

# Mental Psychology of Voters: Social Media Marketing, Corporate Social Responsibility and Political Campaigns Perspectives

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## Abstract

This study examines how the psychological behavior of voters, voter attitudes, and voters' actions respond to situations involving the use of a series of social media marketing, corporate social responsibility, and political campaign activities. It also investigates the mediating consequences of political campaigns on the mental psychology of voters. Questionnaires were electronically administered among university students in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. In conjunction with SPSS and AMOS version 24, the structural equation modeling approach was utilised to examine the relationships between the modeled variables on the basis of data collected from 525 university students. The reliability and validity of the measurements was confirmed before the proposed research hypotheses were tested using confirmatory factor analysis. The results revealed that social media marketing positively influences political campaigns, corporate social responsibility, and the mental psychology of voters. CSR, political campaigns, and social media marketing's positive effects on mental psychology of voter have been supported. The results also confirmed that political campaigns significantly mediate the relationship between social media marketing and mental psychology of voters as well as the relationship between CSR and mental psychology. This study enriches the understanding of social media marketing, CSR activities, and political campaigns voter vis-à-vis the mental psychology of university students. Political groups can gain benefits by understanding how specific CSR activities can influence voter's mental psychology and social media engagement value, leading to enhanced mental psychology and choices. The study's originality and novelty are embedded in its ability to build an integrated model that examines the interaction between social media marketing and mental psychology related to voters among university students. This study investigates the effects of social media marketing on the relationship between CSR activities, political engagement, and mental psychology of voters, which has been lacking a full investigation in the tertiary institutions' literature.

**Keywords:** corporate social responsibility; political campaigns; social media marketing; structural equation modeling; mental psychology of voters.

## 1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a central concept that is increasingly drawing the attention of business corporations and researchers. Trivellas, Rafailidis, Polychroniou and Dekoulou (2019) defined CSR as a management concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders. CSR's importance is attached to several economic, social, legal, and environmental benefits it offers to communities & societies (Castro-González, Bande & Kimura, 2019; Trivellas et al., 2019). Studies consider CSR to be vital for ensuring that business corporations maximise economic profits (González-Rodríguez, Martín-Samper, Köseoglu & Okumus, 2019), social performance (Demir & Budur, 2019), preserve the environment (Zeimers et al., 2019) adhere to acceptable ethical standards, and continue to

exhibit socially responsible behaviour (Trivellas, Rafailidis, Polychroniou & Dekoulou, 2019). Over the past decade, CSR precepts' application has widened to incorporate political organisations on the presumption that it boosts mental psychology of voters and choices (Cheema, Afsar & Javed, 2020). Studies have shown that CSR can yield substantial political gains, enhancing both, the individual political candidate's profile, and the organisation's social image and reputation (González-Rodríguez et al., 2019; Zeimers et al., 2019).

Social media is increasingly used as a marketing tool in the modern digital age. Politicians are capitalizing on the benefits of social media marketing to raise awareness, reach a wider number of voters, reduce campaigning costs, and influence voters' attitudes and perceptions towards them (Song, Ren & Yu, 2019). With the massive prevalence of social media marketing tools and networks, CSR has a

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substantial potential to boost the mental psychology of voters and affect their choices during political campaigns (Castro-González, Bande & Kimura, 2019; Trivellas et al., 2019; Gürlek & Tuna, 2019). Nevertheless, what remains to be explored is how CSR interacts with social media marketing tools and other political activities such as political campaigns to influence the mental psychology of voters. This brings us to the key objective of this study i.e. to examine the mediating effects of social media marketing on the relationship between CSR, political campaigns, and mental psychology of voters.

Meanwhile, the notion of 'political marketing' has also risen to prominence over the past decade. As it stands, this branch of study draws researchers from various disciplines other than the mainstream marketing field. Besides, several political parties commenced using social media marketing tools as part and parcel of their electoral campaigns (Towner, & Lego Munoz, 2016) and the use of social media for this purpose has risen substantially (Mourão et al., 2016). Social media has a higher tendency to capitalize on substantial internet traffic in comparison to public campaign websites, and therefore, it is critical and valuable for politicians to get connected to people. This stems from its capacity to facilitate politicians to interact with voters, express their opinions, vision, and political mandate, and obtain information about the voters' opinions and attitudes (Yu & Chen, 2020). As such, social media influences elections in terms of the speed of communication and the number of voters involved. These ideas do, therefore, demonstrate that social media has substantial implications for the mental psychology affecting voter choices. It also stems from the fact that social media plays a crucial role in promoting voter awareness and voter targeting in order to garner more votes and enhance the possibility of winning an election (Hoewe & Sherrill, 2019; Towner & Lego Munoz, 2016).

Despite the significant research progress made in CSR and social media marketing over the years, this knowledge body is limited in three critical areas:

1. The exact nature of the connection between CSR practices, social media marketing, political campaigns, and mental psychology related voters remains unclear (Md Dawot & Ibrahim, 2014; Raudeliūnienė et al., 2018).
2. Voters are significantly different from consumers (Kilgour, Sasser & Larke, 2015), and this has enormous potential implications on the influence of social media marketing and CSR activities on the mental psychology of voters. Studies have not duly acknowledged this phenomenon (Kilgour, Sasser & Larke, 2015; Kim & Min, 2015), and it remains insufficiently explored.

3. Moreover, CSR activities' adequate capacity to trigger the desired changes in another aspect, like mental psychology, is believed to be mediated by numerous variable elements (Liu et al., 2016). In this case, this study argues that the effects of social media marketing activities on mental psychology of voters are mediated by the yet to be explored mediating effects of CSR.

