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The role of artificial intelligence and public relations in reputation management: A structural equation modelling-based (SEM) study

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A B S T R A C T

Reputation management is of more significant consideration for organizations across the globe. However, for relevant purposes, Public Relations accompanied by Artificial Intelligence further play a significant role. Mainly supported by the social exchange theory, this study also focuses on Public Relations practices and Artificial Intelligence as facilitating the pathway to reputation management for online retail organizations in the United Arab Emirates. The researchers selected a sample of n= 330 individuals and analyzed it using Structural Equation Modelling to test the proposed conceptual model. Results revealed that Public Relations practices significantly affect Competitive Value, Online Communication, and Behavior Change. Besides, the effect of Artificial Intelligence on Competitive Value, Online Communication, and Behavior Change also remained significant. Further, the three relevant factors (Online Communication and Behavior Change) significantly affect reputation management, indicating the overall effect of PR practices and AI on reputation management in online retail organizations in the UAE. Hence, it is concluded that PR practices and AI technology have a substantial role in ensuring reputation management. Besides, factors including Competitive Value, Online Communication, and Behavioral Change have a positive role in reputation management, further ensuring attaining the organizational goals. Finally, the researchers discussed the results and highlighted the theoretical implications accordingly.

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1. Introduction

Reputation management is an important part of an organization. It is primarily based on how clients perceive and think about the organization (Szwajca, 2017). According to Omondi (2017), reputation management is a crucial phenomenon for organizations that maintain their reputation among clients as important for organizational success. In other words, reputation management is important for organizations to reach their overall goals. Organizations with a wider offline and online presence bother their business reputation. Regardless of the target audience, reparation management is a strategic consideration for an organization (Munyoro & Magada, 2016)

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further argued that reputation management helps an organization attain new customers and gain the loyalty of the existing ones. This reputation management is directly dependent on various factors that reflect the overall quality of products and services offered by an organization. As a result, clients rate the organization through their reviews given through different consumer surveys, rating systems, social media posts, and review sharing on the official shopping platforms. However, Berg and Blomqvist (2019) stated that paying special consideration to the service and product quality is important. They are significant determinants of an organization's success and popularity among its clients. If clients are unhappy or having a bad experience, they will adversely affect the reviews and ratings, which will decline the organizational reputation, leading to decline popularity among them. Notably, poor experiences demotivate clients to reconsider the same organization in the future (Dacko-Pikiewicz, 2021). A potential client is more likely to avoid the current organization and prefer the competitors' organization. In such circumstances, the organization will confront a loss of clients, revenue, and, eventually, overall reputation (Yu et al., 2021).

On the other hand, organizational factors such as Public Relations practices further improve an organization's reputation management in several ways (Gouda et al., 2020). Notably, today it is important and comparatively more considerable for organizations to focus on reputation management. For this purpose, Public Relations practitioners resort to different communication platforms, including social networks and official websites, where accessibility and communication are direct and feasible (Gouda et al., 2020). On the other hand, the technology further aids these PR practices by applying a developed yet complex form of human-computer interaction such as Artificial Intelligence. As noted by (Türksoy, 2022), Artificial Intelligence has greatly facilitated the traditional patterns of Public Relations, communication, and service providence. Artificial Intelligence performs all well by staying online, providing an instant service, solving and answering clients' complex questions, and other tasks. Indeed, merging Artificial Intelligence with Public Relations practices has further aided business organizations, leading to better client relationships. Consequently, an explicit behavioral change can be seen when accessing online platforms has added competitive value to the organization's overall reputation. For Gouda et al. (2020), both Public Relations practices and Artificial Intelligence are further facilitating accelerating and sustaining the organizations' reputation leading them to acquire unique positions among their rivals.

Thus, (Arief & Saputra, 2019) considers Artificial Intelligence (AI) as the future of Public Relations practices. Primarily, in terms of on-time service delivery, support and guidance, organizations widely rely on Article Intelligence (See Cismaru et al., 2018; Kirpichnikov et al., 2020; Noort et al., 2015; Shrestha, 2022). In this context, this study also focuses on the collaboration between Public Relations practices and Artificial Intelligence, further providing a pathway to reputation management among Emirati organizations. For this purpose, the researchers divided this research into sections that include an introduction, review of literature, theoretical underpinnings, methods, analysis and results, discussion, conclusion, and finally, limitations and recommendations. Thus, the aim is to examine the study problem and draw empirical conclusions systematically.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Public Relations Practices, Competitive Value, Online Communication, and Behavioral Change

Customers and potential customers are referred to as the target audience for public relations. This interaction can take various forms, including events such as trade exhibitions, marketing promotions, customer relations initiatives, and other public-facing endeavors. Public relations are also a catch-all word that refers to disseminating newsworthy material to the media, specialty magazines and trade journals, newspapers, radio, television, and the internet to obtain publicity (Lee et al., 2016). To optimize the sales potential of any firm, regardless of size, a public relations program should be incorporated into the overall marketing plan. Marketing is essential to the success of a large, long-lasting organization. Public relations are often less expensive than advertising; however, this is not always the case. It is best used with marketing initiatives (Battisti et al., 2020). Similarly, Alserhan and Al Shbail (2020) consider that even while print media still plays a vital role, public relations (PR) has evolved significantly over the past decade. Choosing a service provider is not the only thing people do on the internet these days; people also use it to investigate the firms they're thinking of working with. Increased exposure in online publications and a strong Facebook presence can help a business produce more and better-quality leads, both of which contribute to the business's success. As a bonus, high-quality connections from high-ranking websites to one's own are a terrific way to boost the website's Search Engine Optimization (SEO). The website will be linked to when online PR coverage is received, such as in online trade publications. This helps to boost search engine rankings (Naeini et al., 2019).

