

MEDIATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED COOPERATIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTERDEPENDENT SELF-CONSTRUAL AND INTERACTION GOALS

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Abstract: This article provides an explanation of the relationship between interdependent self-construal, perceived cooperative communication, and interaction goals. To test this notion, structural equation model analysis was employed to analyse the structural relationships in this study. 196 Malaysian and 192 Chinese international business negotiators were the respondents in this study. The results indicate that perceived cooperative communication is a mediator between interdependent self-construal and interaction goals. This suggests that interaction goals are not dependent on interdependent self-construal. Focusing on the importance of communication styles, i.e., cooperative and competitive, it proposes possible win-win or win-lose negotiation outcomes. This paper draws attention to interdependent self-construal, which has an immediate impact on communication styles, and adopting perceived cooperative communication in international business negotiations will create more integrative agreements between international business negotiators. The findings reveal that perceived cooperative communication mediates the relationship between interdependent self-construal and interaction goals, which indicates the importance of perceived cooperative communication as an essential factor in reaching interaction goals and negotiation outcomes.

Keywords: Interdependent self-construal, perceived cooperative communication, interaction goals, and international business negotiations.

Introduction

Communication in international business negotiations is important as it creates value and future possible collaborations. Despite the vast research on international business negotiation, especially on the strategy of negotiations, the communication elements of negotiations remain detached from international business negotiation studies (Singh & Singh, 2014; Hou, 2017; Xiao, Luo, & Daly, 2020). Studies indicate that communication between two people can play an important role in achieving interaction goals, which explains how human relationships can be maintained and how negotiation can be conducted in a way that can reach the objective of the negotiation outcome. Thus, having perceived cooperative communication in the negotiation model is very important (Swaab, Galinsky, Medvec, & Diermeier, 2011).

However, to date, there is limited research on perceived cooperative communication in international business negotiations. This is especially true with international business negotiations between negotiators from collectivist cultures on achieving cooperation to

reach interaction goals. The objective of this article is to examine how interdependent self-construal influences interaction goals, with perceived cooperative communication as a mediator variable. First, the original data regarding the interdependent self-construal choices made by Malaysian and Chinese business negotiators will be examined. Second, data about perceived cooperative communication choices, such as willingness to exchange information, attitude towards others, willingness to resolve problems together, and openness towards other people's ideas and communication skills, would be analysed. Third, the interaction goals' choices that motivate the behaviour and actions of the business negotiators will be studied.

This article seeks to examine the relationship between interdependent self-construal, perceived cooperative communication, and interaction goals in Malaysia-China business negotiations. These differences in countries in terms of cooperation are examined, which relate to aspects of the preferences of business negotiators towards how they deal with negotiation. This article represents the first statistical test of the relationship between interdependent self-construal and interaction goals with perceived cooperative communication as a mediator, as an explanation of how Malaysian and Chinese business negotiators communicate and negotiate to persuade each other to reach the outcome. The results validate the adapted items because the measure of perceived cooperative communication is derived from the indices of Lee's (1997, 2001) 7-item scale. Perceived cooperative communication explains the relationship between perceived cooperative communication and interaction goals. Moreover, the mediation model examines the relationship between interdependent self-construal and interaction goals, the relationship between interdependent self-construal and perceived cooperative communication, and the relationship between interaction goals and perceived cooperative communication.

These findings suggest that the relationship between interdependent self-construal and cooperative communication is positive, which has an immediate effect on a group's interaction goals. The results of the findings show that perceived cooperative communication mediates between interdependent self-construal and interaction goals.

Literature Review

It is important to identify the meaning of interdependent self-construal, perceived cooperative communication, and interaction goals. Interdependent self-construal means individual values have an immediate impact on communication styles that influence them to connect to other people in the same group as them, such as getting fit into the group, promoting others' goals, and having a tendency to cooperate with others (Markus & Kitayama, 1993). Perceived cooperative communication refers to people's willingness to cooperate when they give and take more information, allocate ideas and resources, and express several concerns and interests in knowing the needs of others so that both parties can achieve cooperation (Bakar & Sheer, 2013). All of the perceived cooperative communication in this study consists of a willingness to share information, a cooperative attitude towards others, a willingness to resolve problems together, openness towards other people's ideas, and communication skills. Interaction goals refer to a person's capacity to believe and perform in such a way that describes why negotiators create messages in a way

that influences the attitudes or behaviours of other people (Liu & Wilson, 2011). Interdependent self-construal, perceived cooperative communication, and interaction goals are important to reach the outcome of business negotiation.