This study's primary purpose is to examine how voters' psychological behaviour, attitudes, and actions respond to situations involving the use of a series of social media marketing, corporate social responsibility, and political campaign activities. The study draws insights from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), where numerous university students' psychological behaviour, emotions, personality, attitudes, and actions are substantially influencing the electoral and voting process. Moreover, the use of social media networks is also considered to be high among university students (Towner & Lego Munoz, 2016). However, there is limited literature studying the interaction between social media marketing and mental psychology related votes among university students, highlights the study's originality and novelty in terms of contribution to existing knowledge.

The study contributes to both existing theoretical and empirical studies as it builds an integrated CSR-social media marketing, and psychology model that is universally applicable in all fields. The study is also vital for highlighting that the appropriate channeling of CSR and social media marketing activities during electoral campaigns can contribute towards enhancing social performance and environmental protection. It also forms a base upon which future studies can establish a sound framework which political analysts and researchers can use to assess the utility and effectiveness of social media networks and CSR activities in transforming social lives and fostering social and environmental development.

## **2. Empirical literature review and hypothesis development**

### **2.1 The empirical examination of the concept of psychology in relation to voters**

Psychology is usually defined in terms of an individual's emotions, mental attitude, and characteristics (Coon, Mitterer & Martini, 2021). Kalat (2021) asserts that psychology deals with matters relating to the scientific examination of human beings' personality, mind, and functions and how these influence their individual behaviour. The concept of psychology has an significant bearing on numerous and diverse aspects of societal life; however, studies have confined the concept of psychology

to areas like marketing (Otterbring, 2021), nursing (Kang et al., 2020), teaching (Akour et al., 2020), etc. It is good knowledge that psychology has significant relevance in other areas, including politics, and in that sense, is vital for analysing voters' behaviour and intention; however, studies are still unable to fill this gap. Besides, circumstances that govern consumers', students', and nurses' psychological behaviour, attitudes, and actions need to be examined to determine if they hold when related to voters. This is relatively accurate, especially when aspects like social media marketing, CSR, and political campaigns are factored into the analysis. Hence, this study presumes that voters' psychological behaviour, attitudes, and actions are influenced by social media marketing, CSR, and political campaigns. This further demonstrates the present study's novelty and contribution at the interface of psychology and political science. Consequently, we operationalise mental psychology regarding votes as a description of how voters' emotions, personality, behaviour, mental attitudes, and actions to vote for a specific political candidate change in response to various social media marketing, CSR, and political campaign activities.

## **2.2 The empirical significance of social media marketing and corporate social responsibility**

Studies on social media marketing are abundantly confined to areas such as marketing (Md Dawot & Ibrahim, 2014), management (Kilgour, Sasser & Larke, 2015), social psychology (Kim & Min, 2015) sociology (Demir & Budur, 2019), and education (Zeimers et al., 2019). Examinations on social media marketing's implications in the political arena are scarce, and this study seeks to fill this void. Meanwhile, social media marketing is defined as the use of a network or system of communication used by individuals and organisations using social media platforms to form social relationships, drive website traffic, increase sales, build a brand and inform a targeted audience about a particular good or service (Liu et al., 2016; Md Dawot & Ibrahim, 2014). When social media marketing is examined in the context of politics, essential objectives like raising awareness, reaching a more comprehensive number of voters, reducing campaigning costs, and influencing mental psychology and choice are major concerns focused on by studies on social media networks. Both practitioners and researchers posit that social media networks' existence relates to opportunities of increasing visibility, improving organisational image, establishing relationships, increasing interactivity, spreading and storing information, identifying an audience, and attracting numerous individuals (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch, 2017; Wang et al., 2016).

Social media marketing networks facilitate the rapid spread of information through communication frequency and the importance of relationships (Mislove et al., 2016). Due to the magnitude and diverse nature of social media networks, political organisations are being obligated to change their marketing campaigns in order to adapt to changes in environmental and economic conditions, new platforms and forms of social networks, and changes in users' information needs (Singer, 2009). As a result, this study argues that social media marketing is vital for political organisations in overcoming challenges associated with political organisational growth through improved mental psychology vis-a-vis voters. Additionally, social media marketing forms a two-way communication between political candidates and voters (Couldry, 2012), allows political organisations to determine whether they have applied appropriate positioning strategies and to gauge how their actions affect voters' consciousness, and observe and analyse voters' feedback (reviews and comments), (Raudeliūnienė et al., 2018; Sheikahmadi & Nematbakhsh, 2017).

Kilgour, Sasser and Larke (2015) assert that it is vital to empirically examine social media marketing studies and apply them in various contexts (Kilgour, Sasser & Larke, 2015). The reasons being that social media marketing is a broad concept which encompasses numerous conceptual percepts like engagement metrics (comments, virality, engaged users, weekly total reach, mentions, people discussions, followers, likes), online advertising metrics (social and campaign reach, click-through rate, cost per impression, and cost per click) and traffic metrics (lifetime, installs, time spent, page views, unique visitors) (Kilgour, Sasser & Larke, 2015). This undermines the development of consistent ideas that warrant consensus on the study of social media marketing's implications on political activities and outcomes like political campaigns, corporate social responsibility and voting. Thus, this study's empirical contributions are embedded in its potency to build an empirical framework that examines the implications of social media marketing on CSR, political campaigns, and mental psychology that can be used by political organisations and candidates.