Furthermore, Public Relations focuses on celebrating positive behavior and erasing poor behavior from public consciousness. However, how an organization, institution, brand, or individual interacts with others greatly influences its destiny. The better the behavior, the greater the likelihood of being admired. Public Relations is the product of clarity, imagination, teamwork, culture, and citizenship. The basic rule is to avoid causing harm (Jasim et al., 2020). According to (Adaurhere et al., 2021), a seminar he attended as a youngster taught him something that remains in his personal and professional guidelines of conduct. This is an excellent criterion to employ when unsure about an intended activity. According to (Kuan et al., 2021), caution is suggested if the answer to any of the four questions is yes or uncertain. Most organizations that violate the law are those that proceed despite clear warning indications.

H_{1a}: *Public relations practices significantly affect competitive value.*

H_{1b}: *Public relations practices significantly affect online communication.*

H_{1c}: *Public relations practices significantly affect behavioral change.*

2.2 Public Relations Practices and Artificial Intelligence

According to Kivayilu and Wanjira (2020), a new partnership between humans and intelligent machines allows public relations specialists to build data-driven campaigns, automate repetitive activities, analyze internet chatter, foresee potential crises, and generate customized content. As a result of advancements in Artificial Intelligence technology, public relations specialists may have more time for imaginative work like developing engaging messaging and organizing strategic media outreach. Recent developments in areas like NLG (natural language generation), chatbots (artificially intelligent software that simulates human interaction), predictive analytics (using historical data), and sentiment analysis (analyzing user reactions) have a significant effect on our field (Olaniran, 2018). Google Analytics and Cision are just two of the Artificial Intelligence-enhanced tools we employ to streamline our processes and improve our results. In an ideal world, technological advancement would free individuals from menial tasks and raise the quality of their job, fostering innovation.

As Artificial Intelligence continues to advance, it may soon be possible for public relations specialists to devote more time to imaginative tasks, such as developing engaging messaging or organizing effective media outreach (Kim & Bhalla, 2022). Sentiment analysis, predictive analytics, chatbots, and natural language generation (NLG) are just a few examples of how recent technological developments have an immediate and tangible effect on our field. There are some ways that Artificial Intelligence is helping assist public relations activities now or will soon be able to. Consideration can be put to rest with just a shift of perspective. Instead of being swept away by the tide of change, people may rise with it by focusing on how technology can make them more efficient by allowing them to think more creatively and pursue people's most promising ideas (Marakova et al., 2021).

H_2: *Public relations practices significantly affect artificial intelligence.*

2.3 Artificial Intelligence, Competitive Value, Online Communication, and Behavioral Change

Competition among businesses is becoming more cutthroat and challenging daily in today's tech-driven and constantly shifting business scene. As a result, the solution for sustaining leadership positions and accelerating growth is now the effective utilization and application of innovative technical solutions (Ahen, 2018). Artificial intelligence is one of these answers that organizations have been vying for and has become a popular, often overused buzzword. It should not be surprising that the global Artificial Intelligence market will reach $15.7 trillion by 2030 (Dokukina & Petrovskaya, 2020). As a result of the opportunities enabled by Artificial Intelligence, the fundamental competition between firms today is for data and insights. Information is the Artificial Intelligence brain's fuel; the technology acts on large quantities of data and learns from these insights. Eventually, it can perform tasks and analyze at a rate that exceeds everything the human brain is capable of (Smith, 2021).

Similarly, Artificial intelligence is also transforming customer relationship management (CRM) systems with greater online communication and presence (Kazankova, 2021; Liew, 2021). Salesforce and Zoho are two examples of software that rely heavily on human participation to stay up to date and correct. Applying Artificial Intelligence to these platforms, however, converts a conventional CRM system into one that monitors your relationships on its own and updates and corrects itself as needed. Artificial Intelligence is the development of chatbots, which mimic human conversation to streamline routine tasks. Chatbots can be used for various customer service purposes, including responding to inquiries and offering guidance as clients browse (Leontiev, 2021). Quicker responses benefit customers while freeing contact Centre staff to tackle more challenging inquiries. Because of this, Artificial Intelligence has great potential for communication. Artificial intelligence's ability to harness the potential of big data is opening up new doors in advertising, public relations, customer service, and the news media (Baranov et al., 2020).

