Voices of the Future: Exploring Students' Views on the Use of GenAI in Academic and Professional PR Writing

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ABSTRACT

As generative AI (GenAI) policies in higher education in Thailand have been introduced, inquiries regarding GenAI integration and adoption in teaching and learning have been raised. Delving into a relatively unexplored interdisciplinary area in this context, this study aimed to investigate students' responses towards the use of GenAI in academic and professional public relations (PR) writing, employing the Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) frameworks. This qualitative study was conducted using semi-structured focus group sessions among native Thai PR major university students, with a workshop on GenAI prior to the discussion on its adoption. The findings revealed that all participants were aware of GenAI and most had utilized it for daily and academic

purposes, but never in professional PR writing. Despite having positive attitudes towards its use after the trial, they recognized certain drawbacks and concerns and expressed some reservations towards adopting GenAI in their future academic and professional PR writing, rather in English than in Thai. Besides knowledge and perceptions, individual characteristics were also attributed to hindering GenAI adoption among some participants. Therefore, providing adequate resources and practical guidelines on appropriate GenAI use are crucial. Future research in other subject areas and languages is suggested.

Keywords: generative AI, academic writing, professional PR writing, Diffusion of Innovations, Technology Acceptance Model

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) plays a highly significant role in our lives, expanding from day-to-day activities to more complex uses at work involving big data creation and computer modeling programming. This rapid advancement of AI has brought about transformative changes in various fields, including education. The concern regarding the ethical consideration aspect in the use of AI has been addressed (Moore, 2006) with suggestions for governing its usage (Khatri & Brown, 2010). Despite the concerns, evidently, in higher education, AI is perceived as a tool which can lead students to independently gain knowledge apart from human teachers (Holmes & Toumi, 2022). AI is also appreciated for its ability to provide customized learning experiences, skillfully aligned with each student's learning path to improve academic writing skills (Gallacher et al., 2018). With the comprehension that we cannot avoid the use of AI in classroom settings and that this technology can be beneficial, accordingly, higher education institutions are adopting AI into their redesigned systems of teaching and learning processes at different levels (Khare et al., 2018).

Recent studies from various countries have indicated that AI is significantly transforming educational methods, particularly in higher educational language learning and academic writing (e.g. Dakakni & Safa, 2023; Malik et al., 2023; Song & Song, 2023). A study of AI's role in supporting academic essay writing conducted with Indonesian students revealed that AI has been shown to improve students' writing skills, self-confidence, and comprehension of academic integrity (Malik et al., 2023). Additionally, a study conducted on English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

undergraduate students at a national university in China demonstrated how AI-assisted language learning affects their writing abilities and motivation to write (Song & Song, 2023). Another piece of research highlighted a contradictory relationship between Lebanese students and AI. While 70.2% of the students indicated that AI fulfilled their academic needs, 84.05% admitted to distrusting AI even though they acknowledged using it (Dakakni & Safa, 2023). Concerns over the technology's negative impact, including the deterioration of student's writing capabilities, creativity, and critical thinking, plagiarism, privacy issues, and ethical concerns, have also been reported (e.g. Dakakni & Safa, 2023; Malik et al., 2023).

Context of the Study

Chulalongkorn University in Thailand has been exploring the integration of AI into teaching and learning. In the academic year of 2023, the university formally announced its protocols for integrating the use of AI into the students' higher education life journeys as well as encouraging the instructors to break out of their traditional teaching methods by using AI in their courses (Office of Academic Affairs, 2023). At this initial stage, the university has not enforced any regulations or mandated specific teaching and learning procedures. Instead, it allows instructors to decide on the implementation based on the unique nature of their courses.

As the first author of this paper teaches a Writing for Public Relations (PR) course, while the other two authors instruct Academic Writing in English courses, together, we recognize the need to integrate the use of generative AI (GenAI) into the teaching and learning process to prepare our students for their future careers. Before implementation, it is essential to assess students' current awareness, opinions, usage of GenAI and their intention to use the tools in academic and professional writing. Understanding these aspects is crucial as it helps tailor the course structure and content to meet the students' knowledge levels and to effectively address specific concerns. Therefore, this study was designed according to the following research objectives (RO):

1. To investigate the students' awareness of, opinions on, and current usage of GenAI in academic and professional PR writing
2. To explore the students' reflections - including the benefits, drawbacks, and concerns - on GenAI adoption in academic and professional PR writing
3. To examine how and to what extent the students adopt GenAI in their own academic and professional PR writing
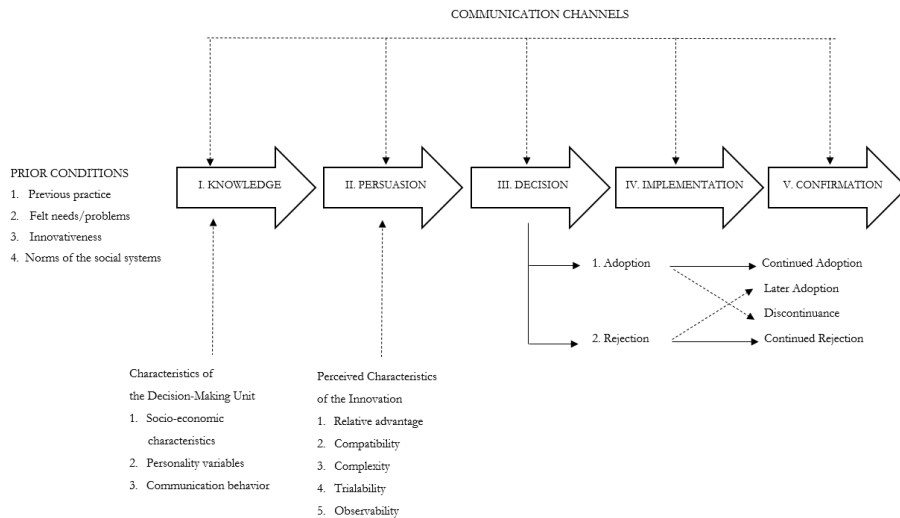
Benefits of the Study