Literature indicates that various theoretical debates and viewpoints explain the critical precepts of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Castro-González, Bande and Kimura (2019) regards CSR as a concept that aids organisations in committing to specific policies, procedures, values, and contributions with a view to establish a responsible society (Castro-González, Bande & Kimura, 2019). González-Rodríguez, Martín-Samper, Köseoglu and Okumus (2019) defined CSR as a concept that signifies the legal, business,

discretionary, economic, and ethical anticipations for business firms by viewing CSR perspectives as contributing to business and social welfare (González-Rodríguez et al., 2019). CSR's prevalence depends on the organisations' responsibilities when considering beneficial business applications, ethical and economic practices, and welfare contributions, which are essential for the business environment, community groups, workers, consumers, suppliers, and other stakeholders (Trivellas et al., 2019). The stakeholders' theory of CSR and other empirical studies (Castro-González, Bande & Kimura, 2019; Demir & Budur, 2019) shows that various corporate stakeholders, employees, consumers, suppliers, and retailers influence an organisation's image. This is of particular importance for political organisations and candidates for influencing mental psychology related to voters. On the other hand, the triple bottom approach to CSR (Cheema, Afsar & Javed, 2020) and other empirical studies contend that environmental, economic, and social sustainability are pivotal for enhancing social performance and development (Song, Ren & Yu, 2019; Zeimers et al., 2019). Both, theoretical and empirical approaches also denote that CSR has implications on the way societies perceive an organisation and influence its performance. This is pivotal for political parties that endeavour to portray a positive image to communities and amass their support to win elections. However, these theoretical insights and empirical studies focus on studying non-governmental organisations (Demir & Budur, 2019), sports clubs (Zeimers et al., 2019), and hotels (González-Rodríguez et al., 2019). Limited work has been done to apply them when study their political implications on university students. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature body by drawing insights from university students' perceptions to build a possibly universal approach to CSR applicable in both, political and non-political organisations.

### **2.3 The effects of social media marketing on CSR**

Social media marketing platforms can help connect people and political organisations around a cause to emphasise social responsibility (Krishen et al., 2016). In other words, social media marketing offers convincing and effective ways of highlighting and harnessing a political organisation's long-term commitment to CSR. Harnessing such efforts amid an increase in the magnitude of communication channels used by political organisations and candidates during political campaigns substantially affects mental psychology and voters' choices (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Liu et al., 2016). Thus, this line of research can provide deeper understanding of the importance of social media marketing when applied in the context of political organisations. The following hypothesis is, therefore, proposed;

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Social media marketing positively influences political parties' CSR activities.

### **2.4 Effects of social media marketing on political campaigns**

Social media marketing activities are increasingly used by organisations in the modern world. Politicians capitalise on the benefits of social media marketing to raise awareness, reach a vast total number of voters, reduce campaigning costs, and influence voters' attitudes and perceptions towards them (Veneti, 2020). Moreover, social media marketing is instrumental in politics because it provides tactics that guarantee environment-friendly outcomes and limits the challenges associated with political growth (Valenzuela et al. 2019). The political relevance of social media marketing can also be linked to enhancing awareness of the political party's vision, mandate, and commitment to improving social and economic outcomes (Omotayo, Funmilola, & Folorunso, 2020). Social media marketing allows politicians to use various online media that are time-effective and cost-effective compared to traditional marketing campaigns like radio and television adverts (Valenzuela et al. 2019). With the prevalence of innovative and online media platforms, politicians can now reach a wider voter audience in different parts of the country within a short period (Oosterhoff, & Laura, 2020). Moreover, social media marketing has revolutionized political campaign methods as it allows voters to obtain feedback on voters' attitudes and perceptions using social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and blogs (Schmuck & Jörg, 2019; Valenzuela et al. 2019). Consequently, it may be asserted that there is a positive interaction between the prevalence of social media marketing and political campaign, and this can be expressed in the form of a hypothesis as follows;

**H<sub>2</sub>:** The prevalence of social media marketing platforms has a positive effect on political campaigns.

### **2.5 The influence of CSR on political campaigns**

The relationship linking CSR to political campaigns is an emerging issue, and it is to the researchers' knowledge that this association has not been adequately explored. Furthermore, studies only highlight that CSR can be used as a political tool but do not advance specific knowledge to assess how it affects political campaigning strategies and outcomes (Wang et al., 2016; Yu & Chen, 2020). Thus, the present study contributes to existing studies by highlighting the probable effects of CSR on political campaigns. This is instrumental for advancing the theoretical and empirical understanding of CSR's influence on political activities. Nevertheless, Castro-González, Bande and Kimura (2019) contend that CSR activities can be used to boost political

candidates' image and reputation (Castro-González, Bande & Kimura, 2019). Thus, the present study lays down the foundation for the following proposed research hypothesis connecting CSR and political campaigns;

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Corporate social responsibility has a positive effect on political campaigns.

### **2.6 The effects of social media marketing on mental psychology of voters**

It is pertinent to note that the magnitude of communication channels used by political organisations and candidates increases significantly during political campaigns (Elis, Sunshine & Norman, 2010). This subsequently exposes voters to numerous types of political messages. Nevertheless, political messages differ regarding the message context and length and communication types, say, audio, video, and text (McLeod, Carroll & McDonald, 1983). Such messages contextualised by the delivery type of communication channel used work in concert to help voters assess their candidate profile. As a result, media type and time spent often influence voters' degree to like a political candidate (Elis, Sunshine & Norman, 2010). Candidate evaluations are of significant importance as they influence people's voting choices. For example, the more favorably individuals perceive a political candidate, the greater the chances of voting for that particular candidate (mental psychology of voters). Studies also demonstrate that both online and traditional media affect candidates' likeability and image (McLeod, Carroll & McDonald, 1983; Towner & Dulio, 2011). With the high prevalence of social media marketing platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, dynamic and substantial changes in mental psychology are inevitable when they are sustainably used as part of campaigning methods.