Now, buyers no longer need to travel to a store to purchase a specific product. With the accessible data, brands will generate ideas to improve the consumer experience. There has been a trend toward virtual shopping in which specific products are transported to customers' homes before purchase so they can try them out and decide whether to purchase them. In this approach, buyers feel the experience or effort was created specifically for them (Arief & Saputra, 2019). Personalization is essential for converting prospects into customers. There is no doubt that Artificial Intelligence has greatly facilitated customer convenience. Customers have become accustomed to convenience (Mehmood Qadiri et al., 2020).

Consequently, Artificial Intelligence has opened the door to new opportunities. Artificial intelligence plays a significant role in every facet of life, particularly retail. As a result of Artificial Intelligence's competitive advantages, firms can generate greater profits. As Artificial Intelligence is our future, there is an urgent need to educate the public on its use so that more and more individuals can utilize it (Lobera et al., 2020).

H_{3a}: *Artificial intelligence significantly affects competitive value.*

H_{3b}: *Artificial intelligence significantly affects online communication.*

H_{3c}: *Artificial intelligence significantly affects behavioral change.*

2.4 Competitive Value and Reputation Management

According to Doorley and Garcia (2015), those that work for companies with solid reputations recruit better employees. They can charge more because they are seen as offering more value. Their clients are more loyal and purchase a broader range of goods and services due to their superior offerings. They are valued more highly, have higher P/E multiples, and have lower capital costs because investors believe these companies will continue to generate profits and grow in the future. In an industry where 70% to 80% of market value is derived from intangible assets like brand equity, intellectual capital, and goodwill, firms are particularly vulnerable to any damage to their reputations (Choi et al., 2018).

Furthermore, recognizing that reputational risk is a discrete type and assigning a single individual with explicit responsibility for managing it is currently the greatest obstacle. This individual may then identify all the organization components whose activities can affect or pose hazards to the organization's reputation and improve coordination between the organization's roles and units (Hakobyan et al., 2019). Unquestionably, the gains in decision-making will result in a better-run business overall. The majority of senior executives are optimists and cheerleaders. Their natural tendency is to believe the compliments poured upon their companies and to disregard the criticism. However, viewing the world and one's organization through rose-coloured glasses is a form of duty avoidance. A company's ability to develop a strong reputation commensurate with its merits will depend on its willingness to be rigorous in both areas (Sumarsid et al., 2020).

H_4: *Competitive value significantly affects reputation management*.

2.5 Online Communication and Reputation Management

According to Tosyali (2021), maintaining a positive online reputation has become increasingly important for organizations due to the expanding use of social media, third-party review websites, blogs, and other digital platforms. Businesses are well aware of the necessity of monitoring internet mentions of their brand. Reputation management (ORM) is becoming increasingly important in business strategy. Every firm knows that a single unfavorable media mention can tarnish its brand image, which is why most firms constantly monitor their brand reputation (Yu et al., 2021).

Brands lose potential customers because of negative media coverage, according to Simon Wadsworth, the managing partner of Igniyte, an online reputation management service in the United Kingdom. A corporation can lose customers because of a single bad media reference. Organizations should watch media mentions frequently to prevent losing many potential customers (Moschella & Pinto, 2019). Because it allows people to share their thoughts and views freely, social media has altered the ORM landscape. Individuals' right to privacy constraints companies' ability to shape public perception of their brands. Businesses can also take advantage of the rise of social media. Companies can now directly communicate with their customers via social media (Cheng & Jiang, 2022). Corporations can participate in discussions about their products, services, and industries using social media platforms. To ensure that the companies can participate in the dialogue, they can monitor it. With social media, businesses can respond immediately and participate in conversations that would otherwise be unavailable on blogs or review sites (Sizaro, 2022).

H_5: *Online communication significantly affects reputation management.*

2.6 Behavioral Change and Reputation Management

According to behavioral science, a consumer's collection of worldview beliefs is a major influence on consumer behavior. Beliefs are so psychologically ingrained that they inhibit customers from evaluating alternatives logically, hence perpetuating established habits and routines (Noort et al., 2015). Companies attempting to influence consumer behavior by ignoring or disputing their beliefs face an uphill battle. When customers are shocked and delighted by new experiences, their long-held views might shift, making them more likely to repeat the behavior even when the trigger is no longer there (such as during the Covid-9 crisis). In other words, this is a rare opportunity for businesses to reinforce and shape behavioral shifts to better position their products and brands for the future normal (Cismaru et al., 2018).

Arief and Gustomo (2020) further argued that companies can capitalize on strong consumer reactions to their products or brands by focusing on the importance of managing their reputations during times of high emotional intensity. For example, Krispy Kreme gave each 2020 graduate 12 free doughnuts when graduations began to be held at home instead of in front of enormous crowds. Doughnuts had not previously been associated with such an emotional occasion, but the pandemic changed that (Sizaro, 2022).

