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## Research Article

# AI Integration into Public Relations: A Cross-cultural study of Low Uncertainty Avoidance Culture (the US) vs. High Uncertainty Avoidance Culture (Pakistan)

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## ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing every industry, globally. The integration of AI into PR (PR) offers significant advantages; however, it varies across cultures. This study explores the integration of AI into PR with a cross-cultural lens, focusing on the United States (US) and Pakistan. It draws on 20 interviews with PR professionals for a comparative study. Utilizing Hofstede's cultural dimension of the Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI), the research examines how culture plays its role in the attitudes toward the integration of AI into PR. Thematic analysis reveals that the US depicted a greater acceptance of AI, citing specific tools and rules, and a smoother integration of AI into PR with less anxiety and uncertainty. It perceived more benefits and the ease of use helped better integration. Pakistan, a high UAI culture, faces challenges due to a lack of clear rules, fewer resources, and openness. There is more uncertainty and anxiety about AI integration. Pakistan finds job loss as a challenge while the US considers pricey subscriptions as an obstacle. The findings provide insights to the PR professionals for culturally adaptive AI strategies. It contributes to the growing body of literature on the intersection of PR, AI, and Culture.

**Keywords:** AI, Public Relations, Cross-Cultural, Uncertainty Avoidance.

## INTRODUCTION

### AI in PR

Technological innovation has long been a hallmark of the PR field (Kuteynikov et al. 2019), with each new advancement reshaping its strategies (Quesenberry 2020). From the advent of the railroad to the rise of the internet and social media, PR has continuously adapted itself to enhance engagement (Nutsugah and Senanu 2024; Logan and Waymer 2024), communication, crisis response (Lovari and Bowen 2019) and promotional strategies (Panda et al. 2019). Automated content creation (Panda et al. 2019), stakeholder relationships (Nutsugah and Senanu 2024), and sentiment analysis (Jeong and Park 2023; Campbell et al. 2023) have shaped the evolving landscape of PR. More scholarship is now surfacing that is addressing the issue of AI integration into PR (Rack 2024).

### Cultural Impact on the Integration of AI into PR

AI offers multiple tools to PR professionals which can make their day-to-day work easier and more efficient. As per one study, there are more than 150 tools for PR



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professionals (Slee 2018) to choose from. This ease (Bourbe 2019), however, comes with certain uncertainties and challenges (Saveliev and Zhurenkov 2020). Scholars have stressed a country-specific and cultural-specific approach while studying these challenges (Botan 1992; Vercic et al., 1996).

All countries and cultures have varied technological landscapes having different levels of technological availability (Lau 2017), and thus one approach will not apply to all cultures (Patwardhan, et al. 2014). Saveliev and Zhurenkov (2020) stated that when it comes to technology, the US and China are leading AI in terms of market application and access to the technology. The US is an “active leader” in terms of AI technology. The perception and response to technology are different among cultures and it calls for the use of cultural dimensions (Syed and Malik 2014) to understand the cross-cultural differences in PR. The US has access to all the requisite technology yet it struggles with its implementation on legal and ethical grounds (Saveliev and Zhurenkov 2020; James 2024). Kelleher (2006) referenced a survey by Portar and Sallot (2003), which found that although integrating the web is technical, PR managers are still actively utilizing it. Whereas developing countries face a different set of challenges (Bibi 2019).

### **The US And Pakistan-A Low Uncertainty Versus High Uncertainty Culture**

Pakistan has a high score of 70 on the UAI (Hofstede 1984; Bukhari and Myeong 2023). Hofstede states that it reflects rigid cultural preferences in beliefs and behaviors resulting in resistance towards innovation. Conversely, the United States with a score of 46 on UAI exhibits greater acceptance of new ideas and technological innovations. He states that there is a “fair chance” that they will embrace new technology with a willingness to not only experiment but also to adapt. However, the post-9/11 scenario has introduced a paradox where openness to technology exists with governmental surveillance (Hofstede Insights 2024). Where high UAI are less likely to adopt innovation (Yigitcanlar et al. 2023), it is crucial to dive into the perceived benefits and challenges that both, high and low UAI cultures face while integrating AI into PR.