This study on the use of GenAI in academic and professional PR writing can provide insights into how practical GenAI is applicable to academic and PR writing-related courses both in Thai and in English. Moreover, the research has highlighted students' opinions on GenAI, enabling instructors to customize their teaching and learning activities to align with students' needs and preferences, using the technology to optimize student learning outcomes. As academics and researchers, instructors can gain insights into the adoption process and factors influencing the adoption of GenAI in the teaching and learning to facilitate the smoother integration of new technologies in classroom settings.

Literature Review

Diffusion of Innovations (DOI)

The theory of DOI was introduced in the early 1960s, explaining how a perceived new idea, practice, or object could progress through stages of adoption by various individuals. According to Rogers (2003), the innovation-decision process involves five stages, namely knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. This process, together with the five perceived characteristics of innovations proposed, involving relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability, helps to both reduce the uncertainty which hinders the adoption of innovations and to predict the rate of adoption – as can be seen in Figure 1. Moreover, five adopter categories were defined based on innovativeness or how early an individual adopts an innovation. These range from the most pioneering ones or innovators, through early adopters, early majority, late majority, to the least or laggards, respectively. Individuals with a higher degree of innovativeness are more likely to have positive attitudes and to be more willing to adopt an innovative technology despite the challenges in coping with its uncertainties (Agarwal & Prasad, 1998).

Figure 1

A Model of Stages in the Innovation-Decision Process

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

PRIOR CONDITIONS
1. Previous practice
2. Felt needs/problems
3. Innovativeness
4. Norms of the social systems

I. KNOWLEDGE

II. PERSUASION

III. DECISION

IV. IMPLEMENTATION

V. CONFIRMATION

1. Adoption → Continued Adoption

Later Adoption

Discontinuance

2. Rejection → Continued Rejection

Characteristics of
the Decision-Making Unit
1. Socio-economic
   characteristics
2. Personality variables
3. Communication behavior

Perceived Characteristics
of the Innovation
1. Relative advantage
2. Compatibility
3. Complexity
4. Trialability
5. Observability

Note. Adapted from *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed., p. 170), by E. M. Rogers, 2003, Free Press. Copyright 2003 by Everett M. Rogers.

The DOI model has become one of the most popular used theoretical frameworks in IT innovation research across different disciplines, including education (Baytak, 2023). It is also regarded as the most appropriate framework for studying the adoption of technology, particularly computer technology for instructional purposes, in higher education and other educational settings (Sahin, 2006) where a potential innovation, defined by Rogers (2003, pp. 11-12) as "an idea, practice, or project that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption" and used interchangeably with "technology", and its diffusion in a particular academic community has been studied in the hope of enhancing teaching and learning experiences.

After the launch of ChatGPT, the AI and GenAI technologies and the process of their adoption in educational environments has inevitably been investigated, employing the DOI theory. Previous studies have confirmed the theory that the perceived characteristics were the significant factors determining a student's intention to use an innovation (e.g. Baytak, 2023; Sahin, 2006). Seen as early adopters, university students in India showed preferences in ChatGPT adoption based on their familiarity with and positive perception of the characteristics of the innovation, particularly its benefits for educational purposes (Raman et al., 2023). A study of Uzumcu and Acilmis
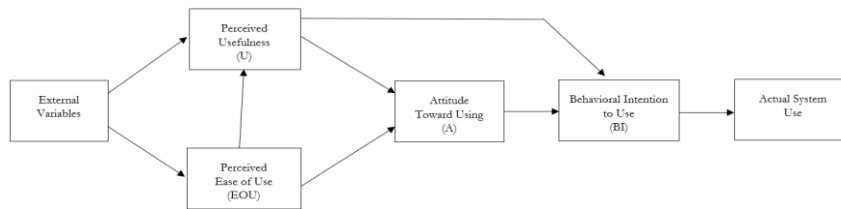
(2023) conducted among senior Turkish university students in the Classroom Teaching Department or pre-service teachers revealed that those with higher levels of innovativeness were more likely to integrate the AI-powered tools more interactively into their lessons. However, based on the total they scored on the individual innovative scale, over half of these students were classified as early majority, possessing a moderate level of innovativeness. This, together with a lack of knowledge and concerns on the use of the tools in classrooms, has resulted in their hesitance and unwillingness to use the innovation in the future. Similarly, Ghanaian academics, who were categorized as laggards due to their misconceptions of AI and lack of awareness of ChatGPT, have also refused to adopt the innovation in their profession after the trial (Adarkwah et al., 2023). It can be seen that other variables involved in the innovation-decision process, namely the innovativeness of individuals as well as prior knowledge of the technology, also play an important role in influencing an adoption.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Another theoretical framework employed to guide this research was first coined by Davis (1989). It describes how a variety of factors play a role in how and when individuals come to accept and utilize a new technology. According to this model, as shown in Figure 2, behavioral intention to use (BI), which is a predictor of actual system use, is significantly influenced by attitude toward using the system (A) and the two beliefs, namely perceived usefulness (U) and perceived ease of use (EOU). This model also includes relationships between A, U, EOU, and BI. Besides being influenced by A, BI can also be determined by U together with A. Although A can directly be affected by both U and EOU, the former is a stronger determinant than the latter. In addition to these, EOU can also have an impact on U (Davis et al., 1989).