H_6: *Behavioral change significantly affects reputation management.*

3. Theoretical Underpinnings: Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange theory provides theoretical support to current research. Notably, the relevant theory has its roots in social marketing theories and focuses on the rewards and consequences individuals primarily obtain from their social relations (Wu et al., 2006). American Sociologist George C Homans proposed the social exchange theory in 1958. Homans was a professor of behavioral sociology and started his work on groups, then shifted to examine the exchange in the context of individuals (Cook & Rice, 2006). According to Zafirovski (2005), the primary aspects of social exchange theory are the "costs and benefits and expectations and comparisons. These four aspects further help the individuals to keep their primary needs under consideration and proceed to the decision-making phase accordingly. Thus, in the current study, social exchange theory supports the concept of Public Relations practices that resort to Artificial Intelligence, as also witnessed by Kim and Bhalla (2022). As noted by Alserhan and Al Shbail (2020), the reason for using Public Relations further enriched by Artificial Intelligence is to provide maximum customer support.

Consequently, PR practices and AI add to the organization's competitive value, further facilitated by online communication and positive behavioral change. These factors further result in reputation management, which is a primary goal for an organization. According to Hall (2020), reputation management is an important consideration for an organization. When customers decide to try a service or a product, Public Relations practitioners come first to guide and support them, answer their queries, and help them in the decision-making process. Thus, the social exchange theory provides theoretical support to the conceptual model in a way that PR practices help the consumers to observe the services in a better possible way, which further helps to enhance the company's reputation accordingly (See Amin et al., 2019; Gudmanian et al., 2019; Iqbal & Khan, 2021; Yang et al., 2020). Fig. 1 illustrates the conceptual model of current research:

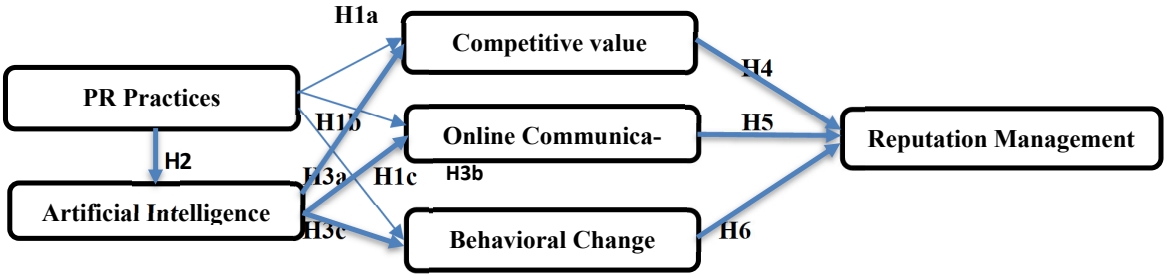

Fig. 1. Conceptual Model of Current Research

4. Research Approaches

4.1 Research Design

This research is based on experimental approaches. The researchers used study hypotheses and examined their validity using the most relevant analysis techniques (McDonough, 2017). Notably, this study is based on primary research as the researcher used the exchange theory and extended it by proposing additional variables (Bentley et al., 2015). Further, by keeping the study problem, aims, and design in mind, the researchers used quantitative surveys for data gathering purposes. The quantitative surveys were designed on a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Notably, the data was gathered between June 16th, 2022 to July 7th, 2022, and the researchers personally visited the selected organizations for the data gathering purposes. Further, the researchers manipulated and entered data into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Amos Ver 26.

4.2 Study Population and Sample Selection

The study population involved all the online retail sector organizations currently working in the United Arab Emirates. However, the researchers narrowed down their population into a subgroup known as the sample and selected n= 12 online retail organizations across the country. Further, the researchers selected a sample of n= 330 respondents from the selected organizations, mainly from the Public Relations departments. Notably, the selected sample size was ideal as the current research is based on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). As noted by (Weston & Gore, 2006), studies based on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) should contain a minimum n= 200 individuals or more sample size. In this regard, the sample size of n= 350 individuals was ideal.

Further, the researchers used a convenience sampling method per the study problem and requirements. According to (Tryfos, 1996), the convenience sampling approach is criticized due to the researchers' own biased, yet it is widely applied in social sciences research worldwide. Using the convenience sampling approach, the researchers select the respondents and gather

data from the individuals they consider most suitable for their research project. However, the response rate in the current research remained at 98.1% as *n*= 6 or 1.9% of questionnaires were removed, being incompletely filled or missing.

4.3. Common Method Bias

Social sciences and management sciences researchers often use questionnaires containing Common Method Bias (CMB) which is the systematic variance among the study variables (Tehseen et al., 2017). In simple words, Common Method Bias (CMB) is visible in the studies where the data about exogenous and endogenous variables are obtained from the same respondents (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Hence, the gathered data in the current research did not report potential Common Method Bias (CMB). Notably, the overall variance was below 30.1%, which is less than 50.5%, as suggested by (Tehseen et al., 2017).