#### **Problem Statement**

The rapid advancement of AI and its integration into PR is an “undeniable reality”. It offers multiple benefits (Jeong and Park 2023). The integration of AI into PR is different among different cultures due to multiple factors. As the technology is considered to be “culturally embedded” (Nelson and Clark, 1994; Alsafleh et al. 2019), it is pertinent to use the intercultural framework to understand it. This research takes on the Uncertainty Avoidance Index of Hofstede's Cultural theory and explores the attitudes of the US (low UAI) and Pakistani (high UAI) PR professionals (10 from each country). The findings of the thematic analysis revealed that the US has more concerns regarding rules and regulations, however, it still is certain and has less anxiety with AI integration into PR as compared to Pakistan. The study findings provide details of the attitudes, challenges, and perceived benefits of AI integration into PR. It allows PR scholars to devise culture-specific strategies for better technology adoption.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Culture**

Culture has a pervasive nature, Buss (2001) and Soares et al., (2007) state that culture stems from legal, technological, economic, and other such “macro-environmental influences”. It is “a complex whole which includes belief, morals, knowledge, custom, art and any other habits and capabilities acquired by man as a member of society” (McCort and Malhotra 2008).

### **Operationalizing Culture**

The use of culture as an independent variable has significantly increased in market-related research (Lenartowicz and Roth 2004). Applying cultural dimensions to marketing-related cross-cultural research (Soares et al. 2007) and studying cross-cultural differences has “anthropological roots” (Steenkamp 2001). It investigates how different communities answer the same questions differently. One of the widely used dimensions comes from the work of Hofstede (Steenkamp 2001). Hofstede (1984) defines culture as a “function of cultural dimensions” one of which is Uncertainty Avoidance (Hofstede 1984; Alvarez 2014).

### **Uncertainty Avoidance**

The level of risk that an individual is willing to accept. The extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and unambiguity and try to avoid these situations” (Hofstede, 1984; Lee et al. 2013).

### **Operationalizing Uncertainty Avoidance**

Uncertainty avoidance refers to the degree to which a culture is willing to embrace the uncertainty regarding the future and is comfortable with the technology adoption (Hofstede 2010; Cardon and Marshall 2008). With uncertainty

comes anxiety, prompting societies to adopt technology to cope with the future (Hofstede et al. 2010). It refers to how society takes control of a situation that is undefined, unambiguous, and uncertain (Girish et al. 2021).

### **Artificial Intelligence in PR**

AI in PR has changed the way the industry works (Panda et al. 2019). AI provides the ability to customize the data for individuals (Panda et al. 2019; Liew 2021). The ability of AI to reach the level of humans remains questionable (Munandar and Irwansyah 2020). Nevertheless, its ability to identify demographics, analyze data and sentiments, develop content, and monitor the latest trends and media has facilitated the PR industry (Soldan 2022).

Jeong and Park (2023) applied the Organization-Situation-Public-Communication Model and found that AI plays its role differently in different situations. They found that AI facilitates PR professionals in personalizing and analyzing the content for the relevant public. AI facilitates content creation, and campaign development, and helps mitigate challenges. AI is all over the PR landscape, however, its “widespread adoption” is still in its early stages. AI adoption among different nations varies and the literature has presented a generalized view regarding such trends (Jeong and Park 2023). It is also the need of an hour for PR professionals to learn and understand AI in a tailored way (Liew 2021; Soldan 2022).

### **Cultural Impact on Technological Adoption**

Tubadji et al., (2021) conducted a survey of 1400 consumers across eleven countries to understand the AI adoption patterns and found that acceptance of AI-based financial services is significantly influenced by cultural factors. Cultures that prefer traditional ways show reluctance towards new technology.

Culture is a major indicator in understanding the adoption patterns of technology, such as AI. Bukhari and Myeong (2023) used the Technology Acceptance Model along with Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions to investigate AI adoption patterns in Pakistan. A survey was carried out with 462 Pakistanis and the results indicated that cultural factors affect how people of the country perceive, receive, and adopt the new technology. The study found that Pakistanis adopt technology because of its collectivist nature, hence getting influenced by each other (Bukhari and Myeong 2023). However, even if a culture adopts a technology, it might have a different set of motivations behind it which needs investigation.

RQ1: How do cultural attitudes towards uncertainty avoidance influence the integration of AI into PR in Pakistan vs the US?