Figure 2

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Note. Adapted from "User acceptance of computer technology: A comparison of two theoretical models," by F. D. Davis et al., 1989, *Management Science, 35*(8), p. 985. Copyright 1989 by INFORMS.

TAM has become one of the most widely used frameworks to explain the acceptance of technology, particularly learning technologies in the educational context, thanks to its quality of being simple, yet effective and usable across extensive contexts (Zaineldeen et al., 2020). According to Granić and Marangunić (2019), besides the original TAM, variations of the model, involving additional factors, were found in others to enhance the suitability with certain technologies investigated.

Recently, TAM has widely been applied to unveil to what extent AI technology is accepted by its users. In the higher education context, the acceptance of AI-powered tools, particularly GenAI or ChatGPT, has received considerable attention among academics in various fields, such as Engineering (e.g. Bernabei et al., 2023), English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (e.g. Chang et al., 2021), and Teacher Education (e.g. Zhang et al., 2023). It was discovered that the core constructs of TAM were potential predictors of university students' acceptance of the technology in their educational environment. Other studies extended the framework by considering other external variables, and self-efficacy - or how individuals perceive their ability to handle a challenging technology (Kulviwat et al., 2014; Vankatesh & Davis, 1994) - is often incorporated. Zhang et al. (2023) found that there was a positive influence of AI self-efficacy on EOU which then affected the BI of pre-service teachers at a German university to use the technology. Among the studies on AI-powered tools, some address specifically the utilization of such tools in English writing. In Zou and Huang's (2023) study, Ph.D. students at a technological university in China had a strong intention to use ChatGPT in their writing, which resulted from a significant impact of their positive attitude, influenced by U and EOU. However, another study reported that although the technology was accepted by Chinese EFL students and found to be useful for their writing performance, they could also point out the tool's limitations on reliability and accuracy (Chang et al., 2021). Similarly, in the study of Bernabei et al. (2023), engineering master's students in Italy, despite being able to produce academic essays of reasonably good quality, also

mentioned their concerns over the output generated by ChatGPT lacking comprehensiveness and readiness to use.

Students' Opinions on GenAI in Classrooms

With reference to the integration of AI in higher education classrooms, students have been found to view GenAI favorably while having some concerns regarding its use.

Studies employing different concepts of technology in education have examined factors for students' readiness to adopt GenAI in their academic activities and due to GenAI's benefits their opinions were positive in the context of Asian universities. Technological proficiency and a positive perception of AI tools are the main factors in students' readiness to adopt them such as nursing students in the Philippines (Labrague et al., 2023) and college students from different majors of study in a university in Hong Kong (Chan & Hu, 2023). Furthermore, positive perceptions including other perceived benefits such as increased learning efficacy, motivation for challenging coursework, and research enthusiasm have been indicated (Chan & Hu, 2023). Moreover, time savings and access to wider areas of knowledge are also described as advantages (Mohammed et al., 2023; Ngo, 2023; Zou et al., 2023). In an EFL context, students from several countries held positive views towards the use of Gen AI. According to Gallacher et al. (2018), Japanese students' impressions through open-ended written responses that after having conversations with GenAI revealed that GenAI was novel in addition to a reliable aid for language acquisition. Similarly, in Mohammed et al.'s (2023) study, students' positive perceptions derived from Arab post-graduates at five Indian institutions demonstrated that these students felt ChatGPT improved their academic writing, language proficiency and achievement further to an increase in productivity. In an Indonesian context, students perceived GenAI as being useful for academic writing, particularly in the planning stage (Utami et al., 2023).