A study by Kaid and Postelnicu (2005) found that internet channels used to broadcast news, debates, and ads significantly impacted the evaluation of democratic and republic candidates in US elections. Moreover, online media marketing strategies were discovered to have a substantial influence on voters' psychology and choices compared to traditional channels such as television and radio stations (Boons et al., 2013). Thus, the prevalence and popularity of numerous online media platforms have been shaping candidate evaluations. This can be supported by insights that revealed the tremendous support for Barack Obama during the 2008 presidential elections was attributed to candidate websites, political blogs, online news magazines, and newspapers (Omotayo, Funmilola, & Folorunso, 2020).

Social media has a high tendency to generate substantial capital traffic and attention in comparison to public campaign websites, and hence, it is critical and valuable for

politicians to get connected to people through social media platforms (Mourão et al., 2016). This stems from its capacity to facilitate politicians to interact with voters, express their opinions, vision, and political mandate, and obtain information about the voters' opinions and attitudes (Yu & Chen, 2020). As such, social media influences elections in terms of the speed of communication and the number of voters involved. These ideas do, therefore, exhibit that social media has substantial implications on mental psychology and individual choices. This also stems from the aspect that social media plays a crucial role in promoting voter awareness and voter targeting to garner more votes and increase the possibility of winning an election (Towner & Lego Munoz, 2016). Though individual researchers, as highlighted, have examined the effect of social media on voter examinations, little has been done to extend such examination to study the effects of social media marketing on mental psychology. Subsequently, the following hypothesis is formulated in line with insights supporting a potential positive effect of social media marketing on mental psychology;

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Social media marketing has a positive influence on mental psychology of voters.

### **2.7 The effects of corporate social responsibility on mental psychology of voters**

Stakeholders are unavoidably and significantly redefining the role of businesses and political organisations in societies, and consequently, mental psychology has risen to become a prominent aspect of the study of organisations (Kim et al., 2017). On the other hand, societies commonly necessitate political organisations to assume their legitimate economic mandate and fulfill their environmental obligations (Boons et al., 2013). Voter intention is the intent and eligibility to vote in an election (Dunbar & Li & Shi, 2017). Voter intention is pivotal for the survival and growth of political parties (Lee et al., 2018). Thus, by boosting mental psychology, political parties can attain recognition and support, translating into survival, growth, and dominance (Kim et al., 2017). This means that those political parties incapable of amassing mental psychology in their favour will lose elections and become non-influential. Hence, political parties can utilise CSR to lure, maintain, and enhance voters' support for their political mandate (Boons et al., 2013).

The influence of CSR on mental psychology may be for the following reasons. Firstly, CSR roles exhibit that CSR assuredly affects mental psychology (Omotayo, Funmilola, & Folorunso, 2020). Secondly, organisations engaged in CSR practices reinforce the suitability of their actions within a set of specific beliefs, values, norms, and rules set forth by numerous stakeholders (Halkos & Skouloudis,

2018). Considerable consistency that matches the society's expectations and political organisations' behaviour is an instrumental determinant of mental psychology. This is because CSR espouses responsible and positive behaviour and commitment of political organisations and firms to the government and stakeholders (Bachmann & Ingenhoff, 2016). Thus, CSR can meet the government's and society's expectations, which subsequently enhances mental psychology. As a result, the following hypothesis has been proposed;

**H<sub>5</sub>:** Corporate social responsibility positively affects mental psychology of voters.

## **2.8 The effects of political campaigns on mental psychology**

Studies highlight that political campaigns aid in enhancing the likeability of a political candidate (Aziz, 2019; Oosterhoff, & Laura, 2020). Others highlighted that political campaigns are instrumental in changing voters' perceptions and attitudes towards a political candidate (Kaid & Postelnicu, 2005; Lee et al., 2012). Moreover, online political campaigns can provide feedback on voters' perceptions of political candidates (Oosterhoff, & Laura, 2020). Such feedback can be used to develop effective political campaigns that can enhance mental psychology and choices. Regardless of the perspective, one can assume online political campaigns' implications can ultimately change voters' psychology and choices. This study, therefore, proposes the following hypothesis.

**H<sub>6</sub>:** Online political campaigns have a positive effect on mental' psychology of voter.

## **2.9 Mediating political campaign messages**

Political campaigns are meant to persuade voters into voting for a particular party (Yu & Chen, 2020). As such, their practical ability to yield desired outcomes relies on their capacity to influence voters' emotional and cognitive processing content. The limited capacity model of mediated message processing depicts that specific structural elements of mediated messages cause an automatic allocation of cognitive resources to information processing of social media users (Raudeliūnienė et al., 2018). Evidence from this line of research indicates that this has been done using various social media platforms like radio (Omotayo, Funmilola, & Folorunso, 2020), television (Hoewe & Sherrill, 2019) and the internet (Elis, Sunshine & Norman, 2010). Nevertheless, researchers rarely test the mediating effects of political campaigns (Omotayo, Funmilola, & Folorunso, 2020) on the influence of social media marketing and CSR on voters' mental psychology. Consequently, this highlights this study's novelty and contribution to existing studies by filling this research gap.