### **Cross-Cultural Studies on AI In PR**

PR scholars have taken the terrain of cross-cultural perspective in the adoption of new technologies. A study by Men and Tsai (2012) used dialogic theory to understand how different companies used SNS in China and the US. Employing a content analysis method, it analyzed 500 user posts and 50 corporate pages from each culture. Findings revealed that while both countries understood the role played by SNS for effective PR, cultural differences were apparent in their overall strategies.

Similarly, Dodd and Collins (2017) examined 41 embassy Twitter accounts representing the Western and Central Eastern European Countries (CEE). They found that the Western embassies had active Twitter accounts with a greater number of followers and they primarily emphasized advocacy while CEE accounts e.g. Polish Embassy in the US, prioritized cultural exchange. The results stress how cultural context influences the overall strategies. The study was limited to only SNS.

It is crucial to understand that different groups “perceive benefits and challenges of AI” differently. Perception of technology and ease of use is influenced by the culture of the country (Young et al 2021). Yigitcanlar et al., (2023) carried out a study to understand the public perception of AI in local government services between Australians and Hong Kongers using Hofstede’s dimensions. He found that Hong Kongers, with low UAI, had a less positive approach toward AI integration as compared to Australia which had high UAI scores. These differences in the perception of AI underscore the crucial role of culture.

RQ2: What are the main challenges faced by PR professionals in Pakistan and the US in integrating AI into PR practices?

RQ3: What are the perceived benefits of integrating AI into PR practices by PR professionals in Pakistan and the US?

### **Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory**

Hofstede’s dimensions have widely been used for cross-cultural studies. According to Steenkamp (2001), Hofstede’s framework is used extensively to understand the markets and relationships with the consumers. An empirical study

was carried out by Hofstede with over 60 respondents in 70 countries between 1967 and 1971. He assigned indexes on all these dimensions to each country. Each dimension was linked to different aspects which included demographics, geographic, political, and economic aspects (Hofstede, 1984; Cardon and Marshall 2008). The dimensions are individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance masculinity-femininity, long-term orientation, and indulgence-restraint.

Beugelsdijk and Welzel (2018) stated that studies for cross-cultural research and marketing have relied on Hofstede's framework. There are others like Inglehart's dynamic concept of culture and together with Hofstede, they are the most cited scholars on Google. Each has its relevancy for different studies but Hofstede is more relevant to the analysis of "cross-cultural psychology and international management" (Beugelsdijk and Welzel 2018). Different scholars have used different dimensions for cross-cultural comparisons in PR and marketing (Sivakumar and Nakata 2001; Dawar et al., 1996). Chi et al., (2023) explored how trust influences intentions to use AI robots in hospitality. Data from 491 US and 495 Chinese respondents was analyzed. Results showed that in high UAI cultures like China, people use AI due to social pressure.

### **Uncertainty Avoidance Across Cultures on AI In PR**

PR research recognizes its relationship with culture, but it is just a recent practice to utilize cultural theories to study the same. This gap provides opportunities for PR scholars to investigate PR with an intercultural lens (Curtin 2021). Ki, Pasadeos, and Eray (2021) used bibliometric methods to analyze 35,982 citations from 521 articles published between 1983 and 2019. They enlisted three topics as the top priority of scholars worldwide. A significant focus was on the cultural dimensions of global PR. The other two focused on applying PR theories and practices in different countries.

Dhanish et al., (2023) stressed that cultural dimensions create both opportunities and barriers for effective PR. For different cultures, however, the challenges and benefits vary. One of the deciding factors is the UAI. Cardon and Marshall (2008) state that Sundqvist et al., used UAI to assess the adoption timing of wireless technology in communications from 1981 to 2000.

### **Pakistan versus the US on Uncertainty Avoidance**

The culture of the country plays an important role in shaping the perception and adoption of technology (Im et al. 2011). Sun and Zhang (2006) identified several moderating factors for technology, one of which is cultural factors. They applied Hofstede's cultural dimensions and found that countries with low UAI tend to adopt the technology based on its usefulness. While high UAI might adopt technology due to the influence of social norms. This study was empirically tested by Im (2011) who found out that the US with low UAI as compared to Korea, preferred a degree of ease while adapting technology.