5. Data Analysis and Findings

5.1 Analysis of Convergent Validity

According to Hussain et al. (2018), convergent validity indicates how closely the scale items are related to other measures and variables of the same construct. In simple terms, convergent validity determines the internal consistency of the research items (Nawanir et al., 2018). Thus, this research also involved analysis of the convergent validity as an integral part of the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). For the relevant purpose, the researchers first calculated the Factor Loading (FL) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values. Analysis revealed that most of the Factor Loading values surpass the threshold value of 0.5. Besides, all the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values surpass the threshold value of 0.5, ranging from .733 to .952. Further, the construct reliability of the measurement model is also examined. The researchers examined the Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability values in this regard. Cronbach Alpha values indicated that they range from .767 to .938, and Composite Reliability values range from .738 to .900, surpassing the threshold value of 0.7. Thus, it is found that the survey items are internally consistent, and their convergent validity is potentially ensured. Table 1 provides the summary of convergent validity analysis:

Table 1
Summary of the Convergent Validity Analysis

Variables	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR	CA
PR Practices	PRP1	0.487	0.833	0.783	0.783
	PRP2	0.787			
	PRP3	0.879			
Artificial Intelligence	AII1	0.794	0.897	0.811	0.858
	AII2	0.99			
	AII3	0.876			
	AII4	0.827			
Competitive Value	COM1	0.809	0.824	0.803	0.738
	COM2	0.735			
	COM3	0.801			
Online Communication	ONL1	0.862	0.855	0.767	0.766
	ONL2	0.659			
	ONL3	0.849			
	ONL4	0.862			
Behavioral Change	BHC1	0.916	0.952	0.791	0.9
	BHC2	0.988			
	BHC3	0.714			
	BHC4	-0.025			
Reputation Management	MGM1	0.082	0.733	0.938	0.785
	MGM2	0.743			
	MGM3	0.724			

Note: PRP is Public Relations Practices, AI is Artificial Intelligence, COM is Competitive Value, ONL is Online Communication, BHC is Behavioral Change, and MGM is Reputation management

5.2 Analysis of Discriminant Validity

According to (Samuels, 2016), discriminant validity helps to determine that the measures and the constructs should not be highly correlated. The weak correlation further affirms the discriminant validity. Thus, this research also involves analysis of the discriminant validity using two criteria, i.e., the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio, as suggested by (Howard, 2016). In this regard, the researchers first used the Fornell-Larcker criterion. They found that the square of all the Average Variance Extracted values is greater than the correlation values in Table 2. Further, calculating the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio value (See table 3) revealed the HTMT value of 0.689, which is smaller than the designated value of 0.9, as suggested by Henseler et al. (2015). Thus, it is assumed that the measures and the constructs are highly correlated, indicating that the discriminant validity of the measurement model is also established.

Table 2
Summary of the Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	POP	AII	COM	ONL	BHC	MGM
POP	**.693**					
AII	.131	**.804**				
COM	-.190	-.168	**.678**			
ONL	-.715	-.123	-.178	**.731**		
BHC	-.107	-.903	.148	.145	**.906**	
MGM	.026	.064	-.067	.013	-.028	**.537**

Note: PRP is Public Relations Practices, AI is Artificial Intelligence, COM is Competitive Value, ONL is Online Communication, BHC is Behavioral Change, and MGM is Reputation management

Table 3
Summary of the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio

	POP	AII	COM	ONL	BHC	MGM
POP						
AII	-.108					
COM	.462	.015				
ONL	.775	-.087	.470			
BHC	-.136	.900	-.072	-.156		
MGM	-.015	-.083	.042	-.015	-.066	

Note: PRP is Public Relations Practices, AI is Artificial Intelligence, COM is Competitive Value, ONL is Online Communication, BHC is Behavioral Change, and MGM is Reputation management

5.3 Goodness of Fit

According to (Narsky, 2004), Goodness of Fit is an important part of measurement model analysis in Structural Equation Modelling-based studies. It primarily determines whether the set of observed data matches those expected under the study's measurement model. Thus, Goodness of Fit in this research revealed the chi-square value at x^2= 0.400 (11) and probability level at 0.002. Further, the Fit Indices value remained at 0.382, and the Standardized Root Mean Square (RMSEA) value remained at 0.256. Thus, the findings revealed that the data fit the expected set of observations with the normal distributions. Fig. 2 illustrates the Goodness of Fit model.