Specifically, in PR class implementing the training for PR writing, students whose native language is English tended to be satisfied with the use of AI to assist their PR writing. According to Schneider (2023), students valued the evaluation of PR writing best practices and liked the opportunity to learn about AI. Using AI for PR writing projects altered students' perception of AI's usefulness, despite their prior awareness. Furthermore, students became more assured of their writing and critical thinking abilities when invited to express their thoughts and suggestions. In contrast, some reservations of the use of GenAI can also be observed. Students felt that it did not provide for the same level of rich peer engagement (Gallacher et al.,

2018). Reservations regarding ethical issues, privacy, accuracy, and the effects on future professional goals, personal growth and society values were also indicated (Chan & Hu, 2023). Additionally, the importance of critical thinking abilities in using AI-generated content resources was the concern raised by the students from the 365 responses of the quantitative questionnaire in Introduction to Academic Writing course (Burkhard, 2022). Moreover, Idroes et al. (2023) pointed out that the unfavorable views on the use of GenAI expressed by almost half of the 91 students involved in a survey of Romanian undergraduate students from different fields of study might stem from the decrease in interpersonal connection between teachers and students. Thus, it was concluded that the use of AI might affect the quality of education. Since GenAI has been constructed by the large language model, specifically English language, many students recognized the limited availability of their native languages for the content provided by GenAI such as Chinese (Bao & Li, 2023) and Indonesian (Utami et al., 2023).

GenAI in PR practices and its integration in PR classrooms

AI has significantly transformed PR practices, enhancing information delivery and providing insights, including generating news releases, transforming written content into audio, converting audio files to text, and producing PR materials in multiple languages (Buhmann & White, 2022; Panda et al., 2019). However, a significant barrier to AI adoption is a lack of education, training, and confidence in using the technology (Buhmann & White, 2022). PR practitioners also face concerns about the high cost of AI-driven systems (Panda, et al., 2019) and transparency in AI-assisted communication (Bourne, 2019). Research by Schneider (2023) and Ryan (2024) have noted a growing demand for PR educators in the United States to equip students with both the traditional and the digital skills required by the profession.

In a PR classroom context, Schneider (2023) and Bruhn et al. (2023) conducted studies on the use of ChatGPT in PR classrooms, enhancing student engagement and critical thinking. They also highlighted the importance of communicators in evaluating new technology for AI. Ryan (2024) conducted a study on incorporating GenAI tools in PR coursework, demonstrating the benefits of these tools in enhancing students' digital literacy and understanding of AI, ultimately leading to improved learning and critical thinking skills.

Building on these findings, the research was designed to include a training workshop to actively engage students with GenAI, allowing them to work with the tools and discuss their intentions to use them in their future

profession by reflecting on their benefits and drawbacks and articulating any concerns. This hands-on approach aimed to deepen their comprehension and evaluate the practical impacts of AI integration on their skill sets and career readiness. Additionally, it enables instructors to incorporate the findings to assess and redesign course structures and content, aligning with industry demands and enhancing both teaching strategies and student outcomes.

This section has presented the previous studies on the overarching theoretical concepts: DOI and TAM and AI technology as innovation. As can be seen, the influence of both theories' core variables as well as the individual factors are integral to each individual's perception of and decision to utilize GenAI. Furthermore, former research indicating the mixed views of students from different disciplines was reviewed. The review has demonstrated that the majority of the previous studies were mainly conducted by the use of different quantitative methods. Further to this, GenAI in PR education and its integration in PR classrooms has been provided. While research investigating the practical implementation of GenAI within classrooms in Thailand remains limited, a crucial gap exists in understanding how Thai students enrolled in specific majors, particularly PR programs at Chulalongkorn University, perceive the potential application of GenAI in their future academic and professional PR endeavors.

Methodology

Participants

From a total of 49 PR major students, the recruitment was announced in PR courses classrooms and PR students Line Group messenger to ask for volunteers to participate in the workshop and research. The participants were 22 current PR major students, consisting of 7 males and 15 females from the Department of Public Relations, Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University in the Academic Year 2023. All volunteers were subject to the condition that they had not been formally trained in using GenAI for a professional PR writing context.

Research Instrument and Data Collection Procedure

This study employed a qualitative research approach. Three semi-structured focus group sessions were conducted according to the participants' available time in November 2023. Each session lasted approximately 90-120 minutes and was divided into three parts: first, a pre-training discussion on the participants' background of GenAI use for their daily and/or academic

purposes; second, a hands-on workshop on using GenAI tools in professional PR writing - teaching how to write prompts in Thai and English and practicing using prompts on writing PR news releases for products and events, and promotion writing; and third, an opinion and experience sharing session on the participants' awareness, comprehension, and intention to use GenAI for the development of their professional PR writing skills after the trial. Since all participants were native Thai speakers, the Thai language was the medium of communication during the sessions to ensure clarity and accuracy. Open-ended questions, framed by the notions of both DOI (Rogers, 2003) and TAM (Davis, 1989), and extensive probing techniques were used in the focus group. The question guidelines were validated by the three experts in the fields of communication and education. The validation coefficient for all 15 question items was greater than 0.66 indicating the acceptable level of construct and content validity (Imsa-ard & Tangkiengsirisin, 2023). The research obtained the IRB approval from the university's IRB committee (COA No. 355/66).

Data Analysis

The recorded conversations of all three focus group sessions were transcribed and analyzed using the qualitative data analysis method (Flick, 2014). The analysis of the themes and sub-themes relied on the inter-coding technique and intercoder agreement (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Prior to the data analysis, Member Checking and Rich/Thick Descriptions were employed. The participants were requested to validate their responses and reflect on the data accuracy at the end of the sessions. The study context, the participants' characteristics and their quotes were described in detail to provide rich and thick descriptions of the focus group.