A comparative study of Pakistan and the US on the adoption of technology in the banking sector found that the US tended to adopt new technology readily. While Pakistan eventually adopted technology, it typically lagged in doing so (Syed and Malik 2014). The present study fills the gap in the PR sector by comparing both.

## **METHOD**

This qualitative research employs a purposive sampling technique (Shaw and Holland 2014) to carry out interviews with PR professionals in Pakistan and the US. These two countries were selected as they represent high UAI and low UAI cultures (Hofstede Inc. 2024) aiding in cross-cultural analysis.

### **Sampling**

In each of the countries, interviews were conducted with 10 PR professionals. Entry, mid-level, and c-suite were reached to get a holistic picture. Table 1 provides further details.

Table 1. Demographics of the participants

City	Province/State	Designation	Organization Type
Islamabad	Federal	Certified PR and Strategic Communication Expert	Largest Development Network In Pakistan
Karachi	Sindh	PR Specialist	Legislative Office
Faisalabad	Punjab	PR Manager	Private education academy
Peshawar	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	PR Officer	Corporate Sector- A solar energy company
Islamabad	Federal	Brand Manager	Private bank
Islamabad	Federal	Media and PR Expert	Marketing agency-E commerce

			experts
Sialkot	Punjab	Manager PR	International Airport
Muzaffarabad	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	PR Officer	Private University
Lahore	Punjab	Assistant Manager Marketing and PR	Real Estate Agency
Karachi	Sindh	Director of PR Strategy and Account Planning	Corporate Communication and Strategic PR Agency
Washington D.C	District of Columbia	Communication expert/Public-Private partnership	Consultancy
New Orleans	Louisiana	Social Justice PR and Brand Strategist	Philanthropic organization
Washington D.C	District of Columbia	Media and PR Manager	Corporate Agency
Atlanta	Georgia	PR Director	Private University
New York City	New York	Strategic Communication Consultant for PR projects	Freelance Consultant
New York City	New York	Senior Level PR Consultant	PR and Marketing Communication Partner Agency
Camano	Washington	Senior Corporate Communications and PR expert	Entrepreneur
Denver Metropolitan Area	Colorado	PR Strategist	PR and Communication Services Provider
San Francisco Bay Area	California	PR Strategist	PR Agency
Baltimore	Maryland	PR and Comms Expert	PR consultant

### Procedure

Interviews were conducted online. The participants and their organizations were assured anonymity. Data was collected from 14 July 2024 to 31 July 2024. Interviewees shared the written and verbal responses as well. Data was cleaned for further analysis in NVIVO 14.

The interview guideline was open-ended and was adopted by Yigitcanlar (2023). It was also influenced by Hofstede (2010), Cardon and Marshall (2008), Hofstede et al., (2010), Girish et al., (2021), Matusitz and Musambira, (2013), and Yigitcanlar (2023) who investigated the technology in cross-cultural settings.

### Analysis

Using a thematic analysis approach, codes were fetched from the transcripts. It was description-focused training and the researcher did not interpret responses but rather reported them. The codes were then placed under the themes that emerged during the analysis. Using the Framework Matrix Approach, the two cases (Pakistan and the US) were compared in NVIVO against the themes under each research question. The conclusions were reviewed by a PR expert to avoid bias.

### FINDINGS

Seven themes emerged during the analysis. Themes for RQ1 i.e., cultural attitudes towards AI into PR included (1) attitudes regarding rules and regulations and (2) perceived uncertainties. For RQ2 i.e., perceived challenges, three themes emerged, namely (3) adopting tech solutions and taking control of the new technology (4) anxiety among PR professionals, and (5) the difference of perception regarding challenges. For RQ3, two themes emerged; (6) the perceived benefits of AI in PR and (7) the ease of use or comfort with it.

The majority of the respondents from the US depicted more understanding citing specific details regarding the new AI tools, hence better integration. The US posed less uncertainty towards AI as compared to Pakistan.

### Need for rules and Regulations

Participant's attitudes reflected clear differences regarding rules and regulations for AI in PR. Where a few respondents from Pakistan mentioned the need for no rules and guidelines as well as being unsure of why these rules are even needed in the first place, the US side reflected a different approach. Only one participant was skeptical, suggesting we would be needing them but could not say what exactly for.