Many studies, which will be discussed later, have treated interdependent self-construal, perceived cooperative communication, and interaction goals as representing the success or the outcome of the relationships and goals. This approach implies that interdependent self-construal, perceived cooperative communication, and interaction goals involve communication and negotiation skills. The first is deciding which communication styles to use; the second is using cooperative communication so that both parties can reach cooperation; and lastly, being able to influence the attitudes and responses of other parties to reach the goals of international business negotiation.

Our reasoning can be summarised as follows: Conceptually, it could be argued that international business negotiation outcomes require both parties to influence and agree with each other, so knowing the reason for negotiating is very important. Negotiation is reaching an agreement, making changes and transformations for both parties, and solving problems between negotiators (Lewicki, Barry & Saunders, 2010). In order to understand the latest trend in negotiation, previous studies claimed that negotiators tend to adopt a win-win approach as people begin to realise competition will not make the business last for long (Zhou, 2000; Lewicki, Barry, & Saunders, 2010; Jiang, 2013; Peleckis, 2014).

Consequently, past negotiation research indicated cooperation becomes the new business idea in international business between two different countries. These findings suggest that Malaysian and Chinese business negotiators perceive the choice as between a win-win approach and a win-lose approach, with influences from other factors, such as perhaps the bargaining power of the other party. This article discusses how interdependent self-construal influences perceived cooperative communication and the impact of perceived cooperative communication on interaction goals, especially since both countries are collectivist countries.

Theoretical Framework

The theory underlying our approach reflects, in some ways, past studies on interdependent self-construal. Past studies indicated that self-construal affects communication styles (Fernandez, 2005), and to understand the differences between cultural communication, individualism and collectivism should be used (Merkin & Ramadan, 2010). High-independent people interpret the self as separate from others, and thus, they value independence and autonomy (Tanaka, 2022). In contrast, interdependent self-construal people interpret the self as being connected with others and value harmony in interpersonal relationships (Tanaka, 2022). However, there is a lack of studies on how interdependent self-construal can lead to cooperative communication in international business negotiations. As our emphasis in this article is on Malaysia-China business negotiations, we focus on those likely to affect factors that influence the communication styles of the negotiators. Past studies revealed that each nationality has different styles of communication and negotiation (Bulow & Kumar, 2011; Hames, 2012; Farazmand, Yu, & Daneefard, 2012).

However, neither of these studies perceived cooperative communication as a mediator between interdependent self-construal and interaction goals. We seek to explain the differences between countries in the choice of communication styles and how these differences will influence the cooperation and outcome of the negotiation. Past researchers found that differences in national culture have proven to result in differences in organisation and administration (Lincoln, Handand & Olson, 1981). Suppose cultural factors influence communication styles in international business negotiations. In that case, interdependent self-construal is relevant to be examined, and as mentioned by Gendrin (2010), interdependent self-construal is being practised in many collectivistic cultures, and the purpose of interdependent self-construal is to have a hierarchical system in society. Due to the difficulty of closing deals, cultural differences are likely to be very important in the case of an international business negotiation.

Unquestionably, interaction goals will be affected by the perceived cooperative communication and interdependent self-construal between the two parties. For a business collaboration to happen, both parties should be willing to communicate and negotiate to resolve conflict (Kellert & Dalton, 2001). For this reason, the following analysis tests the relationship between interdependent self-construal and interaction goals and perceived cooperative communication as a mediator under four hypotheses:

- H1: Interdependent self-construal is associated with interaction goals in international business negotiations.
- H2: Interdependent self-construal is associated with perceived cooperative communication in international business negotiations.
- H3: Perceived cooperative communication is associated with interaction goals in international business negotiations.
- H4: Perceived cooperative communication mediates the relationship between interdependent self-construal and interaction goals.