The analytical processes were conducted by open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Pseudonyms were labeled to each participant and made up to the list to help ensure the accuracy of the participants. The analytical processes were conducted as follows. First, in an open coding process, the three researchers separately read the focus group transcripts and dissected the transcripts into segments and assigned initial codes to capture emerging key ideas. Second, in the axial coding process, meetings were held among the three researchers to discuss and organize the emerging themes to find the relationships between the emerging themes and each research objective. For any disagreements during this stage, resolutions were achieved by discussion among the three researchers. Finally, in the selective coding process, the three researchers worked together to refine the core themes and sub-themes relying on the theoretical concepts of DOI (Rogers, 2003) and

TAM (Davis, 1989) and tried to ensure that the findings accurately reflected the participants' statements. The statements, which were used as examples of direct quotations, were translated into English and validated by two Thai instructors of English and a native English instructor.

Findings

Students' Adoption and Ambivalence of GenAI Utilization

In response to RO 1, the findings from the focus group revealed that the awareness of GenAI technology was evident among all participants prior to the workshops. While 18 out of the 22 participants were aware of its benefits and had adopted the technology both in their daily lives and for academic purposes, none of them had ever utilized it in their professional PR writing. These participants exploited GenAI tools for several tasks.

Firstly, GenAI was utilized as a language assistant. These participants relied on the technology to help them in translating from their native Thai language into English and some other languages and communicating with speakers of other languages such as English, French, German, and Spanish. It was also used for grammar checking and paraphrasing. The tools often used by the participants included QuillBot, Grammarly, and Papago.

> "I used AI-powered tools to complete my essay writing tasks for my English for Academic Purposes course." (Jenny)

Secondly, GenAI was used as a search tool. The tools, namely, AlisaAI, ChatGPT, and Google Bard, helped the participants to research information on unfamiliar topics and how-to knowledge, such as how to structure a piece of writing of different genres.

> "I used GenAI to complete my group project on a topic I had no idea about. I asked ChatGPT for the information that I had previously tried searching for on Google but hadn't found any, and ChatGPT could provide all the information needed." (Yasmin)

Thirdly, GenAI was utilized as a presentation or an image generator, and the familiar tools mentioned were Canva and Photoshop AI. Moreover, the participants used GenAI to achieve a combination of the aforementioned tasks for assignment completion, such as academic writing in English and term projects, as well as employment communication, for instance, résumé and cover letter writing and preparation for job interviews.

> "I frequently use AI-powered tools to create images. For example, I just put in some key words, and they would generate some images. There's also a new feature of Photoshop AI, and I find it very useful. The AI drawing tool in Google is another good option for image production." (Brandon)

These participants were not certain of the technology - whether GenAI might generate unoriginal content, undesirable output, inaccurate and not entirely reliable information or misinformation, and non-native-like language use, particularly in Thai language.

> "I'm worried that GenAI may generate plagiarized content. I'm not sure if the sentences it produces would be similar to any sentences found on other websites." (Natalie)

> "I'm not sure if GenAI would generate the same output for everyone and I assume each tool has the same set of data. No one person's work would be original but would be similar to that of others." (Keith)

> "When I created my portfolio, I wanted to write statements which were catchy and easy to understand. However, the output was different from what I had expected." (Brandon)

> "ChatGPT generates outdated [Thai] language from a few years ago. No one really uses these words or phrases anymore. Sometimes, the language generated doesn't fit the context." (Victor)

Some interesting comments from the participants were revealed regarding their hesitation in adopting GenAI technology. One participant mentioned feeling uncomfortable with using it because of the mindset people have of utilizing the technology as there are those who perceive people who use AI as not being sufficiently competent to complete tasks themselves.

> "I'm concerned with the negative opinions in Thai society towards the use of AI for work. They may think people using AI have no actual ability nor original ideas to create their own work."(Keith)

However, despite being aware of the existence of GenAI, four out of the 22 participants preferred not to use it. Among these, there was one participant who indicated having heard of GenAI tools such as ChatGPT, but had never paid attention to adopting or using them. The other three participants were also aware of such tools, but they had decided not to use

them because they were concerned that it would reduce their ability to think, create and master their skill sets for their future profession.

> "I'm worried that if I depend too much on GenAI, I might use it all the time in the future, and it would hinder me from thinking outside the box. Currently, I'm trying not to use it much." (Victor)

> "I think using GenAI can be a tricky way of finishing a piece of work. It seems the people using it don't perform the task themselves, and it may go against academic integrity. … I feel that using it to complete my work would devalue myself in completing my own tasks." (Melanie)

> "I truly believe in human capability rather than AI. Actually, it's humans who create AI." (Jessica)

Navigating GenAI: Students Weigh Benefits, Drawbacks, and Concerns for Academic and Professional PR Writing

With reference to RO 2, there was a tendency that 19 out of the 22 participants would consider accepting and using GenAI in their academic and professional PR writing thanks to its benefits. However, there were still some reservations regarding its use because of the drawbacks and concerns reported regarding the tools.