Both sides posed different reasons behind this need. A total of 06 out of 10 Pakistani PR professionals mentioned that proper guidelines must be in place to ensure ethical use, data privacy, and transparency of AI usage. They did not specify what exactly they meant by this. On the other side, the US PR professionals were more specific and sure about what was causing problems for the AI integration. Three respondents talked generally about the need for ethical use, data privacy, transparency, and accuracy. The majority stressed the need for proper rules to ensure responsible use.

Rules are needed to protect intellectual property, responsible use of AI, and not use plagiarized material (A PR agency founder from San Francisco Bay)

Others specified the handling of misinformation in PR. Three participants from the US mentioned the need for rules to address the growing trend of deepfakes and to stop the usage of AI to manipulate the public. They also mentioned the need for rules to make sure that PR professionals are following the same standards across the board.

### **Perceived Uncertainties**

Pakistan was more skeptical and resistant to AI integration. It feared that PR professionals would be easily replaced by laymen. Out of 10 PR professionals from Pakistan, only one felt certain about the industry stating that AI will never be able to replace the “traditional expertise”. Among the US PR professionals, the majority stated that the future of PR with AI is promising and that AI is “incredibly exciting”. They believed that everyone usually adjusts.

I believe we’re just another rung up on the technological ladder. 30 years ago, people had to visit a library and go in the stacks, now it’s just a click away (A PR instructor from a private university in Atlanta, Georgia, US)

Most of them expressed contentment with technology integration and said that there is no uncertainty. They were of the view that AI helps ease the burden of administrative and writing tasks. As the tools become more robust and sophisticated “we’ll lean on them more and more but there will never be a substitute for the creativity, empathy, humor, and conclusion-drawing”.

The US believed that most of the campaign work and ideas are still produced by humans. They mentioned that they have no concerns that AI can replace crisis response, creative ideas, relationships with media, anticipating problems, and connecting the dots with other marketing functions.

Everyone’s been freaking out about AI, but I think that you have to learn how to use it rather than be uncertain about it. A Media and PR Manager working in the corporate sector in Washington D.C., US)

Professionals from the US stated that AI would enhance the value of PR. The human touch was mentioned to be an irreplaceable skill. AI was also seen as an opportunity offering small agencies to be more competitive against midsize and larger firms. Potential reliance on technology was considered a reason for the uncertainty on both sides. More Pakistanis fear job displacements as compared to that of the US. Also, more Pakistanis expressed their concerns regarding AI replacing human touch, affecting personal connections.

### **Adopting Tech Solutions and Learning AI Tools**

When it comes to the adoption of new AI tools, the initial challenge in Pakistan is regarding the resources. 3 out of 10 PR professionals mentioned that due to limited resources and lack of institutional support, investing in learning AI tools is not a priority. Others mentioned that they do try to invest their time and energy to stay relevant. A Media and PR expert working in a marketing agency in Islamabad, Pakistan mentioned, “I’m motivated by a desire to stay current in the fast-changing PR field”.

Others mentioned that they invest in learning and adopting new AI tools as it would help them enhance their skills and aid in multitasking. PR professionals in Pakistan believe that investing time in learning AI tools is akin to acquiring a superpower in the digital age.

Almost all the PR professionals from the US did not mention any obstacles on their journey towards AI except for the one who stated that despite utmost interest it was difficult to invest time. However, some preferred spending time rather than money on learning AI tools. Among US PR professionals, the motivation comes from the desire to enhance personal skill sets and leverage AI to improve PR outcomes. They mentioned that they were constantly exploring and implementing new AI tools into PR processes. The participants stated that they specifically explored tools for “writing media pitches and press releases”.

Like Pakistani PR professionals, some of the US professionals also considered the PR industry as competitive and prioritized learning AI tools to stay at the “top of the game” and “current”. PR professionals turned to AI tools to improve strategic planning, data analysis, and campaign execution. A senior-level PR consultant from a PR and Marketing Communication Partner Agency in New York, US mentioned that AI can be learned at any age and that nobody wants to fall behind.

