AI and Culture: Culturally dependent responses to AI systems

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Abstract

This article synthesizes recent research connected to how cultural identity can determine responses to artificial intelligence. National differences in AI adoption imply that culturally-driven psychological differences may offer a nuanced understanding and interventions. Our review suggests that cultural identity shapes how individuals include AI in constructing the self in relation to others and determines the effect of AI on key decision-making processes. Individualists may be more prone to view AI as external to the self and interpret AI features to infringe upon their uniqueness, autonomy, and privacy. In contrast, collectivists may be more prone to view AI as an extension of the self and interpret AI features to facilitate conforming to consensus, respond to their environment, and protect privacy.

Adopting artificial intelligence across cultures

Artificial intelligence represents "the science and engineering of making intelligent machines," with an emphasis on machines' capabilities to learn, at least, in part, as humans do [1]. Following recent work [2], we conceptualize AI as an ecosystem comprising three fundamental elements—data collection and storage, statistical and computational techniques, and output systems—that enable products and services to perform tasks typically understood as requiring intelligence and autonomous decision making on behalf of humans [3]. Today, AI represents a general-purpose technology [4] with the potential to revolutionize the lives of consumers everywhere, in ways large or small [5].

However, published statistical information reveals strong geographical differences in the acceptance of artificial intelligence (AI). For example, compared to 26–33% of companies in France, Spain, and the U.S., 50–59% of companies in India, Singapore, and China report to have actively deployed AI as part of their business operations [6]. Researchers often cite such differences in the prevalence of AI to explain why many more people in Eastern countries (67-72%) perceive AI as beneficial for society [7], compared to Western countries, and generally accept the use of AI in specific applications [8]. A merely descriptive perspective overlooks the potentially significant role of cultural psychology in explaining these observed differences in AI prevalence and acceptance. Indeed, recent unpublished analyses of secondary data reveal that country-level differences in cultural values (e.g., individualism-collectivism) significantly predict AI acceptance beyond other factors (e.g., GDP per capita). Overall, these insights support the possibility of a nuanced interplay between cultural identity and consumer responses toward AI, building upon a rich body of literature connecting country differences to psychological differences in responses to new technologies [9,110] and consumer behaviors [11,12]. Our

review will show how cultural psychology can advance our understanding of how consumers' responses to AI may relate to the self and how its adoption may impact the consumer journey.

Culture determines the role of AI in constructing the self

Culture is defined as a set of meanings shared by people in a given place and time [13]. Although numerous culturally shaped meanings exist, including the level of emphasis on hierarchical social arrangements (power distance) and the level of reliance on social norms to avoid the uncertainty of future events (uncertainty avoidance; [14]), perhaps the most relevant element that culturally differs in its meaning is the definition of self. People from different cultural backgrounds see themselves in relationships with others differently. Following the bulk of cross-cultural research, we focus on whether the self is defined as independent versus interdependent [15] and on the associated values of individualism and collectivism, which reinforce those self-construals [16].

Technology has become a useful tool to mediate relationships with others [17], while potentially being "other" itself [18, 19]. Known cultural variation in how individuals construct their self-concepts in relationship to others [15] and the increasing role of technology in our daily lives suggest cultural patterns in how individuals include AI technologies in the self (i.e., AI is external to the self versus an extension of the self) and organize AI within social hierarchies (i.e., AI is higher in power or not).

AI as external to the self

External but equal

The tendency to view AI as external to the self, and therefore a threat, is pervasive [18, 19]. When people view AI as external to the self but not more powerful, they may be more likely to view AI's benefits (e.g., automation) as a threat to their identities [20*]. People with individualistic cultural tendencies seem particularly subject to this interpretation. For example, U.S. and Western European consumers who strongly identified with a social category (e.g., thought of themselves as good bakers) tend to resist automation in identity-relevant products (e.g., bread-baking machines) [21]. Moreover, increasing levels of independent self-construal–viewing oneself as separate and unique from others–weakened the symbolic value derived from delegating tasks to AI as if it were a subordinate [22].

External and more powerful

However, when individuals view AI as external to the self and more powerful, then responses become more favorable. Consider religiosity. Although often overlooked as a dimension of cultural differences [23], religiosity increases trust in the unseen and positively influences AI acceptance and evaluations [24]. Moreover, when God is salient, people tend to feel small and fallible, weakening their aversion to AI (vs. human), and leading to a more likely acceptance of its recommendations [25**].

