation is achieved only when audiences perceive the performance as authentic.

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Together, these findings highlight the need for a shift from declarative CSR messaging toward dialogue-based, transparent communication.

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics for CSR Communication Variables

CSR Communication Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Transparency of CSR messages	2.47	1.09	Low clarity and openness in communicating CSR activities
Consistency of CSR information across platforms	2.78	1.02	Messages perceived as inconsistent across media and departments
Responsiveness to CSR inquiries	3.33	1.12	Moderate responsiveness to stakeholder concerns
Clarity of CSR objectives	2.66	1.06	Limited explanation of CSR goals and community outcomes
Overall CSR Communication Index	2.81	1.07	Moderate level of CSR communication effectiveness

6.3 Influence of CSR on Trust and Satisfaction

Stakeholder trust and satisfaction were moderate (M = 2.77–3.01), indicating cautious acknowledgement rather than strong endorsement of CSR efforts.

While stakeholders recognize CSR activities, they do not yet view them as decisive factors in shaping loyalty, hospital choice, or advocacy. This reflects a credibility gap—CSR is visible but not consistently experienced as genuine or impactful.

Stakeholder Theory suggests that trust develops when organizations enable participation and respond to stakeholder values. Current one-way communication limits the relational aspect of CSR, diminishing trust and emotional commitment.

Through the lens of Impression Management, these findings signal the limitations of image-driven CSR. When communication appears promotional rather than value-driven, it fails to create resonance. Trust emerges when CSR messaging aligns with visible, measurable practices—such as community health initiatives or transparent reporting of outcomes.

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics for Stakeholder Trust and Satisfaction Variables

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Confidence in the hospital's CSR integrity	2.95	1.05	Stakeholders moderately trust hospitals' CSR commitments.
Perceived ethical responsibility of the hospital	2.88	1.01	CSR is viewed as partially aligned with genuine social values
Satisfaction with CSR-related hospital services	2.77	1.12	Moderate satisfaction with CSR implementation and visibility
Willingness to support or recommend a hospital based on CSR	3.01	1.09	Neutral to slightly positive intention to endorse hospitals
Overall Trust and Satisfaction Index	2.90	1.07	Moderate level of stakeholder trust and satisfaction

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6.4 CSR and Hospital Reputation

CSR communication contributed moderately to hospital reputation (M = 2.37–2.63). Stakeholders noted the greatest influence on public image (M = 2.63) and the weakest on ethical reputation (M = 2.37).

Correlation analysis revealed strong positive associations among CSR communication, stakeholder trust, and reputation (r = .705–.823, p < .01), demonstrating that when CSR communication improves, stakeholder attitudes and reputational perceptions also improve.

However, the low mean scores indicate that many stakeholders remain skeptical. They perceive CSR as partially symbolic and insufficiently connected to demonstrated community impact.

Theoretically, these findings illuminate a tension:

- Impression Management Theory indicates that hospitals are using CSR to signal legitimacy and maintain public approval, but stakeholders question authenticity when outcomes are not evident.
- Stakeholder Theory emphasizes accountability, transparency, and mutual value creation. Stakeholders are seeking evidence-based CSR that aligns with community needs, not promotional narratives.

Bridging this gap requires hospitals to adopt mixed-mode reporting, digital transparency tools, and stakeholder-driven program design.

Table 4.

Descriptive Statistics for CSR Impact on Hospital Reputation

Reputation Dimension	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
CSR enhances the hospital's public image	2.63	1.11	CSR communication contributes modestly to image building
CSR increases hospital credibility	2.51	1.08	Stakeholders perceive a limited link between CSR and credibility.
CSR improves hospital legitimacy in the community	2.48	1.02	CSR is seen as weakly connected to broader legitimacy
CSR communication strengthens ethical reputation	2.37	1.05	Perceived gap between claimed and demonstrated ethics
Overall Reputation Index	2.50	1.07	Moderate to low perceived impact of CSR on reputation

Table 5.

Correlation Matrix for CSR Communication, Trust, and Reputation Variables

Variables	CSR Communication	Stakeholder Trust	Stakeholder Satisfaction	Hospital Reputation
CSR Communication	1	—	—	—
Stakeholder Trust	.710	1	—	—
Stakeholder Satisfaction	.754	.801	1	—
Hospital Reputation	.705	.778	.823	1

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Note: All correlations are significant at $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

6.5 Stakeholder Engagement and Communication Dynamics

The study reveals that CSR communication remains largely one-directional, with limited channels for stakeholder input. This restricts empowerment and constrains the co-creation of CSR value.

Enhancing credibility requires participatory models, such as involving employees, patients, and community representatives in designing wellness programs, sustainability campaigns, and health education initiatives. This approach aligns closely with the principles of Stakeholder Theory, which positions stakeholders as partners in value creation.

In digital environments, engagement becomes even more crucial. CSR communication increasingly unfolds on interactive platforms—websites, blogs, social media—where stakeholders evaluate, comment on, and influence narratives.

Under Impression Management Theory, hospitals that use these platforms transparently and consistently—sharing data, stories, and stakeholder contributions—strengthen authenticity and legitimacy.