There is a huge bias against workers older than 40, some people assume we are all fearful of Luddites. I have been working with AI to generate ideas, and edit drafts and I incorporate AI tools into my work for efficiency. (PR consultant from a PR and Marketing Communication Partner Agency in New York, US)

### **Anxiety Due to AI in the PR Industry**

Pakistani professionals believe that AI can stir anxiety as keeping up with new tech is challenging. A PR manager from an education academy in Faisalabad, Pakistan said, “AI in PR is like adding a turbo engine to a classic car—exciting yet potentially overwhelming”

Pakistani PR professionals mentioned that AI tools make them “frustrated” when they do not follow instructions accurately. The potential for AI to make mistakes adds another layer of anxiety and there is some skepticism about the accuracy and validity of the information. The same was considered as a cause of anxiety by two of the US professionals. But as compared to the US, majority of the Pakistani PR professionals believe that AI can cause anxiety because they're worried about losing their jobs. It is not only the fear of obsolescence but also the steep learning curves that keep them anxious. In Pakistan, some mentioned that insecurity increases as the institutions have no acceptance of AI. Only one PR professional from Pakistan considered AI as “a mere tool” that must not stir any type of anxiety. Fear of job displacement and pressure to adapt to new technologies to stay in business is a major instigator against AI adoption. However, more professionals in the US considered this anxiety as baseless and believed AI is a tool to augment rather than replace humans.

People kind of fear what they don't understand or they don't know. If we went back in time to when Windows 95 was introduced, people did not know what to expect. (A Media and PR Manager working in corporate from Washington D.C US) Where a majority of the PR Professionals believed that the industry would do well with AI as a supporting tool and that there is nothing to be anxious about, one professional in the US considered AI as a “scary thought”.

### **Challenges**

Most of the perceived challenges by both cultures revolved around the content generated by AI. While more professionals from Pakistan considered the inaccuracy of data as the problem, the US gave significance to the over-reliance on AI tools which hinders creativity.

Another challenge that was common among both countries included the need to update skills and knowledge. However, Pakistani PR professionals found a lack of knowledge and resources as an instigating factor while the US PR professionals found the learning curve and integration of AI into existing structures as a major challenge.

Data privacy and ethical concerns were considered challenges by an equal number of participants with a focus on misinformation, deepfakes, and ethical concerns.

Pakistani PR professionals found job displacement as a challenge while the US mentioned the pricey subscriptions as an obstacle. A PR and Comms expert from a PR consultancy firm in Washington D.C, US mentioned, “Most of these tools are geared towards agencies at the moment and are quite pricey.”

Pakistani professionals believe that it has already replaced humans and that it is difficult to find a competitive salary. An Assistant Manager of Marketing and PR from a leading real estate agency in Islamabad, Pakistan said, “AI has already unemployed many PR Specialists”.

### **Perceived Benefits of AI Integration into PR**

Pakistani PR professionals cited several benefits that AI can offer to the PR industry. More of them were relevant to personalized communication. Enhanced audience insights, audience segmentation, sentiment analysis, analyzing data, and spotting trends were considered top-notch benefits. Some professionals also referred to real-time crisis management and social media conversations.

The US considered better crisis response, the potential to enhance efficiency, improved data analysis, and personalized communication strategies as a few of the benefits. Additionally, according to the US, AI has the potential to “truly transform the PR landscape”. They believed that AI could “supercharge our PR capabilities”. They mentioned brainstorming and ideation, research, identifying the right journalists to pitch based on their past articles, and media lists, writing first drafts of press releases, creating bios, briefing documents, reporting, administrative tasks, proofreading, ideas starters, ROI calculations and their support as virtual assistants as its benefits.

With AI, we can make smarter, data-based decisions, personalize our communication strategies, and respond swiftly to challenges. AI presents endless opportunities. By automating routine tasks, it can help focus on more strategic aspects. (A PR and Brand strategist working on Social justice PR with a philanthropic organization in New Orleans, Louisiana, US) While both countries understand the potential benefits that AI can offer, the benefits mentioned by US

professionals were more specific and related to the PR's day-to-day queries. Also, all the professionals in the US were sure regarding the benefits while the situation on the other side was not as such. A PR specialist working in a top government position in Karachi, Pakistan could not mention any of the benefits that AI has to offer to the PR industry.