Therefore, business negotiators from China and Malaysia with relatively high levels of interdependence, as they are from collectivistic countries, will tend towards interdependent self-construal and perceived cooperative communication.

Materials and Methods

Data comparing the business negotiators is not easily available in past studies due to the difficulties in getting them to answer the survey forms, as business people are usually busy with their work commitments. Therefore, it is worthwhile to report the findings found in our research to provide a better understanding of how to meet the expectations of the other party during business negotiations. In this study, 196 respondents from Malaysia and 192 respondents from China answered the questionnaire. Respondents took time to answer the questions regarding interdependent self-construal, cooperative communication, and interaction goals. Respondents' perceptions towards their own communication styles were assessed based on a 26-item scale of interdependent self-construal adapted from Oetzel

(2001). The aspects measured in the cooperative communication items are adapted from work by Lee (1997, 2001). They are based on high or low-power context, competition or cooperative context, influence strategy, resource-related aspects, and perspective-taking. As for interaction goals, the questions were adopted from the 31-item scale of interaction goals by Wilson and Putnam (1990), which consist of instrumental or task-oriented goals, relational goals, and identity goals that include competitive and cooperative items.

This study used SPSS v19 and AMOS v21 software to analyse the data obtained. The research process started with conducting data examination and screening to report the descriptive statistics and prepare for subsequent quantitative analyses. A test of reliability was performed on measurement scales. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to determine the distinctiveness of the measures: Interdependent self-construal (SC), cooperative communication (CC), and interaction goals (IG) to re-access resulting solutions. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was engaged to examine the hypothesised relationships between the research constructs as suggested in the theoretical model and to assess the overall goodness of fit between the postulated model and the collected data set. The mediation was assessed using SEM to calculate the direct and indirect effects of mediation variables on independent and dependent variables. A bootstrap procedure was also conducted to estimate the indirect effect of the mediation variable in this study.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Group statistic: A comparison between Malaysia and China on variables

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Interdependent self-construal	Malaysia	196	3.8081	.51271	.03662
	China	192	4.1999	.48347	.03489
Perceived cooperative communication	Malaysia	196	3.5697	.55671	.03977
	China	192	4.2266	.66538	.04802
Interaction goals	Malaysia	196	3.6401	.42833	.03059
	China	192	3.9026	.42833	.03486

The results found that there is no significant relationship between interdependent self-construal and interaction goals, which shows that interaction goals are not dependent on interdependent self-construal. Results showed that interdependent self-construal needs the support of a perceived cooperative communication variable to lead to a positive relationship with interaction goals. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was rejected with $y = 0.66$ and $t\text{-value} = 0.054$. Results found there is a significant association between interdependent self-construal and perceived cooperative communication. Hypothesis 2 fails to be rejected as the parameter estimates are significant ($y = .689$, $t\text{-value} = .054$). Hypothesis 3 is the relationship between perceived cooperative communication and interaction goals. As hypothesised, perceived cooperative communication was found to be significantly positive for interaction goals.

Results from the research found a significant path ($y = .055$, $t\text{-value} = .066$), which shows H3 fails to reject. Mediation occurs when we regress perceived cooperative communication, and the results found that the weight of perceived cooperative

communication is greater than interdependent self-construal. In path 1, interdependent self-construal has a direct effect on interaction goals. In path 2, interdependent self-construal has a direct effect on perceived cooperative communication. In path 3, perceived cooperative communication has a direct effect on interaction goals. In path 4, the apparent effect of interdependent self-construal on interaction goals is mediated by perceived cooperative communication.

Table 2: SEM results of perceived cooperative communication as a mediator

Dependent Variables	Total Effects		Fixed Effects
	X --- Y	X – M	M – Y
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
		M: Perceived Cooperative Communication	Y: Interaction Goals
<i>Step 1: Independent Variables</i>			
Interdependent Self-Construal		.449*(a)	.257*(c)
R ²			.253
<i>Step 2: Mediator</i>			
Perceived Cooperative Communication			.276* (b)
R ²			.018
<i>Step 3: Interdependent Self-Construal</i>			
Perceived Cooperative Communication			.257 ** (c ₁)
R ²			.689**
Pseudo R ²	.34	.23	.44
Akaike (AIC)	380.30	385.31	388.35
Bayesian (BIC)	395.01	395.07	395.04
Intercept	4.03* (4.34)	3.57* (3.88)	3.70* (3.88)

Note: Level 1, n = 388 group members; 2 groups * p < .05. ** p < .01.