Benefits

These participants recognized that GenAI tools could be used as a basis for generating a new piece of PR writing and that the AI-generated work could be further developed and refined by the participants as future PR practitioners themselves. GenAI tools could also be used for information search as a ground for their work in their academic and professional PR writing.

> "When I didn't know how to begin writing a press release, I would ask GenAI to highlight specific and important information received. After that, I would use the information generated and adjust it following the 5W1H pattern." (Paula)

> "GenAI can be a good starting point. If I don't really have any ideas, it can help me produce something from zero. I feel that it's quite amazing that it can help me ignite some ideas." (Jenny)

The participants responded that they would rely on GenAI for writing PR work in English, exploiting the tools to assist them with the language.

> "From my experience, I feel quite impressed with the use of GenAI tools to generate outputs in the English language. … I think I would mainly use them for work in English." (Bella)

More importantly, one major benefit of the technology mentioned was time-saving, which corresponds directly to the nature of PR's constraint of time. Since most PR work has to be completed promptly to keep up with a fast-paced environment, the participants agreed that using GenAI could serve this purpose.

> "In our PR industry, writing a press release has to be done in a very short period of time. GenAI can assist us in shortening the work process. For example, the tools can help us summarize the information more quickly so we need to spend less time working." (Victor)

Interestingly, one participant believed that in an educational setting, GenAI technology could reduce the gap in academic achievement between the less and the more proficient students. To illustrate, students who are not very proficient in one subject can use GenAI to improve their skills and obtain better achievement in that subject.

> "GenAI can decrease the gap between students who are weaker and those who are stronger. For example, in a PR writing class, some may have very good ideas for writing, but they have limited writing skills and vocabulary. Therefore, they can't communicate well through writing. GenAI can help them master their skills so they can get better output and perform better in class." (Keith)

Drawbacks

All these participants found that one of the drawbacks of using GenAI in their academic and professional PR writing was the language, particularly Thai. This is because GenAI was not able to generate language which is appropriate for the context as well as the time period to meet writing objectives. For instance, some words, some slang or some expressions are no longer used in today's contexts. When writing in Thai, they felt that they could possibly outperform the technology by being native speakers.

> "The Thai language GenAI generated seems strange to me." (Paige)

> "When writing in Thai, the language generated by GenAI isn't really appropriate to the real-world context. … Also, from the trial, it was quite difficult to use the tools in Thai to produce what I wanted." (Michelle)

> "The language generated by GenAI should sometimes be adjusted to fit the context to reach the target audience. It isn't as convincing as it's supposed to be." (Ben)

A lack of creativity is another drawback of using GenAI. The participants found that the technology was not able to produce authentic or creative ideas for them. After the participants were tasked to utilize a GenAI tool to produce some PR work by writing their own prompts, they found that the output was neither as innovative nor as creative as they had expected.

> "I tried using ChatGPT to create a new piece of PR writing. I expected that it would come up with something really new and creative, but it didn't. The output came from a combination of several general ideas." (Brandon)
> "I think creativity is the most important thing in creating pieces of work, especially in the PR field. Work produced by GenAI seems structured, redundant, and not very interesting." (Bobby)

Although it was discovered that GenAI can be beneficial for writing, on account of the drawbacks, the participants thought that the tools may not be suitable for creating academic and professional PR writing in its entirety, particularly work which requires originality as well as critical and in-depth analysis to serve specific objectives and target audiences.

> "The output from GenAI requires rechecking. It's important for us to rewrite and adjust the language generated in our own writing style." (Natalie)

> "I expected ChatGPT to give me a creative and catchy output, but it didn't turn out to be as captivating as I wanted it to be. Though GenAI tools are useful, I would rather write it myself." (Brandon)

Concerns

Following the trial, some concerns as to the adoption of GenAI in academic and professional PR writing arose among the participants in several areas. First, the participants expressed their worries about losing their creativity and critical thinking skills in writing and working if they use the

technology to help complete their work. Without hands-on or on-the-job experience, they would consequently, be incompetent in their professions.

> "If I rely too much on GenAI, I'm worried that I would lose my critical thinking ability." (Natalie)

> "Using GenAI to produce work reduces the fun of working. Although it may be tiring sometimes when I write, it gives me the pleasure of being able to think and create the work myself." (Michelle)

Second, they were concerned with the originality, copyright, and plagiarism of the work generated by GenAI tools. Since GenAI contains a huge amount of available data, the output generated may be used without the owners' consent. They were not certain to what extent they could use the work generated by the technology without it resulting in copyright infringement or plagiarism.

> "I'm concerned about copyright and plagiarism. I don't know if it's someone else's work or just a combination of random pieces of information." (Brandon)
> "I'm not sure if the results from GenAI tools replicate somebody else's work. I don't know if it violates any copyright or whether the original owner is okay with others using their work or not." (Max)

Third, there was a concern that GenAI would be able to replace humans in some areas of some professions, and this could possibly result in future unemployment. Moreover, work would become more challenging for people who are not able to catch up with GenAI technology.

> "GenAI tools can assist some tasks very well, but it has disrupted many industries. Those who are unfamiliar with the technology would be left out. People who do paperwork or other routine tasks may be replaced because GenAI can perform these tasks better." (Faye)

However, the participants felt that PR practitioners may not be entirely substituted by the technology since creativity and originality are essential for PR work, and these qualities can be performed more effectively by humans than GenAI.