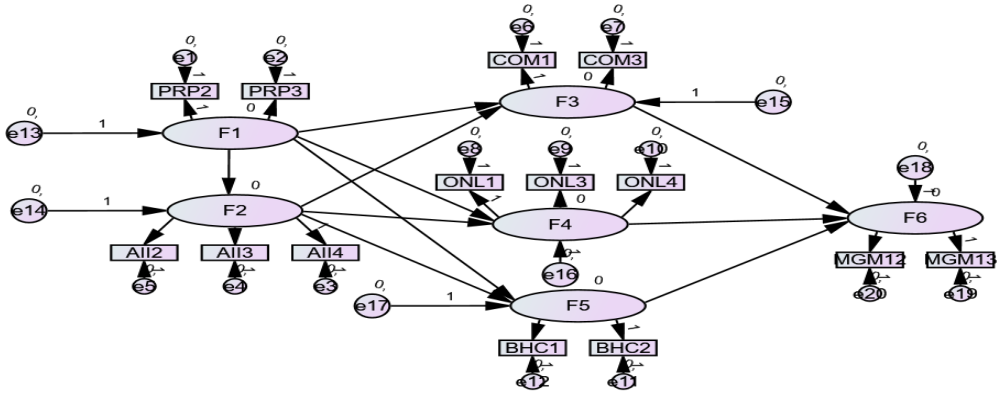

Fig. 2. Goodness of Fit

5.4 Demographics of Study Respondents

The researchers used descriptive analysis to calculate the demographics of study respondents. For this purpose, the researchers calculated gathered data based on the gender, age, and qualification of the participants. Results revealed that, a majority of the respondents (*n*= 169 or 51.7%) were males, while *n*= 155 or 47.4% were females *(M= .480, SD= .500).* Further, according to the age of the respondents, a majority of the (*n*= 196, 60.4%) were 31 to 40 years old, followed by *n*=83 or 25.6% individuals that were 20 to 30 years old, there were *n*= 51 or 15.0 % of respondents were 40 years old or above *(M= .690, SD= .953).* Finally, according to the qualification level of the respondents, a majority of them were having graduation degree (*n*= 210 or 64.8%), *n*= 91 or 28.0% had under graduation, and *n*= 23 or 7.0% or where having a professional diploma or certification *(M= 2.73, SD= 1.282).*

5.5 Coefficients of Determination R^2

Coefficients of determination R^2 is a number between 0 and 1 that determines the extent to which a statistical model anticipates the research outcomes (Dastres & Soori, 2021). In other words, (Figueiredo Filho et al., 2011) define coefficients of

Determination R^2 determines the predictive power of the latent variables. Thus, coefficients of determination R^2 in this study revealed that the R^2 values of all the variables range from .203 to .629, indicating a strong predictive power of the latent variables in this study. Table 4 summarizes the findings of the coefficients of determination R^2.

Table 4
Summary of the Coefficients of Determination R^2

Latent Variables	R^2	Strength
Public Relations Practices	.215	Moderate
Artificial Intelligence	.268	Moderate
Competitive Value	.592	Large
Online Communication	.629	Large
Behavioral Change	.203	Moderate
Reputation Management	.402	Moderate

5.6 Path Analysis

Path analysis is an important test in structural equation modelling to determine the strength of the structural relationships between study variables (Asparouhov et al., 2015). According to Pavlov et al. (2021), path analysis helps to examine the causal relationships making up complex systems. Thus, path analysis is also applied in this research to examine the structural relationships between the study variables. Table 5 summarizes the path analysis findings that contain the regression weights (*t*-values and significance values). Thus, the researchers first proposed a significant effect of Public Relations Practices on Competitive Value (H1a), Online Communication (H1b), and Behavioral Change (H1c). Results revealed that all three hypotheses remained significant, with the path values at *-.137, .750*, and *.262* and the significance values at *p> .051*, *p> .000*, and *p> .000*. In the H2 of the study, the researchers proposed a significant effect of Public Relations Practices on Artificial Intelligence. The proposed effect did not remain significant, with the path value at *-.071* and the significance value at *p> .107*. Further, the researchers proposed and tested the significant effects of Artificial Intelligence on Competitive Value (H3a), Online Communication (H3b), and Behavioral Change (H3c). Findings indicated that the effect of Artificial Intelligence on the Competitive Value was insignificant, with the path value at -.002 and the significance value at .107. However, the effects of Artificial Intelligence on Online Communication and Behavioral Change remained significant, with the path values at .229 and 1.275 with the significance values at *p> .003* and *p> .000.*

Table 5
Summary of the Path Analysis

Hyp.	Relationship	*Path*	*t*	*P*
H1a	Public Relations Practices → Competitive Value	-.137	-1.954	.051
H1b	Public Relations Practices → Online Communication	.750	21.919	***
H1c	Public Relations Practices → Behavioral Change	.262	9.465	***
H2	Public Relations→ Artificial Intelligence	-.071	-1.610	.107
H3a	Artificial Intelligence→ Competitive Value	-.002	-.091	.927
H3b	Artificial Intelligence→ Online Communication	.229	1.330	.003
H3c	Artificial Intelligence→ Behavioral Change	1.275	36.792	***
H4	Competitive Value→Reputation Management	.331	-.915	.060
H5	Online Communication → Reputation Management	.260	1.049	.094
H6	Behavioral Change→Reputation Management	-.021	-1.244	.014

Similarly, the H4 of the study proposed a significant effect of Competitive Value on Reputation Management. The proposed effect was validated with the path value at *.331* and the significance value at *p> .060.* Besides, the effect of Online Communication on Reputation Management is also affirmed with the path value at 1.275 and significance value at *p> .094.* Finally, the last hypothesis (H6) also remained validated as the effect of Behavioral Change on Reputation Management was significant, with the path value at *-.021* and the significance value at *p> .014*. The summary of path analysis is represented in Table 5.