Next, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to examine interdependent self-construal’s main direct and indirect effects on interaction goals. Richtor *et al.* (2014) found that SEM was commonly used as an analytical method to examine complex international business and marketing research models. Table 2 reports the results relating to Hypothesis 4. In the first step, interdependent self-construal refers to interaction goals. As shown in Table 2, interdependent self-construal was significantly and positively related to interaction goals ($\beta = .164, p < .05$). The second step of this procedure requires interdependent self-construal to be significantly related to perceived cooperative communication ($\beta = .405, p < .01$). In the third step, perceived cooperative communication was significantly and positively related to interaction goals ($\beta = .172, p < .01$). In the last step, in order to test the hypothesis, we included both interdependent self-construal and perceived cooperative communication as predictors in the regression models. We found that interdependent self-construal was significantly related to perceived cooperative communication ($\beta = .405, p < .01$). It was also discovered that a significant indirect effect between interaction goals and

perceived cooperative communication was observed in the predicted direction ($\beta = .134, p < .05$), but the regression weight was reduced. Hence, the hypothesis received support, as perceived cooperative communication not only directly impacted interaction goals but also partially mediated the relationship between interdependent self-construal and interaction goals.

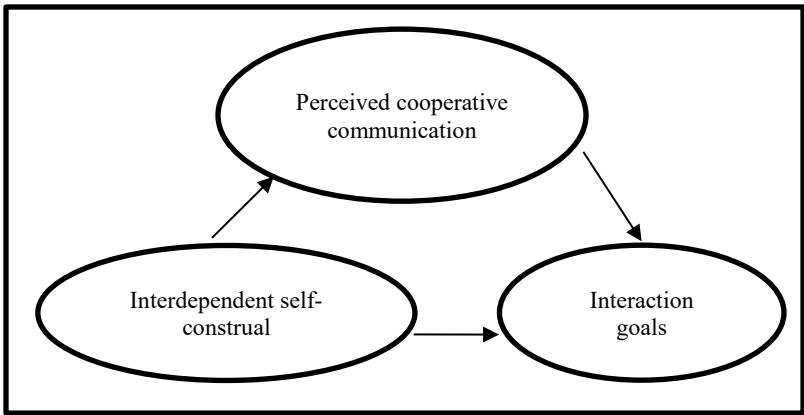


Figure 1: Perceived cooperative communication as a mediator between interdependent self-construal and interaction goals

Discussion

Various misunderstandings in negotiation may happen in the same culture (Peleckis, 2013). As negotiations without communication are unlikely to happen (Peleckis, 2013), the impact of perceived cooperative communication on international business negotiations is significant. The findings revealed that interdependent self-construal will not be able to reach interaction goals directly. This is due to the fact that cooperation from each party is necessary for both parties to have the opportunity to communicate and negotiate. For example, if only one party is allowed to talk and the other listens, there will be no cooperation. Cooperation communication can only happen if both parties have mutual benefits gained from both parties. In this case, Malaysian and Chinese business negotiators cannot achieve interaction goals if there is no cooperative communication. In addition, if both parties do not have the same goals, it is a waste of time to negotiate as both do not gain any mutual benefits.

This study agrees that interdependent self-construal has a relationship with perceived cooperative communication (H2). Even though there are limited past studies that support this hypothesis, the results of this study show that both variables have a positive relationship. Martin and Kitayama (1991) found a strong impact of interdependent self-construal on communication styles which support other-face and mutual-face concerns. Interdependent self-construal people tend to deal with conflict using other-face concerns to maintain harmony, while cooperative communication will be used to achieve harmony. Therefore, this article’s findings indicate a common communication breakdown that explains why people have different attitudes, values, and discrimination, especially if both

parties come from different cultures and nationalities. Ghauri (1983) supported this by indicating that a lack of understanding of the cultural needs and behaviour of different nationalities will cause difficulties during international business negotiations. It is noted that cooperative communication in a group is designed to facilitate cooperation to achieve the group's goals (Lee, 1997; 2001). Moreover, Tjosvold (2007) indicated cooperatives as collaborators who help each other to achieve goals and needs and build mutual trust. This proves that cooperative communication is one of the techniques that can encourage Malaysians and Chinese to work together towards achieving a common goal, producing better results with positive negotiation outcomes.