### **Ease of Use with AI tools for PR**

Both countries found it difficult at some point. Pakistan found a steeper learning curve hindering the ease of use while the US considered an increasing number of AI tools as creating discomfort.

Most of the tools have been easy to use, the discomfort comes with the fact that we get overwhelmed by all the options available. (A PR Strategist working in Denver, US)

PR professionals from Pakistan stated that not being very tech-savvy created challenges in the beginning. They also stated that the ease of use is dependent on the type of AI tool you are using. A PR officer working in a private university in Muzaffarabad, Pakistan mentioned, "I find it easy to use for text-based content but for videos and graphics, I find it challenging. I sometimes get frustrated and leave it in midway". Some US professionals also stated that AI integration is not "smooth sailing" however a little investment would make it easier. They did not understand why some professionals found it challenging. A media and PR Manager from Washington D.C, US, said, "It is not much different from other computer-based programs that assist in writing or ideation. I am fairly comfortable with the AI tools". The US professionals also admitted that it's a new technology and hence one must proceed with caution.

## **DISCUSSION**

Previous research called for a cultural approach, using intercultural theories to understand the cross-cultural integration of technology in the PR landscape (Curtin 2021; Steenkamp 2001; Beugelsdijk and Welzel 2018; Sivakumar and Nakata 2001; Dawar et al., 1996). This qualitative study of 20 PR professionals from the US and Pakistan, built upon the uncertainty avoidance dimension (Marshall 2008) of Hofstede's cultural theory in response to this call. Findings suggest that different cultures do adopt technology in different ways, for different reasons, and at different paces (Hofstede 2010; Cardon and Marshall 2008). The participants' responses and themes complimented the dimension of UAI as described by Greet Hofstede (Hofstede et al. 2010). The findings supported the scholarship regarding differences in integration patterns among different cultures (Lau 2017; Patwardhan, et al. 2014).

### **Cross-cultural Differences in AI integration: A way Forward for PR**

In particular, participants cited different motivators and instigators regarding the integration of AI into PR. Although both cultures mentioned a shift towards AI, their attitudes towards its use and integration differed. These attitudes become a deciding factor on how and when the technology will be adopted. For example, for a participant from Pakistan who is unable to integrate AI due to the traditional setup of the organization, a shift would come rather slower. For a PR professional from the US, whose challenge is the pricey subscription of AI tools, a shift might come faster. The economic conditions and environment (Soares et al. 2007) play a role in its adoption when an industry is introduced to new technology (Young et al 2021). The author proposes a culture-specific framework for AI tools to move PR professionals towards AI integration.

### **Content Regulation Versus the Emotional Need for Rules**

The findings regarding rules and regulations aligned with the literature, except for the fact that it is post-9/11 literature (Hofstede 2024). Generally, a low UAI culture asks fewer questions regarding the rules and regulations (Hofstede et al. 2010). However, the US, a low UAI culture, had more concerns regarding AI integration into PR. This necessity for rules (Hofstede insights 2024) stems from the need to regulate content like misinformation or deepfakes. Pakistan had more focus on the "emotional" as compared to specific rules. They focused on privacy, data accuracy, and transparency but why they need them or what they will address was not clear. Where professionals in the US are clear about the problem, Pakistani PR professionals are yet to understand the exact issues that need regulation. It makes them skeptical about the technology and hence late or no integration. Training on the exact concerns that AI posits and mitigation strategies will make a difference in Pakistan. While in the US, more policies around content regulation will ensure better AI integration.

### **Addressing Uncertainties Regarding AI Integration**

The high UAI means that a particular culture would be afraid or resist integrating technology. The findings align with Hofstede's (1984) theory showcasing clear divergence among high and low UAI cultures. Pakistan with a high UAI (Hofstede 1984; Bukhari and Myeong 2023) posed more questions on AI integration and only one out of the ten professionals expressed certainty while the US, with a low UAI, had no uncertainties. They rather considered it as an

opportunity that would upgrade the PR industry (Matusitz and Musambira 2013; Cardon and Marshall 2008; Yigitcanlar 2023). The pattern with which AI is adopted is different in different nations (Jeong and Park (2023) and needs tailored applications (Liew 2021; Soldan 2022). As Pakistan feared more regarding jobs, ways to tackle extreme reliance on technology and help professionals find a balance between “human touch and AI” will facilitate this integration.