AI as an extension of the self

In contrast to the dominant conceptualization of AI as external to the self, scholars have called for research to consider conceptualizations of AI as an extension of the self [18,20*]. One relevant benefit of an extension-of-self conceptualization is that people may be more prone to apply lay theories about human intelligence to artificial intelligence. For example, volumes of research support the idea that people vary in the belief that human intelligence can be increased

over time (the incremental belief) or that intelligence is fixed and cannot grow over time (the entity belief) [26]. Recent work showed that one reason people distrust AI is because they believe that, unlike humans, AI cannot learn from past mistakes; therefore, once the algorithm's ability to learn was made salient (i.e., increased performance from 60 to 80% correct evaluations over one year), there was an increase in trust and choice of algorithms [27**]. Given that the belief in incremental human intelligence is more prevalent in East and South Asian cultures than in North American cultures [28,29], future research that considers AI as an extension of the self may afford culturally inclusive predictions about when and why people distrust AI because of its presumed ability or inability to learn (see Table 1 for sample future research hypotheses). More broadly, interventions that frame AI as an extension of the self, and therefore more equal to the self, may prompt favorable judgments of AI regardless of cultural identity.

Culture determines the effect of AI on decision-making

Consensus versus uniqueness

By their very nature, the algorithms that power AI are reductionist [30]. They need to translate human behavior, identity, preferences, and attributes into a smaller set of independent, computationally readable variables, parameters, and formulae [20*,31]. In this way, people may view AI systems to emphasize consensus information at the expense of an individual's uniqueness.

Compared to individualistic cultures, people from collectivistic cultures, such as India and most cultures outside the industrialized West, place more value on consensus because it helps them pursue social harmony and interconnectedness with their in-groups [15]. In Korea, for instance, the word for "conformity" means "maturity" and "inner strength." In collectivistic

cultures, conforming to others is therefore highly valued [12,32]. For example, consensus information that emphasizes others' preferences plays a greater role in persuasion in collectivist (vs. individualist) cultures [11]. Since collectivism may increase the impact of familiarity due to pressure to conform, recent evidence shows that familiarity with AI weakens algorithm aversion more for Indians than for Americans [33**].

In contrast, people from individualistic cultures, such as the U.S., place a high value on uniqueness because it helps them perceive themselves as agentic, self-reliant, and distinct from others [13,14,15,16]. Accordingly, uniqueness neglect has been shown to influence algorithm aversion more for Americans than for Indians [33**]. However, framing technology as a way to amplify one's uniqueness may improve individualists' responses to AI. For instance, individuals who express individualistic (vs. collectivistic) tendencies are more accepting of personalized recommendations based on their unique preferences [12], and are willing to pay more for AI recommendations that help them avoid similarity with others [34].

Agency transference

Agency refers to the human capability to influence one's functioning and the course of events by one's actions [35]. Agency transference relates to AI's ability to limit one's personal agency, as agency is transferred from humans to algorithms [36*]. However, various literatures suggest that agency itself may not be "personal" across different cultural contexts. In individualistic cultures such as the U.S., people adopt a model of agency that prescribes that one's actions are internally driven and independent from outside influence [37], consistent with Westerners' tendencies to exhibit more internal locus of control [38]. Indeed, when people feel a greater internal locus of control, they are less likely to follow suggestions from AI in games [39] and medical diagnoses [40], suggesting an unwillingness to transfer agency to AI. Moreover, in a

series of studies conducted with participants in Western cultural contexts, Dietvorst, Simmons, and Massey [41] showed that people become satisfied even with slight control over the process, such as the ability to modify the input to some extent in algorithmic decision-making.

Compared to people in individualistic cultures, people in collectivistic cultures such as India adopt a model of agency that prescribes that one's actions are responsive to the environment [37], attribute others' behaviors to situational factors [42], and exhibit more external locus of control [38]. Therefore, cultural identity might determine the extent to which individuals perceive AI to limit agency. Consistent with this idea, when ordering room service with an AI-powered voice assistant (vs. touch panel), participants primed with an independent self-construal felt lower levels of satisfaction due to a lack of perceived control. In contrast, among participants primed with an interdependent self-construal, there were no differences in perceived control or satisfaction [43].

Self-disclosure and privacy

AI systems require large amounts of data from users to operate and, thus, tend to require significant self-disclosure. Such self-disclosure requires self-expression, which has well-documented cultural variation in psychology research. Whereas individualists are motivated to self-express [44], collectivists are motivated to conform [45]. For example, in peer-to-peer communications such as discussion boards (e.g., eBay and EachNet; [46]) and customer reviews (e.g., Amazon; [47]), U.S. and Australian consumers were more likely than their Chinese counterparts to express opinions and recommendations. Evidence suggests that cultural identity shapes patterns of self-disclosure in ways that resemble culturally shaped patterns of self-expression. Chinese individuals primed with an independent (vs. interdependent) self-construal

were more willing to disclose private driving and identifying information to a smartphone app that could supply real-time analyses of users' driving activities [48].