In previous studies, research on cooperative communication focused on workgroup goals (Bakar & Sheer, 2013), public health and nursing (Pilemer *et al.*, 2003), and enhancing interaction and cooperation between staff and families of patients in nursing home dementia programmes (Robison, Curry, Gruman, Porter, Henderson Jr., & Pillner, 2007). However, this study adds value to past studies by analysing how perceived cooperative communication can influence interaction goals in international business negotiations. Hypothesis H3 shows the direct effect of perceived cooperative communication on interaction goals, which shared similar results with a previous study conducted by Bakar and Sheer (2013) that indicated workgroup goals are significantly related to cooperative communication. The results implied that having clearer goals, trust, and cooperation would contribute to higher achievement outcomes between Malaysian and Chinese negotiators. Although cultural norms and interdependent self-construal are claimed to be important in the negotiation process (Caputo *et al.*, 2019), the findings show that they may not be the most important tools to reach a negotiation outcome alone.

In this study, perceived cooperative communication as a mediator, interdependent self-construal serves as an important technique that explains the influence of communication styles on interaction goals. These findings found a direct influence between individualism-collectivism and personal goals, communication styles, and face concerns. Negotiation goals are important (Okoro, 2012); thus, interdependent self-construal is needed to build relationships (Agrawal & Maheswaran, 2005). As mentioned by Bakar and Sheer (2013), cooperation means people use their power to reach goals, needs, mutual trust, and mutual helpfulness. However, no research has been conducted on perceived cooperative communication as a mediator. Thus, the findings of this study have proven that perceived cooperation communication mediates interdependent self-construal and interaction goals in Malaysia-China international business negotiations. In the context of Malaysia-China business negotiations, the negotiators from both countries can use their knowledge, share information, exchange goals, and share skills and capabilities to develop cooperative solutions that are acceptable for both parties to gain mutual benefits.

Practical Implications

Malaysian and Chinese business negotiators have been trading with each other for a long time. As a result, they have been business partners for many years. The findings of this study will attract international business negotiators, as it is useful knowledge and information for them. It is also a good reminder for those in the business industry to realise

the importance of culture and communication. In addition, this research indicates that without perceived cooperative communication in international business negotiations, interaction goals will never be able to be achieved. It is impossible to work alone in business, as we need to ask for help, work with others to solve problems and share strengths and information. As such, perceived cooperative communication impacts other parties' attitudes and responses during international business negotiations.

Limitations and Recommendations

One of the limitations of this study is that it is overrepresented by males (61.6%), which suggests the findings have a bias in the number of gender samples. Generally, business negotiators are usually males, but in future research, more female business negotiators should take part in the research to get more balanced findings, which will produce different results.

Secondly, this survey also adapted the measurement scale from past research. Some measurement items were picked during the item refinement process because these items did not measure the construct domain very well, and it may be that a similar study carried out in a different context might perhaps mean that different items are selected. Most of the items were deleted in the data cleaning process before the CFA, which might be a significant item to the overall model fit. Therefore, researchers should consider doing qualitative research by interviewing the respondents and observing how the business negotiation meetings are being conducted with permission recording to analyse their communication styles, negotiation styles, facial expressions, and behaviours for future research. This research method will add value to the present literature and provide a better understanding of how negotiation can meet the outcome.

Third, this research is concerned with how to reach international business negotiation outcomes for both Malaysians and Chinese. Still, as time has changed due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the way of doing business has transformed into digital trade and online business. Online business has been growing rapidly as travel is restricted to certain countries. Therefore, future research should focus on how digitization has changed the way business negotiators communicate and negotiate to reach a negotiation outcome. Adapting and leading in key areas such as digital adoption, digital entrepreneurship, and innovation will drive the nation's economic growth.