The sector appears to be transitioning from institutional broadcasting to interactive CSR dialogue, emphasizing transparency, responsiveness, and co-creation.

6.6 Integrated Interpretation

Overall, the findings confirm that hospital reputation is shaped primarily by stakeholder perceptions of message believability, authenticity, and openness. CSR communication influences reputation only when stakeholders perceive both honesty and measurable community value.

The results indicate that UAE private hospitals are beginning to move from descriptive CSR reporting (listing activities) toward performance-based reporting that presents outcomes and demonstrates engagement with stakeholders.

Integrating both theories reveals the dual role of CSR communication:

- Stakeholder Theory (trust-building): Legitimacy arises when hospitals involve stakeholders, encourage dialogue, and co-create CSR initiatives.
- Impression Management Theory (reputation-building): CSR shapes perceptions when messages are consistent, transparent, and evidence-based.

When these elements align, CSR communication becomes credible, relational, and performance-oriented, strengthening long-term trust and reputation among internal and external audiences.

7. Discussion

In this regard, one of the major objectives of this study was to delineate the nature of CSR communication initiatives in private hospitals in the UAE and highlight how customers perceive and understand those initiatives. The findings based on the quantitative data have revealed in this context that a considerable number of the respondents agreed that hospitals are transparent regarding their CSR activities. While analyzing the opinion of the respondents on CSR communication initiatives by private hospitals, it has been noted that a considerably

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higher percentage of the respondents has agreed that private hospitals CSR communication is consistent in nature.

In alignment with the observations derived from quantitative data, the findings indicate that when considering the key elements of successful CSR communication, the importance of transparency has been consistently emphasized by respondents. The observations related to the nature of CSR communication initiatives in private hospitals in the UAE, along with the significance of transparency and consistency in communication, are found to be aligned with the outcomes of previously conducted studies.

In this regard, the study conducted by Petkovic Saša et al. (2022) suggests that effective CSR communication in the healthcare sector requires messages that are consistent, transparent, and clear, and that align with the values and actions of the organization. Similarly, Hossain et al. (2019) argue that authentic and transparent communication of hospitals' CSR activities plays a crucial role in enhancing credibility and building trust among patients.

The second objective of the study has been to assess the external image and reputation of private hospitals that are affected relative to CSR communication initiatives. Herein, the findings from the quantitative data has revealed that the majority of the respondents are of the opinion that CSR initiatives that are undertaken by the hospitals in UAE result in impacting the overall reputation of the healthcare providing organization in a positive manner. While enumerating the significance of transparency in CSR communication, they have been noted to state that effective CSR communication has a positive impact on client loyalty and the reputation they have regarding the hospital. When providing their opinion on the ways of improving the engagement of patients in communicating their CSR efforts as well, they have stated the inclusion of patients in CSR initiatives result in improving the image and reputation among the patients, which can be noted to be in alignment with the observation in the quantitative data. As an instance, Yunis et al. (2017), opined in this regard that CSR plays an integral role in improving the level of loyalty among the patient, which reestablishes the finding of the study. The researchers have opined in this context that patients who are satisfied perceive their healthcare providers as ethical and socially responsible as well and they are more likely to remain loyal to the organization, an observation which has also been noted in the current study. Yunis et al. (2017), have reemphasized in this context that loyalty among customers is not just about repeat business, it also comprises word-of-mouth recommendations, which according to the researchers is an effective tool for attracting new patients and building a positive, strong reputation in the community.

The third objective that has been addressed with the help of this study is to identify the attitudes of the clients toward CSR activities implemented by private hospitals in the UAE. The analysis of the data collected from the survey conducted in this research has revealed that the majority of the respondents agreed that the hospitals that engage in CSR activities with community needs are perceived positively among the general public. In this alignment, in the study conducted by Kurniawan (2017), the researchers have stated that considering the fact that the significance of CSR in healthcare is multilayered in nature, it has role to play in building trust within the community which positively impacts the reputation of the organization, which is in complete alignment with the findings of this study. In this alignment Yulita & Hidajat (2020), when discussing about the role of CSR in patient loyalty and satisfaction stated that hospitals by actively participating in community development and public health initiatives, can contribute to the overall well-being of the community, which in the long run is reflected on the satisfaction level of the patients, which further reaffirms the observations in the current study.

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Furthermore, while assessing the opinion of the respondents towards attitudes of the clients toward CSR activities implemented by private hospitals in the UAE, it has also been noted that a considerable percentage of the respondents demonstrated agreement with the statement that they believe hospitals should engage in CSR activities for the welfare of society. In this context, on reviewing the observations in the previously conducted studies for instance, Brandão et al. (2013), the significance of CSR activities by hospitals to promote societal welfare has also been noted. The researchers have stated in this alignment that with the help of transparent CSR communication, healthcare organizations can strengthen stakeholder relationships, which in turn positively contribute to a more sustainable and equitable society, which reaffirms the observations from the current study. The study conducted by Holland & Ramaley (2008), in this context has also stated that providing support to community engagement through CSR communication is one of the essential strategies for healthcare organizations, which helps these organizations in positively serving the communities.