Political messages communicated via social media can be structured using political campaigning tools composed of various stylistic language variations, which allow politicians to express a single idea using different modalities to address different audiences (Towner & Dulio, 2011). Supporting studies highlight that political campaigns can be used in conjunction with various social media strategies and platforms to influence individuals' perceptions (Bachmann & Ingenhoff, 2016; Hendricks & Schill, 2015). As such, the reported findings indicated that political campaigns offer more room for social media marketing to use different strategies capable of positively influencing voters' perceptions about a political candidate. Politicians can use social media marketing to launch their CSR activities as a campaigning strategy to influence the mental psychology of voters. Moreover, social media networks can be used as a CSR communication tool (Šechny, 2016) to enhance politicians' image and reputation, boosting mental psychology when used as a campaigning strategy. Henceforth, political campaigns tend to shift social media marketing roles from interacting with stakeholders about CSR activities to influencing their political opinions and psychology. Alternatively, these ideas show that politicians can use political campaigns to mediate and redirect social media marketing and CSR messages, activities, aims and purposes with a view to influence voters' mental psychology. Others claim that the effects of social media marketing, and CSR on any activity can be mediated respectively by any variable (Raudeliūnienė et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2016). Hence, this study contends that political campaigns mediate CSR messages communicated using various social media marketing platforms to influence mental psychology. Subsequently, this results in the formulation of the following hypotheses, highlighting the mediating effects of political campaigns;

**H<sub>7</sub>:** Political campaigns have a mediating effect on social media marketing's influence on mental psychology of voters.

**H<sub>8</sub>:** Political campaigns have a mediating effect on corporate social responsibility's influence on mental psychology of voters.

## **2.10 Proposed study model**

This study's insights reveal that social media marketing is of extensive significance in influencing corporate social responsibility, political campaigns, and mental psychology of voters. Hence, the study findings contribute significantly to managerial insights and existing literature on social media marketing and CSR activities' effectiveness. More so, this study's contributions are embedded in its capacity to provide suggestions to enhance the universal applicability

of studies regarding corporate social responsibility, political campaigns, and mental psychology of voters.

Studies that examine the effects of social media marketing on the relationship between CSR, political campaigns, and mental psychology are limited. Therefore, the proposed model is significant as it highlights that appropriate social media marketing strategies coupled with

acceptable corporate social conduct and proper political campaigns are pivotal for enhancing mental psychology related to voters. The resultant outcome of the in-depth examination of the literature provided herein resulted in the development of the conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1 below.

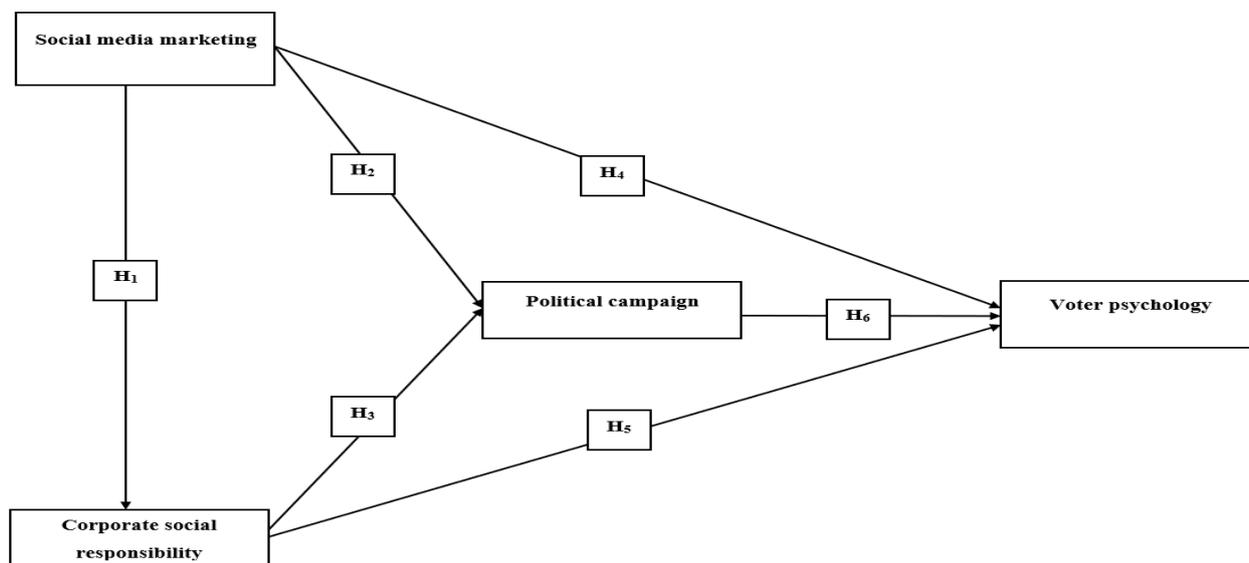


Figure 1. Research Framework

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1 Sample size

This study draws insights from university students in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) as a significant number of university students are substantially influencing the electoral and voting process. Moreover, the use of social media networks is also considered to be high among university students but there are limited studies that examine the interaction between corporate social responsibility (CSR), political campaigns (PC), social media marketing (SMM) and mental psychology (MP) among university students. Consequently, the study focuses on a sample of 525 university students based in Erbil, KRI. The university students comprised of 53.7% female students and 46.35% male students. 12.3% were in between the age group of 18-25 years, 44.8% between the age group of 26-33 years, 18.7% between the age group of 34-41 years, 13.3% between the age group of 42-49 years, and 10.8% were 50 years and above. 98% of the students highlighted that they read politics-related news on Facebook and 2% on Twitter. Snap Chat and Instagram were mainly used for socialising purposes with other students, relatives and people.

#### 3.2 Data analysis

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to estimate the SMM, CSR, PC and mental psychology model. SEM is a multivariate arithmetical examination method used to examine fundamental connections between variables (Ali et al., 2018). Ali et al. (2018) highlighted that SEM combines multiple regression analysis and factor analysis to separate structural links between two or more variables. According to literature, no comprehensive work has been done to build an integrated SEM that uses CSR, PC, SMM, and MP. Thus, SEM was used in this study because it plays a significant role in investigating the structural relationships between CSR, PC, SSMM, and mental psychology of voters (Hancock, Stapleton & Mueller, 2018; Ullman & Bentler, 2003). Besides, SEM's use in this study was justified by its potency to estimate numerous and interrelated dependence in one analysis (Hancock, G. R., Stapleton, L. M., & Mueller, R. O. (Eds.). (2018). SPSS and AMOS version 24 were used to aid in the data analysis process.