Conclusion

With the globalisation of the world economy, the number of companies going global has increased. These findings show strong evidence that perceived cooperative communication mediates the relationship between interdependent self-construal and interaction goals. It suggests the importance of perceived cooperative communication as a crucial factor that creates cooperative communication between international business negotiators. When both parties are from collectivist countries, their communication styles will be similar, and applying cooperative communication will influence the interaction goals in international business negotiations.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits or commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

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Appendix

List of Items Used in the Survey Questionnaire

A. Interdependent Self-Construal

1. Everyone in our group participated in this activity.
2. To resolve an issue, we voted and used the majority decision.
3. We showed positive attitudes towards one another.
4. I respect the decisions made by this group.
5. I was extremely satisfied with the group's outcomes.
6. I am confident that our performance during this activity was satisfactory.
7. We shared the work equally.
8. We used empathy among members.
9. We listened to each other.
10. I would stick with this group even through difficulties.
11. I was happy with the way our group interacted.
12. I have confidence in the members of my group.
13. The way our group related was appropriate.
14. All of our members were prepared.
15. When disagreements occurred, we worked together to resolve them.
16. I would stay in this group if they need me, even if I am not happy in the group.
17. I was happy with the way our group worked during this activity.
18. An atmosphere of trust exists in our group.
19. We showed encouragement to each other.
20. I respect the majority's wishes of this group.
21. My personal level of satisfaction with the group was high.
22. I would like to work with this group again.
23. One or two members tended to dominate the discussion.
24. Even though we didn't have a total agreement, we did reach a kind of consensus that we all accepted.
25. The other members were considerate.
26. I feel a sense of pride being a part of this group.

B. Perceived Cooperative Communication

1. Relevant information is exchanged openly among group members. In general, it is difficult to approach other group members.
2. Group members often criticise other members. (R)
3. Some individuals in the workgroup intentionally provide misleading information to other members. (R)
4. If disagreements arise, group members are usually able to solve them.
5. Workgroup members openly share their ideas with other group members.
6. Workgroup members often fail to communicate information to each other. (R)

C. Interaction Goals

1. I want to get a better deal than my business counterpart.
2. I want to make sure that the other business partner does not get a better deal than I do.
3. I want to reach an agreement that benefits me more than my business partner.
4. I want to achieve higher profit in this negotiation than my business partner.
5. I want to maximise the total benefit for both business partners.
6. I want to find a solution that meets both business partners' needs and concerns.
7. I want to make sure both business partners get what we want in the negotiation.
8. I want to make sure my business partner will not know my weaknesses.
9. I want to make sure my business partner will not know my bottom line.
10. I want to make sure I withhold information that will put me at a disadvantage.
11. I want to conceal the truth about problems in my proposal.
12. I want both parties to share information to find a mutually acceptable solution
13. I want both business partners to be open and honest about our needs.
14. I want both business partners to find common ground by sharing information about our goals.
15. I want to tell my business partner that he makes poor arguments that do not hold water.
16. I want to tell my business partner that his lack of compassion is annoying to me.
17. I want to tell my business partner that his lack of support let us down.
18. I want to tell my business partner that he keeps asking irrelevant (and stupid) questions.
19. I want to tell my business partner that he appears considerate and understanding.
20. I want to tell my business partner that he appears friendly and polite.
21. I want to tell my business partner that he appears sincere and trustworthy.
22. I want to tell my business partner that he is a competent negotiator.
23. I want to tell my business partner that he appears confident in the negotiation.
24. I want to convince my business partner that I can walk away from the negotiation if he does not meet my demands.

25. I want to convince my business partner that he needs me more than I need him.
26. I want to convince my business partner that he will not be able to get a better deal elsewhere.
27. I want to convince my business partner that I do not have to reach an agreement with him because I have other options to achieve my goals.
28. I want to establish a positive work relationship with my business partner in the negotiation.
29. I want to tell my business partner that I want to work with him in the future.
30. I want to tell my business partner that I care about our relationship.
31. I want to convince my business partner that we have a long term work relationship beyond this negotiation.