In summary, the study highlights that CSR communication in UAE's private hospitals is perceived positively by stakeholders, with transparency, consistency, and responsiveness serving as key elements for effective communication. These initiatives foster stakeholder trust by enhancing confidence, integrity, and reliability, while simultaneously strengthening the hospitals' reputation through improved credibility, ethical conduct, and public image. CSR efforts also promote societal welfare, and strategies such as patient engagement and the use of social media further amplify their impact. Overall, CSR plays a critical role in enhancing organizational reputation, patient satisfaction, and community trust.

8. Conclusion

This study explored how CSR communication, as an operational practice, shapes stakeholder trust and hospital reputation within UAE private healthcare. The results show that CSR communication contributes positively to both variables when it is transparent, participatory, and aligned with actual organizational practices. This reinforces the notion that CSR communication is not merely a reporting activity but a mechanism through which hospitals negotiate meaning, legitimacy, and credibility with stakeholders.

Importantly, the findings show that active elements in the study—patients, employees, and community members—play a decisive role in evaluating CSR communication. Their responses in the survey demonstrated how trust is constructed when CSR information is perceived as useful, honest, relevant, and consistent across platforms. This confirms that stakeholders are not passive receivers of information; rather, they co-create hospital reputation through continuous feedback, perception, and interaction.

From a theoretical perspective, the study illustrates how CSR communication functions at the intersection of Stakeholder Theory and Impression Management Theory. Stakeholder Theory helps explain how inclusive practices, responsiveness, and engagement strengthen trust and long-term relational bonds. Impression Management Theory clarifies how hospitals strategically manage their public image, especially within digital environments, and how these strategies become credible only when supported by observable action.

The research also reflects the broader shift from material / traditional communication (reports, brochures) to digital, networked communication (social media, websites, real-time updates). In this digital landscape, stakeholders actively judge CSR messages, compare them

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with experiences, share opinions online, and influence public perception. Thus, reputation becomes a co-constructed digital asset rather than a unilateral institutional claim.

Overall, the study underscores that CSR communication in UAE private hospitals must evolve from symbolic visibility to authentic, evidence-based, stakeholder-driven engagement. Hospitals that integrate stakeholders' input and demonstrate measurable social contributions are better positioned to enhance trust and maintain a competitive reputation in a digital era.

7.1 Practical Implications

The findings suggest that hospitals can enhance trust and reputation by transforming CSR communication from mere publicity to transparent and participatory engagement.

Hospital managers can no longer abuse CSR as mainly publicity, but instead create transparency and candor of communication with society through them. This is through transparency on its intention, action, as well as result, so that patients, as well as society, can tangibly see the hospital's genuine influence on society.

Hospitals can also entangle beneficiaries directly as participants within their CSR programs. Employees, patients, as well as individuals from within the community can add meaningful inputs on health needs, community concerns, and how such CSR projects can be sustainably improved. Injunctions of continued inputs can be elicited through such media as web questionnaires, social networks, or community meetings, so that such hospitals can get a sense of what is most important in people's lives. When people are involved in the conceptualization as well as the evaluation of CSR projects, they are more likely to be suspicious of the hospital's motives and become its ambassadors.

Apart from that, digital channels of communication are also made use of more effectively on behalf of hospitals. Websites, social media, and online reports are good means of imparting effect, conveying real-life stories, and bringing evidence regarding the effect of CSR programs. Constant updates, as well as interactive tools, facilitate regular coverage of the masses and inform them regularly.

By prioritizing transparency, participation, and efficient communication through digital media, CSR becomes recognized as a genuine social contribution rather than a symbolic or promotional exercise, fostering long-term credibility and stakeholder trust. All these can serve to build a good base for long-term credibility and believability in the healthcare field.

7.2 Theoretical Implications

This study extends theoretical understanding in two key areas. First, it contributes to Stakeholder Theory by demonstrating the operational importance of involving active stakeholders in CSR communication. The results show that trust and reputation are shaped not through one-way dissemination of information, but through interactive processes in which stakeholders co-create value by evaluating, responding to, and influencing CSR messages. Second, it advances Impression Management Theory by illustrating how the shift toward digital communication requires organizations to adopt more authentic, verifiable, and participatory strategies to maintain credibility within highly networked environments. Together, these insights contribute to contemporary debates on how organizational reputation is constructed and negotiated in digital societies.

7.3 Limitations and Future Research

The findings of this study are limited to private hospitals in the UAE, which may differ significantly from public healthcare institutions or organizations in other countries, thereby restricting the generalizability of the results. Future research could address this limitation by conducting qualitative interviews or focus groups to capture deeper and more nuanced stakeholder insights, and by adopting longitudinal designs to track how trust develops over time through repeated CSR communication. Additionally, further studies may explore how emerging technologies—such as artificial intelligence, real-time impact dashboards, and interactive CSR portals—enhance communication authenticity and stakeholder engagement. Cross-cultural or international comparisons would also provide valuable understanding of how cultural expectations and institutional environments influence the effectiveness of CSR communication across diverse contexts.

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