5.7 Importance of Performance Map Analysis

Importance Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) is considered an extension of the Structural Equation Modelling that further determines the performance of constructs (Dastres & Soori, 2021). The Importance Performance Map Analysis in this research also determined the performance of all the latent variables. However, the researchers only selected Public Relations Practices, Artificial Intelligence, Competitive Value, Online Communication, and Behavioral Change for the Importance Performance Map Analysis. In this regard, Competitive Value remained the highest scoring variable (3.95), followed by Public Relation Practices (3.89), and Online Communication scored as the third highest variable (3.89). Finally, Artificial scored 3.88, and Behavioral Changed was the lowest scoring variable (3.80). Figure 3 illustrates the findings of the Importance Performance Map Analysis (IPMA).

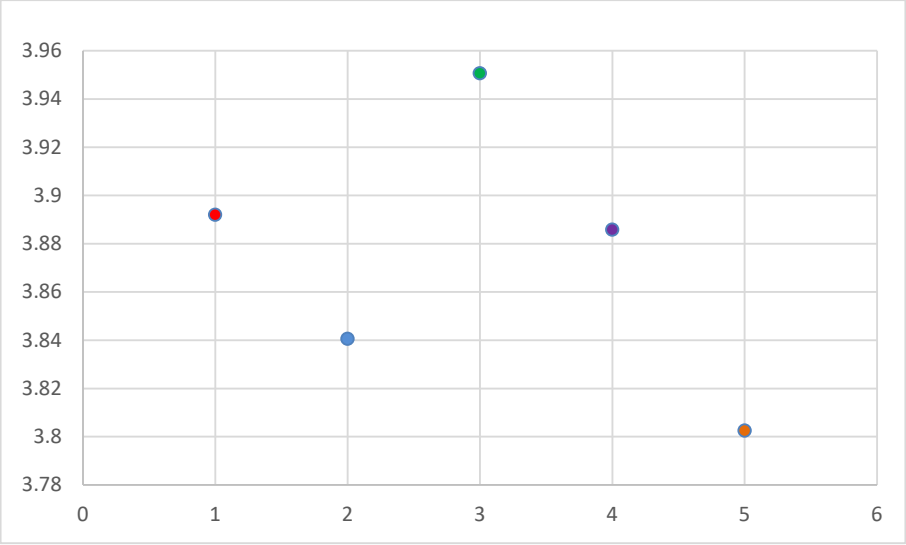

Fig. 3. Summary of Importance Performance Map Analysis (IPMA)

6. Discussion on Results

Several existing studies have witnessed a strong relationship between reputation management and Public Relationships (Cismaru et al., 2018; Kirpichnikov et al., 2020; Nobre, 2020; Santa Soriano & Torres Valdés, 2021). On the other hand, Public Relations practices that are accompanied by approaches such as Artificial Intelligence have a clear goal to ensure reputation management at a maximum level (See Abdalli & Hassan, 2019; Ajzen, 1991; Berg & Blomqvist, 2019; Froment et al., 2017, 2017; Klepek & Starzyczná, 2018). In this regard, this study also proposed and witnessed the role of Public Relations practices accompanied by Artificial Intelligence to improve and affirm the reputation management of the retail sector in the United Arab Emirates. The Social Exchange Theory is theoretically supported by the current research, which further strengthened the conceptualization of this research. As noted by (Wæraas & Dahle, 2020), an utmost concern regarding reputation management magnifies the role of Public Relations practitioners to adopt strategies that may not only focus on reputation management but also on the factors that further facilitate the pathway to attain the relevant goal.

Taking particularly about the results of current research, the researchers first focused on the effects of Public Relations on Competitive Value, Online Communication, and Behavioral Change. The relevant effects can be seen in the studies conducted by (Dacko-Pikiewicz, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Rust et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2020), showing consistency with the research propositions. Results indicated that, Public Relations practices have significant effects on Competitive Value (*t= -1.954, p> .051*), Online Communication (*t= 21.919, p> .000*), and Behavioral Change (*t= -1.954, p> .000*). Further, the researchers proposed significant effect of Public Relations practices on Artificial Intelligence. The assumed effect indicates its consistency with the existing studies (See Alserhan & Al Shbail, 2020; Doorley & Garcia, 2015; Gouda et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2016). As noted by (Dacko-Pikiewicz, 2021; Panda et al., 2019), merging Public Relations with Artificial Intelligence has transformed the role of PR practitioners in an organization. Consequently, they are more strategic, aiming to implement practical policies to meet the desired goals. However, the proposed effect of Public Relations practices on Artificial Intelligence in this research remained insignificant, which contradicts the cited literature.