#### 3.3 Research instrument

The model was estimated using four measured variables, namely SSMM, CSR, PC, and VI, adapted from similar studies and amended to ensure that the research instrument remains highly valid and reliable in addressing the area of concern. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure all the variables with values 1 to 5 corresponding

from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Economic, legal, environmental, and philanthropic CSR dimensions were used to measure CSR (Lee, Lee & Li, 2012). Ten variable elements adapted from a study by Khan and Jan were used to measure the variable SMM (Khan & Jan, 2019). PC (Hosch-Dayican et al., 2016) and VI (Bode et al., 2014) had respective totals of 9 and 8 sub-elements each and were adopted from Šechny. The validity of all the variables established by previous studies was compared with the study's obtained validity results. The study's validity results (CSR:  $\alpha=0.94$ ; SSMM:  $\alpha=0.90$ ; PC:  $\alpha=0.96$  and VI:  $\alpha=0.92$ ) were relatively higher and exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Hence, conclusions were made that the variables were reliable in explaining SSMM's effects on the relationship between CSR, PC, and VI among university students in KRI.

## 4. Results and implications

### 4.1 Confirmatory factor analysis

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results revealed that the variables had factor loading surpassing 0.70. This is in line with propositions suggesting that factor loadings above 0.70 are acceptable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). In addition, the convergent validity of the constructs [(SSMM: AVE=0.844); (CSR: AVE=0.844); (PC: AVE=0.844), and (VI: AVE=0.844)] examined using average variance extraction (AVE) were above the minimum threshold of 0.50 (Ali et al., 2018). Satisfactory composite reliability (CR) values surpassing 0.70 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011) were also recorded [(SSMM: CR=0.67); (CSR: CR=0.74); (PC: CR=0.72), and (VI: CR=0.70)].

**Table 1.**  
Confirmatory factor analysis

	$\chi^2.df$	GFI	CFI	NFI	IFI	TLI
<b>Result</b>	85.570 (0.000)	0.931	0.921	0.903	0.923	0.812

The chi-square value of 80.211 was significant at 1% and signified that the model was fit and acceptable for accomplishing the purpose of this study (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Further observations revealed that the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) was relatively higher than the stipulated 0.90 benchmark. As a result, the estimated SEM was considered to offer reliable estimates fit for policy formulation (Ali et al., 2018; Hancock, Stapleton & Mueller, 2018).

Additional inferences made from the model tests revealed that the SEM conforms to fitness standards' stipulated good. These inferences are extrapolated from the results depicted in Table 1, which revealed that both the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Non-normed Fit Index (NFI), and Incremental Fit Index (IFI) were above the minimum acceptable 0.90 cut-off point (Ullman & Bentler, 2003). Consequently, the SEM was considered to be in alignment and within the stipulated goodness of fit requirements, and thus capable of fulfilling this study's purpose.

### 4.2 Descriptive statistics

The model variables had values above, and this depicts that the university students, on average, agreed to all the suggested inquiries about SSMM, PC, CSR, and VI. High dispersions of 1.10, 1.06, and 1.24 were associated with the

demographic variables department, year of study, and social media handle. Similar observations were made regarding the variables PC, VI, and CSR, which had standard deviations of 1.52, 1.94, 1.95, and 1.94, respectively. This denotes that these variables have high responsive effects and can easily change in response to any model variables change (see Table 2).

ANOVA was used to determine if there were significant differences between the demographic features of the university students. The findings demonstrated significant differences among the university students regarding their gender, age group, department, year of study, and preferred social media handle. This is because all the ANOVA values were statistically significant at 1%. This implies that the university students' demographic features significantly influence their SSMM, PC, CSR, and VI perceptions. The Pearson correlation coefficient test results revealed that all the variables were significantly and positively correlated. Hence, this suggests that improvements in one of the variables possibly results in significant improvements in the other variables. High and significant positive correlations of 0.765, 0.714 existed between CSR and SSMM, and VI and PC, respectively. CSR and VI were the least positively correlated variables with a moderate correlation coefficient of 0.535 (see Table 2).

**Table 2.**  
Mean, standard deviation, and correlations among the observed variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	ANOVA	SSMM	PC	VI	CSR
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<b>Gender</b>	4.28	0.68	0.52*				
<b>Age group</b>	3.64	0.98	0.61*				
<b>Department</b>	2.98	1.10	0.76*				
<b>Year of study</b>	3.28	1.06	0.89*				
<b>Preferred social media handle</b>	3.46	1.24	0.47*				
<b>SSMM</b>	4.56	1.52	0.35*	<b>1</b>			
<b>PC</b>	4.62	1.94	0.55*	0.559*	<b>1</b>		
<b>VI</b>	4.50	1.95	0.88*	0.617*	0.714*	<b>1</b>	
<b>CSR</b>	4.24	1.94	0.72*	0.765*	0.647*	0.535*	<b>1</b>

SMM- social media marketing; PC-political campaign; VI-mental psychology of voters; CSR-corporate social responsibility

Note: \* denotes that the ANOVA value and correlation are significant at 0.01 level

4.3 SEM estimation results

Hypothesis 1 was accepted, leading to the assertion that social media marketing significantly impacts political parties' CSR activities (p-value=0.040). This is relatively true as social media marketing activities provide effective ways of highlighting and harnessing a political organisation's long-term commitment to CSR (Liu et al., 2016).