### **Taking Control of Technology**

The finding aligns with Hofstede's (1984) study. Pakistan aims to integrate AI due to the competition. It adopts technology because of social pressure. The same was found out by Chi et al., (2023) and Sun and Zhang (2006). On the other side, the US is inclined towards learning AI tools to adapt and upgrade. Generally high UAI cultures avoid disruptive technology (Cardon and Marshall. 2008), but Pakistanis do adopt the technology. They however adopt it as laggards (Syed and Malik 2014). The majority of the Pakistanis do not want to lag, and they lack resources. They have jobs that do not facilitate the time and resources for AI learning and they are on their own for this integration. More free and online courses can be introduced to assist them.

### **Uncertainty-Induced Anxieties: Solutions for AI Integration**

Many industries have been able to cope with the ever-evolving technology and so has PR (Nutsugah and Senanu 2024; Logan and Waymer 2024). For different cultures, technological integration works differently. The uncertainties prompt societies to take control of the situations (Girish et al. 2021). The same was found in this study. The fear of job loss due to AI among high UAI cultures hinders the integration of new technology. Conversely, anxiety induced due to uncertainties is also said to aid the communities in learning the new technology. Pakistan is more anxious towards AI as compared to the US. It is not only because of the fear of job loss but also because the content produced through AI cannot be verified readily. The solution lies in introducing verification tools. Collaboration of PR professionals from different cultures can also help better integration of AI.

### **Recognizing and Responding to the Challenges**

As Slee (2018) mentioned there are unlimited tools so was found in the study. The US is willing to adopt the technology but finds it uneasy because there are so many options available. Over-reliance and becoming too dependent on technology is considered one of the major challenges of the industry. Of all the challenges that technology brings (Bourbe 2019; Saveliev and Zhurenkov 2020), most of them are cultural-specific (Vercic et al., 1996). And so Pakistan faces a different set of challenges. Scholars have stressed not using the same standards for all professionals (Patwardhan, et al. 2014). The rules that work for the US scholars might not work for the Pakistani industry. In Pakistan, job transition and promotion programs where professionals are guided on the new AI tools can help mitigate this challenge.

### **Building Upon the Perceived Benefits**

We understand that different cultures have different motivating factors that define technological adoption. The same is found to be true in the case of Pakistan and the US. Pakistan foresees generic and a few benefits of integrating AI into PR while the US knows specific and more benefits of this integration. The US professionals understood that AI can change the way PR works which was also indicated by Panda et al., (2019). New technology is not considered a rival but an associate unlike in Pakistan. Cultural exchanges between the two countries with a specific focus on AI in PR can help reduce this gap.

### **AI Integration into PR and its Ease of Use**

Countries with low UAI culture prefer ease of use while learning and adapting technology (Im 2011) and the findings revealed the same. The US has been able to integrate AI more as compared to that of Pakistan. This is mainly because many professionals do not find it difficult to use AI tools. For them, more investment of time and money can help while Pakistan looks for guidance. Also, where the US is exploring options from a variety of tools available, Pakistanis are looking for further training regarding AI tools on videos and graphics.

### **Limitations and Direction for future Research**

In a one-on-one interaction between an interviewee and the interviewer, the former may find it embarrassing to express a complete lack of knowledge regarding AI tools. A focus group discussion session might be able to bridge this gap. This will also help fill a gap regarding less number of participants. Also, a focus on the PR by academia might bring a different picture than a focus on the PR by the real estate agencies.

## CONCLUSION

AI is considered a disruptive technology. This technological evolution has changed the way PR works. A good number of AI tools are available to facilitate the PR professionals of any country. The complete integration of AI into PR, however, has not yet been achieved. At its core, acceptance of technology is rooted in understanding the cultural attitudes towards technological integration by any country. Countries with different levels of uncertainty avoidance have different attitudes toward technology and integrate it in different ways. These levels might change due to cultural or historical events like 9/11. Continuous research on the adoption patterns of any culture is required, specifically after any major event. The study has brought forward the attitudes, challenges, and benefits of AI integration into PR in two countries: the US (low UAI) and Pakistan (high UAI). It is for future research to provide the culture-specific approaches for better integration of AI into PR.

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