

New Research Finds Trust Has Become a Boardroom Priority Across the Middle East

Businesses are increasingly expanding responsibility for organisational influence beyond marketing to executive leadership as AI reshapes how customers discover, evaluate and choose organisations.



THE NEW RULES OF INFLUENCE
MIDDLE EAST EDITION 2026

Dubai, United Arab Emirates Aug 12, 2026 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - Businesses across the Middle East are increasingly redefining how responsibility for corporate influence is being assigned as artificial intelligence accelerates changes in how customers discover, evaluate and choose organisations according to new research published today by NetResults.

The report, **The New Rules of Influence: Middle East Edition 2026**, found that **63% of participating organisations** from the UAE and Saudi Arabia **now place responsibility for brand influence with executive leadership, compared with 51% globally**. The findings suggest trust, executive visibility and reputation are increasingly being managed as measurable business assets that influence customer confidence, investment decisions and long-term growth rather than simply communications activities.

The research, based on a global study of **1,871 business leaders** and over 100 from the UAE and Saudi Arabia conducted by Researchscape International for NetResults and Public Relations Global Network (PRGN), indicates that the regional leaders continues to evolve a distinct approach that

increasingly integrates leadership, credibility and commercial outcomes into strategic communications.

AI Is Changing How Businesses Compete

For decades, organisations competed for attention. Success was measured by visibility, media coverage and search rankings because customers primarily relied on search engines and corporate websites to find information.

That equation is changing.

Customers now consume information from dozens of independent sources before making purchasing decisions, including news coverage, executive commentary, customer reviews, industry research and, increasingly, AI-powered platforms that recommend companies rather than simply listing them.

The report argues that this shift fundamentally changes the purpose of communications. In an AI-driven marketplace, visibility alone is becoming less sufficient. Organisations increasingly compete on both discoverability and trust.

Nick Leighton, CEO of NettResults, who moved to Dubai in 1997, said, "For years communications helped organisations become visible in the region. Today its role is helping organisations build credibility and earn trust. As AI increasingly influences business decisions, trust becomes a measurable competitive advantage that shapes commercial outcomes long before the first sales conversation begins. This reflects the broader vision we see across the UAE, where initiatives like the newly established Dubai Media Narrative Committee reinforce that unified, fact-based leadership messaging is essential for building global trust and economic resilience."

Strategic Communications Is Evolving

While organisations worldwide are adapting to this new environment, the findings suggest organisations across the UAE and Saudi Arabia are placing particularly strong emphasis on executive leadership, reputation and trust.

Compared with the global sample, organisations from the UAE and Saudi Arabia were more likely to:

- Place responsibility for influence with executive leadership.
- Integrate communications into overall business strategy.
- Measure reputation as a strategic business asset.
- Use AI to strengthen decision-making alongside productivity improvements.
- Prepare for an AI-driven information environment.

The findings suggest organisations are adapting global best practices while developing approaches suited to the region's evolving business environment — one where communications is increasingly aligned with leadership, commercial performance and long-term business resilience.

Why This Matters Now

Artificial intelligence is accelerating this shift because artificial intelligence is accelerating this shift because it changes how trust is discovered, assessed and reinforced during buying decisions.

Instead of asking, "*Where can I find a supplier?*" customers increasingly ask AI platforms, "*Which*

company would you recommend?"

Those recommendations are influenced by signals that already exist across the market, including independent media coverage, executive expertise, original research, customer advocacy and industry recognition. The report argues that AI does not create authority—it reflects authority organisations have already earned.

As a result, reputation is becoming an increasingly valuable strategic asset because it influences both human decision-makers and AI recommendation engines simultaneously.

Communications Is Becoming a Business Capability

The report concludes that communications should no longer be evaluated solely by traditional metrics such as media coverage, impressions or share of voice.

Instead, leadership teams are increasingly asking broader business questions:

- Are customers becoming more confident in our organisation?
- Is our reputation strengthening over time?
- Would AI recommend us ahead of our competitors?
- Is communications contributing to commercial growth?
- Are we making it easier for customers, partners and investors to choose us?

These questions reflect a broader shift away from measuring communications activity toward measuring business outcomes.

Key Findings

- **63%** of organisations in the region place responsibility for brand influence with executive leadership, compared with **51% globally**.
- Trust is becoming a measurable competitive advantage as AI reshapes how organisations are discovered and recommended.
- Independent media coverage, executive expertise and original research are emerging as critical signals of organisational authority.
- Communications is evolving from a marketing function into a strategic business capability.
- Organisations that consistently build trust become easier to buy from, easier to partner with and more likely to be recommended by both people and AI.

Nick says, "These findings align with the region's growing focus on innovation, digital transformation and long-term economic diversification, where leadership credibility and institutional trust are increasingly recognized as drivers of sustainable growth."

Looking Ahead

The report predicts that reputation, executive credibility and independent validation will become increasingly important competitive assets over the next five years as AI continues to influence how organisations are evaluated. Businesses that invest early in building trust are expected to strengthen customer confidence, accelerate sales, improve recruitment and create long-term competitive advantage.

Report Availability

The New Rules of Influence: Middle East Edition 2026 is available as a free download from NetResults.

The report combines independent global research conducted by Researchscape International for the Public Relations Global Network (PRGN) with strategic analysis and commentary from NetResults. It explores five major shifts reshaping communications across the Middle East, including executive ownership of influence, AI-driven recommendations, reputation measurement, trust as a competitive advantage and the emergence of **Influence Capital™** as a measurable business asset.

Download the report:

<https://www.netresults.com/the-new-rules-of-influence>

About NetResults

NetResults is a specialist technology communications agency that helps international technology companies build trust, reputation and market influence across the Middle East. Through strategic communications, media relations, executive positioning and thought leadership, the agency supports organisations expanding across the UAE, Saudi Arabia and the wider region.



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