> "I'm worried that in the future, some jobs may be replaced by GenAI, such as jobs that mostly involve the provision of information. However, in the PR field, the writing must be

unique. I think the PR jobs will not be easily replaced because humans still have to create the work themselves." (Bobby)

Diverging Paths: Future Integration of GenAI in academic and professional PR Writing

Concerning RO 3, 19 out of the 22 participants would likely adopt GenAI in academic and professional PR writing. The major reason for this is that they believe that the technology would be useful in their academic activities and future PR professions. They would adopt the technology to the extent to which GenAI tools are efficient such as providing information, generating ideas, and assisting with language use.

> "I'll use GenAI to help with what I'm not confident about. I think the tools can help improve my essays in my English writing class." (Max)

> "I can't imagine how I'd live without AI-powered tools in the future. In terms of PR work, the technology can suggest some writing patterns that I'll use as a starting point." (Ben)

Nonetheless, they would not use the technology solely to produce their work because of some drawbacks and concerns they have.

> "I'll probably use GenAI tools, but I won't use the output generated entirely as my final product. I'll need to re-check and verify the information. I'll use it carefully with literacy." (Nathan)

> "I'll continue using GenAI. Everything is good at a certain level. However, I'll use it simply as an assistant or to fill the gaps in my work. … In professional PR writing, emails and press invitations can be written by GenAI because they follow certain structures and require no creativity. So, I'll use it for these tasks." (Keith)

On the other hand, three out of the 22 participants found otherwise. These three were among the four participants who showed no intention to use GenAI in the pre-workshop discussions. Even after the trial, they still did not express much interest in adopting the technology as they did not feel such tools were compatible with or relevant to their work.

> "When I really need help, I'll turn to my friends or do my own research. GenAI isn't the first choice that I'll resort to." (Melanie)

> "I'm not proficient in using new technology. I'm usually afraid of the changes and globalization. … I won't use GenAI in PR writing because I'll probably need to fix the work generated that doesn't meet my expectations, and this will be time consuming." (Jessica)

However, one of the four did decide to use GenAI and acknowledged that when used properly, the technology can be useful in academic and professional PR writing.

> "Before the workshop, I used to oppose using AI-powered tools, but after the trial, I changed my mind. GenAI has been developed to assist humans." (Natalie)

Discussion

Beyond Basic Awareness: The Importance of How-to-Knowledge

The findings revealed that prior to the workshops, GenAI had been diffused by most participants. The reasons for adopting the innovative technology arose from the fact that students found the aforementioned five perceived characteristics of innovation, particularly the relative advantage, were able to reduce their uncertainties toward GenAI.

On the contrary, some participants possessed awareness-knowledge; nevertheless, they still lacked how-to-knowledge which may slow down their rate of adoption of GenAI. Insufficient level of how-to-knowledge may hinder them from the trial and adoption of the technology (Sahin, 2016). In other words, it may possibly lead to them rejecting and discontinuing its utilization. Although Rogers (2003) suggested that awareness-knowledge would stimulate an individual to obtain how-to-knowledge, prior conditions, including previous practice, felt needs/problems, innovativeness, and norms of the social systems, may also come into play. The influence of these different types of knowledge and prior conditions on technology adoption was evident in some previous studies (e.g. Adarkwah et al., 2023; Raman et al., 2023; Uzumcu & Acilmis, 2023)

Furthermore, although with the awareness-knowledge, recognizing GenAI tools as a writing assistant, none of the participants responded that they had ever used them in professional PR writing. This suggests the importance of training, which is highlighted in this study through the workshop provided, as it introduced the participants to proper how-to-knowledge of the innovation in the PR writing context. This, in turn, would

encourage them to try using the technology and influence their decision to adopt it.

Perceived Usefulness Outweighs Ease of Use in Driving GenAI Adoption

After the workshops, the results indicated that GenAI was generally accepted by most participants and that these participants held relatively favorable attitudes towards its utilization in academic and professional PR writing. It can also be seen that their attitudes and behavioral intention to use were influenced by TAM's primary constructs, namely perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. This corresponds to the theory (Davis, 1989) and many previous studies on the use of AI in higher education (e.g. Bernabei et al., 2023; Chang et al., 2021; Zou & Huang, 2023).

On the one hand, with regard to the participants' reflections on the benefits of GenAI, almost all of the participants agreed that the technology was useful, enhancing their academic and professional performance for different purposes. On the other hand, it was evident from the findings that the drawbacks affected how much they perceived the technology was easy to use. Consequently, the participants did not reject using GenAI entirely, but expressed their intentions to integrate the technology to the extent to which they felt it could assist them despite recognizing the drawbacks and concerns mentioned in the findings.

Additionally, according to Davis (1989), perceived usefulness is a greater influence than perceived ease of use (Granić & Marangunic, 2019; Zaineldeen et al., 2020). The overall acceptance of GenAI among most participants can be interpreted as meaning that the challenges they faced could be overcome by the benefits they received from using the technology, in parallel with the aforementioned findings of Bernabei et al (2023) and Chang et al. (2021). In contrast, based on their responses, the other participants who did not intend to use GenAI might perceive its benefits to be insufficient to surpass the drawbacks encountered. This then could not positively affect their attitudes and intentions to accept the technology.