The positive influence of social media marketing on political campaigns was established to be valid as evidenced by a significant coefficient of 0.280. This aligns with

propositions suggesting that social media can help level the playing field in politics, where money and access to formal communication channels pose huge barriers to new entrants (Raudeliūnienė et al., 2018). Besides, running political adverts on social media is a campaigning method that empowers candidates to directly communicate their message to voters and influence the political debate. By running political ads on various media types, candidates can reach audiences that otherwise may not have been paying attention to the election and build name recognition, highlight important issues, and call attention to the shortcomings of their opponents (Veneti, 2020).

Table 3

Computed SEM results

	Effect	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Hypothesis
<b>CSR</b>	<--- <b>SSMM</b>	0.049	0.042	4.531	0.040	<b>H<sub>1</sub>: Accepted</b>
<b>PC</b>	<--- <b>SSMM</b>	0.280	0.078	3.604	0.001	<b>H<sub>2</sub>: Accepted</b>
<b>PC</b>	<--- <b>CSR</b>	0.331	0.042	2.817	0.004	<b>H<sub>3</sub>: Accepted</b>
<b>VI</b>	<--- <b>SSMM</b>	0.488	0.065	7.556	0.000	<b>H<sub>4</sub>: Accepted</b>
<b>VI</b>	<--- <b>CSR</b>	0.558	0.061	9.162	0.000	<b>H<sub>5</sub>: Accepted</b>
<b>VI</b>	<--- <b>PC</b>	0.217	0.060	3.612	0.020	<b>H<sub>6</sub>: Accepted</b>

PC – Political Campaigns; SMM – Social Media Marketing; VI- mental Psychology of voters; CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility.

The results depict that CSR has a significant positive effect on political campaigns of 0.331. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was considered to hold, resulting in the validation of the assertion depicting that CSR can be used as a campaigning strategy to positively influence voters' perception regarding political candidates' image, reputation, and service delivery capabilities. Such a connection had not been empirically established although there are some studies which provide make cursory references to such a connection (Wang et al., 2016; Yu & Chen, 2020).

Hypothesis 4 was also established to hold, leading to the assertion that social media marketing positively influences voters' psychology to vote for a particular candidate (estimate=0.488; p-value=0.000). This is supported by McLeod, Glynn and McDonald's findings, which opine that

SMM affects candidates' likeability and image, which triggers people's psychology to vote for that particular candidate (McLeod, Carroll & McDonald, 1983). This also aligns with ideas suggesting that social media marketing allows political organisations to determine whether they have applied appropriate positioning strategies, how their actions establish in voters' consciousness, observe and analyse voters' feedback, and is generally vital for political organisations in guaranteeing environment-friendly outcomes and limiting challenges associated with political organizational growth (Raudeliūnienė et al., 2018; Sheikhamadi & Nematbakhsh, 2017).

Findings in Table 3 also confirm the hypothesized relationship between CRS and VI which shows that there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between

CRS and VI (0.558). Hence, we accept the Hypothesis 5 and assert that CSR positively affects mental psychology of voters. This is possible because CSR practices are used to reinforce the suitability of politicians' actions within a set of specific beliefs, values, norms, and rules set forth by numerous stakeholders (Boons et al., 2013; Halkos & Skouloudis, 2018). This can also be supported by relatively similar findings, which depicted that CSR exhibits responsible and positive behaviour and commitment of political organisations and firms to the government and stakeholders (Lee et al., 2018), which causes improvements in the mental psychology of voters. The findings also supported Hypothesis 6, which asserts that online political campaigns have a positive effect on voters' psychology to vote for a particular candidate (p-value=0.000). Thus, an increase in online political campaigns will enhance mental psychology by 0.217 for each successive use of online political campaigning tools. This is in line with findings that depicted that online political campaigns are instrumental for enhancing the likeability of a political candidate (Aziz, 2019; Schmuck & Jörg, 2019) and changing the voters'

**Table 4**

The indirect effects testing results of the mediation models

Hypothesis	Variables	Unstandardised estimates	Bootstrapping		Prob.
			Bias correction		
			Lower 2.5%	Upper 2.5%	
H <sub>7</sub>	SMM → PC → VI	0.813	0.05	0.18	<b>0.021</b>
H <sub>8</sub>	CSR → PC → VI	0.766	0.12	0.25	<b>0.000</b>

Table 4 depicts that political campaigns significantly mediate the relationship between CSR and mental psychology of voters. The interaction value of 0.766 was significant, at 5%. This entails that a high prevalence of political campaigning activities enhances the association between social media marketing and mental psychology of voters during political campaigns. Hence, this validates Hypothesis 7 and 8, highlighting the mediating effects of political campaigns on the connection between SMM and VI, and CSR and VI. These findings are in support of the limited capacity model of mediated message processing which depicts that specific structural elements of mediated messages cause an automatic allocation of cognitive resources to information processing of social media users (Raudeliūnienė et al., 2018).

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The study is devoted to examining social media marketing's effects on the relationship between CSR, political campaigns, and mental psychology of voters. The findings

perception and attitudes towards a political candidate. This, subsequently, aids in boosting the mental psychology of voters.