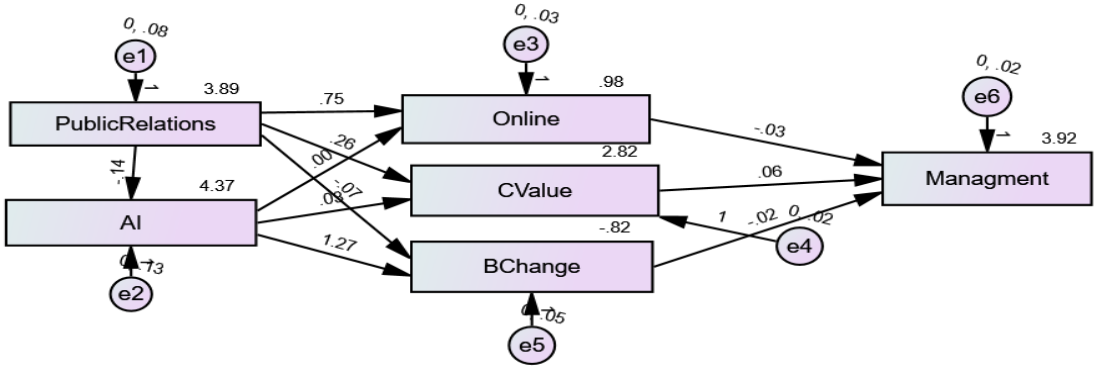

Fig. 5. Path Diagram

Similarly, the researchers assumed significant effects of Artificial Intelligence on Competitive Value, Online Communication, and Behavioral Change. Existing studies previously witnessed the proposed effects (See Arief & Saputra, 2019; Barakina et al., 2021; Nobre, 2020; Szwajca, 2017). However, the effect of Artificial Intelligence on Competitive Value remained insignificant. On the other hand, the effects of Artificial Intelligence on Online Communication (*t= 1.330, p> .003*) and Behavioral Change (*t= 36.792, p> .000*) proved significant, showing greater consistency with the existing literature. In the H4 of the study, the researchers proposed a significant effect of Competitive Value on Reputation Management in the online retail sector in the United Arab Emirates. The proposed effect was consistent with the study conducted by (Mellado & Barría, 2016) and the results of the current study also remained compatible with the relevant research with the *t*-value at *t= -.915, p> .060*.

Finally, the last two hypotheses propose significant effects of Online Communication and Behavioral Change on the Reputation Management of online retail organizations in the United Arab Emirates. First, the effect of Online Communication on Reputation Management with the *t*-value at 1.049 and significance value at p> .094 shows strong consistency with the proposition (Rust et al., 2021). According to Rust and their colleagues, online communication laid a strong foundation for a successful business. In this regard, we assume that the more an organization focuses on online communication, the more it will improve its reputation among customers. Besides, the effect of Behavioral Change on Reputation Management also remained validated (*t= -1.244, p>.014*), indicating consistency with the existing literature (Abdalli & Hassan, 2019; Ajzen, 1991; Berg & Blomqvist, 2019; Froment et al., 2017; Gibson, 2018; Klepek & Starzyczná, 2018). Thus, (Ahmed & Khan, 2019) considers behavioral change as a core component of ensuring Reputation Management. Besides, behavioral change also indicates strategic Public Relations practices and efforts made by the PR professional of an organization.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

Cost-benefit analysis is an important component of Social Exchange Theory as the relationship between people is built through the relevant phenomenon (Arief & Gustomo, 2020; Barakina et al., 2021; Baranov et al., 2020; Cook & Rice, 2006; Leontiev, 2021; Szwajca, 2017). According to the Social Exchange Theory, cost-benefit analysis is a metric to determine the efforts individuals use in a formal or informal interaction. Further, determining these efforts further helps to take a favourable decision among the individuals (Olaniran, 2018). The relevant theory remained applicable and unique in the current research as the structural relationships proposed between the variables were not based on emotional metrics. Instead, the relationship was solely based on the efforts of Public Relations practitioners, when combined with Artificial Intelligence, to result in a positive reputation among consumers (Dimitrova, 2016). (Hall, 2020)noted that the Social Exchange Theory does not necessarily depend on emotional relationships. Instead, it also involves an in-depth and critical evaluation of the relationship through communication. In this regard, financial matters such as buying and relevant decision-making can also be considered equally involved in the core concepts of the Social Exchange Theory. As a result, this research empirically and systematically highlighted the role of Social Exchange theory in reputation management, facilitated by the collaborative function of Public Relations and Artificial Intelligence (Cismaru et al., 2018).

6.2 Conclusion

The primary focus of the current research was to highlight the importance of Public Relations practices and Artificial Intelligence regarding reputation management. The researchers applied Structural Equation Modelling to attain the relevant goal, which further helped assess the structural relationships between the study variables. Through the study findings, it will be helpful for future researchers to examine the other different factors significantly contributing to the reputation management process. This study also emphasized reputation management as one of the crucial considerations for online retail organizations. On the one hand, PR practices and AI technology have a potential role in ensuring reputation management. On the other hand, factors including Competitive Value, Online Communication, and Behavioral Change have a positive role in reputation management, further ensuring attaining the organizational goals.

6.3 Study Limitations and Contributions

This study has certain limitations. First, the researchers only focused on the United Arab Emirates, which questions the results' generalizability in other regions. Second, the researchers focused only on reputation as the primary variable. In contrast, the role of AI and PR can be further analyzed in terms of reputation management, customer loyalty, and brand image. Third, using convenience sampling remained another primary limitation. Finally, the fourth limitation involves rejecting one of the preliminary research hypotheses. However, this study is of greater significance according to the nature, topic, and proposed conceptual framework. Mainly, it significantly adds to the existing literature gap, further magnifying its importance systematically and empirically.

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