Innovativeness and Self-Efficacy: Individual Characteristics Matter for GenAI Integration

It is crucial to note from the findings that a few participants were not very positive about integrating GenAI in academic and professional PR writing even after the workshop. One possible way to explain this is to focus on the individual characteristics in addition to the individual beliefs and

perceptions of the technology (Agarwal & Prasad, 1998; Kulviwat et al., 2014) determined by the core variables of DOI and TAM.

Individual or personal innovativeness has been taken into account by many researchers as a complementary variable determining an individual's behavior in the adoption of an innovation. In this study, it can be inferred from the findings that these participants possessed a lower degree of innovativeness compared to the rest. Therefore, they were not very optimistic towards GenAI and did not express a strong intention to use the technology in their academic and professional settings. Clearly, aligning with other studies (e.g. Adarkwah et al., 2023; Uzumcu & Acilmis, 2023), innovativeness had a positive impact on the participants' attitudes toward the adoption of an innovation.

Self-efficacy is another common extending variable in a number of studies (e.g. Zaineldeen et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2023). This confidence of individuals in utilizing the technology positively influences the perceived ease of use, and in turn, affects their behavior in the acceptance of the technology (Kulviwat et al., 2014; Venkatesh & Davis, 1994). These several participants in this study might perceive themselves lacking strong efficacy in the use of GenAI. This barrier demotivated them from putting stronger effort into adapting themselves to accept the technology and finding it easy to use and possibly useful for their work. This resulted in their unwillingness to integrate GenAI into future use.

Handle with Care: Transcending Barriers in Languages Other Than English

The findings revealed that the majority of students perceived GenAI positively rather than negatively for their academic activities. The primary reason for their positive opinions arose from the perceived benefits of GenAI being their language assistant, particularly in the English language courses. This finding corroborates with the studies of Gallacher et al. (2018), Mohammed et al. (2023) and Utami et al. (2023) in that the participants believed that GenAI could help improve their assignments in both pre-, during and post-writing stages.

One interesting finding from this study indicated that although GenAI could provide them with the basic template of PR writing, the participants did not solely rely on the technology for their professional PR writing in Thai, which is their native language. In comparison, based on the trial, they tended to trust its ability to write PR work in English. This is contrary to Schneider's (2023) study that her native English-speaking students were satisfied with the output of PR writing best practices produced by GenAI. In this current study, the participants compared and examined the

language generated in both Thai and English PR written pieces and found that the output in Thai might not yield the best results due to inaccurate information and limitations in the Thai language. The limitations of GenAI in other languages besides English were also identified by Bao & Li (2023) and Utami et al. (2023).

Conclusion and Implications

The findings of this study demonstrated that all participants were aware of the existence of GenAI, and in general, the technology was perceived positively and integrated in the daily and academic activities, but not in professional PR writing by most of them. They recognized from the trial the technology's benefits, drawbacks, and concerns. However, when it comes to the GenAI adoption in their future academic and professional PR writing, most participants intended to utilize the technology, particularly in English, with reservations, whereas several others were not very keen on adopting it. Knowledge and perceptions of GenAI together with individual characteristics are also significant in influencing a particular participant's degree of adoption.

As the integration of GenAI technology is inevitable in today's teaching and learning practices, it is necessary for higher education institutions to prioritize making an investment in providing adequate resources to meet the ever-evolving and increasing demands of GenAI among students and instructors in the academic landscape. Based on the study's findings, it is strongly recommended that higher education administrators consider the necessity of equipping not only students but also instructors with how to apply GenAI in learning and teaching and awareness of ethical issues concerning the use of GenAI for optimal experiences in their academic pursuits. Greater institutional initiatives would be required to encourage appropriate use of GenAI in classroom settings by formally issuing practical guidelines.

This group of PR students recognized that the proper use of GenAI could benefit their writing skills. Interestingly, they also believed that while GenAI could be a great assistant, it lacks the originality and creativity that they must provide. For pedagogical implications, this emphasizes the important role of GenAI as a tool in both enhancing classroom learning and preparing students for professional roles in industry. As for instructors, they are encouraged to integrate GenAI to assist them in lesson planning, particularly designing suitable in-class activities for their target students. GenAI should also be employed to enhance the learning experience by instructors introducing the use of GenAI for certain stages i.e. preparation,

editing, and proofreading stages to enhance students' writing skills and foster learner autonomy.

While these findings can help shed some light on the use of GenAI in academic and professional PR writing in both the English and Thai languages, it is suggested that a comparative study of the use of GenAI in other different languages could also be explored. Moreover, the findings from this present study may not be able to be generalized to other groups of students in different subject areas. These findings can be extended for future research to investigate opinions of students from different fields of study on the use of GenAI for their academic and professional writing and interviews with individual students can be conducted to gain more insights. Classroom culture and cultural factors are suggested for future research. Additionally, a quantitative study can be further conducted to represent a larger population.

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