### 4.4 The mediating effects of political campaigns on the connection between SMM and VI

As noted by inferences made from the development of this study's conceptual model, no comprehensive work has been done to build an integrated empirical model that examines political campaigns' mediating roles on the connection between SMM and mental psychology and the linking connecting CSR to mental psychology of voters. As a result, this study focused considerable attention on examining the mediating effects of PC between SMM and VI, CSR and VI. The computed findings revealed that PC had high positive mediating effects of 0.846 on the relationship between SMM and mental psychology of voters. Therefore, the findings reaffirmed the existence of a robust indirect relationship running from SMM to PC to affect mental psychology subsequently with a high coefficient of 0.766.

depict that using social media marketing has significant positive effects on political campaigns. This aligns with previous related studies and is a result of the idea that social media provides various online platforms that are cost and time-effective. Hence, social media marketing allows politicians to conveniently reach a more comprehensive number of student voters in different geographical areas. Moreover, the study's theoretical and practical underpinnings demonstrate that running political ads on various media types, allows political candidates to reach audiences that otherwise may not have been paying attention to the election and build name recognition, highlight important issues, and call attention to the shortcomings of their opponents. Notable implications suggest that integrating CSR and social media marketing activities offers an outstanding political campaigning advantage which causes certain political parties to outperform others during elections.

The study offers valuable contributions by expanding our understanding of the benefits of the widespread use of online political campaigning strategies. While previous studies on political campaigns base their examination on

the general public, this study dwells on university students' opinions. Additionally, the study is vital for highlighting that the appropriate channeling of social media marketing and CSR activities during electoral campaigns can contribute towards enhancing social performance and environmental protection. We established that the widespread use of online political campaigns positively affects students' psychology to vote for a particular candidate. This concurs with study findings depicting that online political campaigns are instrumental for enhancing the likeability of a political candidate (Aziz, 2019; 34] and changing the voters' perception and attitudes towards a political candidate. This eventually boosts students' voting psychology and choices.

Though research attention on social media marketing impressions has gradually increased, understanding its underlying connections remains insufficient. The study applied a SEM approach to determine the effects of social media marketing on students' psychology to vote for a particular candidate. The results depicted that social media marketing positively influences student's psychology to vote for a particular candidate. This is because SMM affects candidates' likeability and image, which trigger students' psychology to vote for that particular candidate. Further practical implications of this study include its ability to demonstrate that CSR activities espouse responsible and positive behaviour, and commitment of political organisations and firms to the government and stakeholders. Non-mandatory CSR activities can be used as a political campaigning tool to boost a political candidate's image and reputation.

Findings highlighted that social media marketing has a significant impact on political parties' CSR activities. Hence, the managerial implications are that social media marketing activities should be well-structured and devised according to social parameters to reinforce the suitability of politicians' actions within a set of specific beliefs, values, norms, and rules set forth by numerous stakeholders. This is instrumental for fostering acceptable ethical behaviour, socially responsible conduct, and positive commitment of political organisations to the government and stakeholders.

This study also contributes to the literature on social media marketing and CSR by examining political campaigns' mediating effects on the relationship between SMM and mental psychology of voters, and between CSR and mental psychology. Relatively limited studies have examined the availability of mediators that can reinforce SMM and CSR's effects on mental psychology. The findings reaffirmed that political campaigning has high positive mediating effects on the relationship between SMM and mental psychology, and between CSR and mental

psychology of voters. Thus, the practical and managerial implications are that political and social media marketing managers should restructure political campaigns in line with high traffic metrics, advertising metrics, engagement metrics, cost and time-effective social media platforms, and acceptable CSR activities and practices to enhance mental psychology of voters. This is consistent with Veneti's (2020) claim that a high prevalence of political campaigning activities triggers a considerable usage of CSR methods and practices, and social media marketing tools and networks that enhance mental psychology during political campaigns.

Lastly, study results can be applied to the government's social development programs. According to the stakeholders' approach to CSR and the triple bottom line approach, stakeholders and societies will benefit from CSR activities when they yield substantial improvements in social investment performance and environmental preservation. Therefore, political parties and the government should emphasize the importance of CSR practices that are socially and environmentally oriented by providing CSR incentives, imposing strict fines on socially irresponsible behaviour, and stiffening legal conduct that governs political organisations' behaviour. The findings from this research are a call-to-action for political and social media managers to ensure that social media marketing, CSR, and political campaigning strategies complement each other. This is possible by ensuring that social media marketing, CSR, and political campaigning goals, activities, and outcomes are integrated to establish an effective political strategy that enhances mental psychology.

## 5.2 Limitations and suggestions for future studies

The study has examined how social media marketing, corporate social responsibility, and political campaigns can enhance Kurdish university students' psychology to vote. This makes it challenging to generalise the results, and hence, future research based on diverse samples will be required to generalise the study results. This study was conducted in Kurdistan of Iraq, and hence, to increase the generalisability of the findings, studies should replicate this study model in other developing countries.

## 6. Conclusions

The study attempted to contribute to existing literature on social media marketing, CSR, political campaigns, and mental psychology by studying university students in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. It was observed that the widespread use of online political campaigns positively affects students' psychology to vote for a particular candidate. It was further observed that social media marketing positively influences students' psychology to

vote for a particular candidate and does not significantly impact political parties' CSR activities. The study contributes to CSR's literature, political campaigns, social media marketing, and voter intention. The study specifically demonstrated that political campaigns mediate the relationship between social media marketing and mental psychology, and between CSR and mental psychology of voters. This study has several practical implications, and notable implications point to the idea that political and social media marketing managers should restructure political campaigns in line with high traffic metrics, advertising metrics, engagement metrics, and cost

and time-effective social media platforms to enhance mental psychology. In addition, in managerial terms, the study posits that social media marketing should be well-structured and devised according to social parameters and CSR activities to reinforce the appropriateness of politicians' actions within a set of specific beliefs, values, norms, and rules set forth by numerous stakeholders. Thus, the study recommends that social media marketing goals, CSR and political campaigns activities, and outcomes be integrated to establish an effective political strategy that enhances mental psychology of voters.

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