In addition to fueling AI systems, self-disclosure also makes users vulnerable to privacy threats [2]. Multinational surveys suggest that individualists (vs. collectivists) have greater concern for such privacy threats, corresponding with their relatively greater tendencies to disclose information to these systems. For example, people from Europe and the U.S. expressed greater anxiety about AI use and concern about privacy disclosure by AI applications, whereas people from Eastern Asia and China expressed greater comfort with AI use and optimism about AI's ability to protect user privacy [49,50]. Moreover, privacy concerns were more likely to predict the contestation of personalized AI-based recommender systems (e.g., TikTok) among people from individualistic countries (e.g., U.K.) than those from collectivistic countries (e.g., Japan)[51]. Together, these findings suggest that cultural identity may influence the willingness to disclose and the subsequent concern with the safety of those disclosures.

Normative reinforcement

By their nature, AI systems can make consensus readily accessible, facilitating conformity and reinforcing prevalent norms. This is particularly worrisome given that people are less likely to perceive algorithmic (vs. human) decisions as biased, potentially fueling further discrimination [52**]. Although conforming to norms is especially appealing to collectivists [11,12,32], evidence suggests that collectivism–as well as the cultural dimensions of uncertainty avoidance and masculinity–positively correlates with questioning AI-based recommendations that may be perceived as racially or gender-biased [53]. This pattern is consistent with the finding that people who are born or raised in countries with high (vs. low) perceived corruption are less averse to algorithmic decision-making because algorithms seem more capable of

facilitating growth and productivity [54**], even though at the societal level, collectivism correlates with corruption [55,56]. Further understanding of how AI can reinforce–or rectify–various societal norms within different cultures is a ripe area for future research (see Table 1).

Conclusion

Our review of recent literature shows that cultural identity is an effective theoretical framework for understanding how individuals might conceptualize and use AI in decision-making. Whereas the consideration of individualism and collectivism is relatively mature, numerous opportunities remain for exploring how other cultural dimensions might influence conceptualizations and responses to this technological revolution.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Table 1

Sample hypotheses for future research on culture and artificial intelligence.

Future research priority	Specific research question	Prediction for collectivistic or interdependent cultural context	Prediction for individualistic or independent cultural context
What are the effects of emphasizing self–AI overlap on AI adoption?	Does culture predict how consumers respond to AI framings that emphasize different aspects of the self-concept?	Framing AI as an extension of the connected self (e.g., highlighting shared interests) will drive adoption.	Framing AI as an extension of the unique self (e.g., creating personalized AI avatars) will drive adoption.
What factors determine self-disclosure in each cultural context?	Does emphasizing self-interest versus altruistic pursuits facilitate self-disclosure?	Emphasizing altruistic pursuits (e.g., help AI improve) will facilitate self-disclosure.	Emphasizing self-interest pursuits (e.g., reaching personal fitness goals) will facilitate self-disclosure.
How does culture determine responses to AI fairness?	Does culture predict how consumers respond to different aspects of AI fairness?	Highlighting the procedural fairness in AI decisions (e.g., algorithm generates recommendations the same way for all) will improve judgments.	Highlighting the distributive fairness in AI decisions (e.g., algorithm delivers similarly effective recommendations to all) will improve judgments.
How does culture determine responses to norm violations by AI?	Does culture predict the fairness perceptions that consumers have in response to different norm violations by AI?	AI violations of communal norms (e.g., appearing insensitive to disparities in others' emotional states) will decrease fairness perceptions.	AI violations of exchange relationship norms (e.g., appearing overly sensitive to disparities in others' emotional states) will decrease fairness perceptions.

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<mark>References of particular interest have been highlighted as</mark>

<mark>* of special interest</mark>
<mark>* * of outstanding interest</mark>

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Further information on references of particular interest

20. * This paper reviews and discusses how new technologies may enhance or diminish consumers' perceptions of being in control of their choices and how either of those can, in turn, enhance or detract from consumer well-being.

25. ** The authors demonstrate that contemplating God fosters increased acceptance of AI-based recommendations, with the decreased dependence on humans being attributed to a heightened sense of insignificance when God is prominent.

27. ** This research addresses the root cause of algorithm aversion, finding that consumers tend to avoid algorithmic advice due to the misconception that algorithms lack the ability to learn from mistakes.

33. ** The authors demonstrate that uniqueness neglect strengthens algorithm aversion for Americans more than for Indians, while familiarity weakens algorithm aversion more for Indians than for Americans.

36. * This paper reviews and suggests the significance of perceived autonomy in consumer choice in the domain of choice, well-being, and consumer welfare in the age of artificial intelligence.

52. ** The authors show that algorithmic decisions that yield gender or racial disparities are often viewed as less biased than human decisions because people believe that algorithms remove personal biases by focusing solely on rules and procedures, disregarding individual characteristics.

54. ** Drawing participants from over 30 countries across all inhabited continents, this work demonstrates that individuals born or raised in countries with high levels of perceived corruption are much less averse to algorithmic decision-making by making algorithms seem more capable of facilitating growth and productivity.