IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION CREATIVITY ON CUSTOMER ACQUISITION IN B2B MARKETING COMMUNICATION UNDER CROSS-BORDER CONTEXT

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PhD

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

This programme is jointly offered by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Xi’an Jiaotong University

2023

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Department of Management and Marketing

Xi'an Jiaotong University

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Impact of Communication Creativity on Customer Acquisition in B2B Marketing Communication under Cross-border Context

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2023

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

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Abstract

In the customer acquisition stage of B2B (business-to-business) transaction, suppliers' communication creativity in the B2B marketing communication is crucial for capturing customers' attention and differentiating themselves from competitors. Especially under cross-border context, when the suppliers and customers are from different institutional backgrounds and may not meet face-to-face, suppliers' communication creativity is particularly important. **However, in practice, suppliers' communication creativity does not always guarantee successful customer acquisition. Research on the effect of suppliers' communication creativity on customer acquisition is mixed.** Reasons are threefold. First, although previous research on communication creativity has categorized it into communication relevance and communication novelty, the differential effects of these two aspects have not been clearly elucidated. That confuses suppliers about what to focus on when intending to attract customers' attention. Second, information processing theory suggests that customer cognitive response plays a key role between communication message and customer feedback. However, current research fails to provide a concrete understanding of the underlying mechanisms between communication creativity and customer acquisition. It is not yet clear how customers, as the subjects of information processing, will respond to these two dimensions of communication creativity. Third, it is unclear how the B2B marketing communication process is influenced by institutional constraints under cross-border context.

To fill these research gaps, based on communication creativity research, signaling theory, information processing theory, and institutional theory, this research proposes the key research question: **in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, how will two dimensions of communication creativity of supplier influence its customer acquisition?** To answer the research question, first, this research investigates the role of communication relevance and communication novelty on supplier's customer acquisition, based on signaling theory. Second, to understand how customers respond to different types of creative communication message, this research investigates the mediating roles of two types of customer cognitive response (customer learning and risk evaluation) between communication creativity and customer acquisition based on information processing theory. Third, this research investigates the moderating roles of a formal institutional constraint (government effectiveness distance) and an informal institutional constraint (trade reference) on the impact of customer cognitive response on customer acquisition, based on institutional theory. Based on the analysis of survey data collected from 195 B2B customers from electronics manufacturing industry and secondary index from the World Bank, 16 of the 19

hypotheses of this research were supported. By answering three research questions proposed above, this research aims to make three theoretical contributions.

First, based on communication creativity research, this research classifies two dimensions of communication creativity (communication relevance and communication novelty), and uses signaling theory to reveal and explain their distinct roles on supplier's customer acquisition. By doing so, this research reconciles the mixed findings in prior research about the role of communication creativity.

Previous research drew mixed conclusions regarding how communication creativity leads to supplier's customer acquisition. Although previous communication creativity research has classified communication creativity into communication relevance and communication novelty, empirical evidence failed to reveal their distinct roles and still regarded communication creativity as a unified construct for investigation. Given the variations in how communication relevance and communication novelty are defined and demonstrated, a potential approach to address the previous mixed findings thus far is to categorize and explore these two of communication creativity separately. By using signaling theory to reveal the distinct effects of communication relevance and communication novelty, this research finds that suppliers' communication relevance is positively related to customer acquisition, but communication novelty does not significantly influence customer acquisition. Communication relevance and communication novelty have a positive interacting effect on customer acquisition. The distinct effects delineate the necessity to classify and examine two dimensions of communication creativity. That helps reconcile the mixed relationship between communication creativity and customer acquisition, and provide managerial implications for suppliers in the customer acquisition stage. Moreover, the application of signaling theory enhances the theoretical foundation of communication creativity research, and broadens the theoretical application of signaling theory.

Second, by introducing information processing theory and investigating the distinct mediating roles of two types of customer cognitive response (customer learning and risk evaluation) in the relationship between communication creativity and customer acquisition, this research clarifies the underlying mechanism by which communication creativity influences customer acquisition, and also addresses the limitation of signaling theory in providing insufficient explanation in customer information processing.

Signaling theory explains how communication creativity affects customer acquisition from suppliers' perspective as signal senders, but fails to reveal customers cognitive response from customers' perspective. Information processing theory states that customer cognitive response of the information processing influences how customers perceive suppliers' communication message and make purchase decision. Based on information processing theory and characteristics of B2B transactions, this research introduces and examines two types of customer cognitive response (customer learning and risk evaluation) as underlying mechanisms in the link between communication creativity and customer acquisition. The findings indicate that communication relevance and communication novelty can increase customer learning, but communication novelty also increases customer's risk evaluation. Customer learning has a stronger mediating role than that of risk evaluation. The findings enrich the understanding on the underlying mechanism between communication creativity and customer acquisition. By integrating information processing theory with signaling theory, this research is able to comprehensively explain suppliers' communication message signals sending and customers' information processing simultaneously, and make up for the lack of signaling theory in explaining the role of communication creativity in customer acquisition.

Third, by investigating how formal (government effectiveness distance) and informal (trade reference) institutional constraints moderate the B2B marketing communication process under cross-border context, this research reveals the boundary conditions under which customer cognitive response influences customer acquisition. Moreover, the findings echo scholars' call on investigating formal and informal institutional constraints simultaneously under cross-border context.

In the cross-border B2B marketing communication where suppliers and customers are from different institutional backgrounds, the influence of formal institutional constraint and informal institutional constraints are important. However, current cross-border business literature has widely investigated the role of formal institutional constraints guaranteed by governments, but seldomly paid attention to the role of informal institutional constraints provided by business networks. Based on institutional theory, this research introduces a formal institutional constraint (government effectiveness distance) and an informal institutional constraint (trade reference) into the framework. The findings show that a high government effectiveness distance alleviates the positive effect of customer learning on customer acquisition. A high level of trade reference strengthens the positive effect of customer learning, and mitigates the negative role of risk evaluation on customer acquisition. Therefore, this research adds empirical evidence on boundary conditions on how customer cognitive response influences customer acquisition. Moreover, the findings enrich institutional theory by clarifying the moderating effects of both formal and informal institutional constraints under this research context.

Keywords: B2B marketing communication; Communication creativity; Signaling theory; Information processing theory; Institutional theory; Customer acquisition

Acknowledgements

Finally, I have now arrived at the final stage of my doctoral journey! I am grateful for the abundant care, support, and assistance I have received throughout this amazing journey.

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my doctoral supervisor at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Prof. Flora Fang Gu. Prof. Gu has provided me with unwavering support. She supported me to attend academic conferences, guided my working papers word by word, provided me with data support, offered me opportunities to collaborate with other excellent scholars, and cared about my career development. I feel so lucky and proud to be her student. There are no words that can fully express my gratitude. Prof. Gu is my role model! I will strive for excellence in my future academic career and work hard to become a responsible marketing scholar, living up to her expectations.

My deepest gratitude also goes to my doctoral supervisor at Xi’an Jiaotong University, Prof. Guijun Zhuang. Thanks to Prof. Zhuang for providing me with the opportunity to be his student. Prof. Zhuang is noted for his meticulous scholarship and erudite in knowledge. He always provides valuable guidance and suggestions for my research direction and thesis writing when I am puzzled. During my job search phase, he also selflessly provided valuable assistance to me. Prof. Zhuang is generous and cheerful. His enlightened attitude towards life has always motivated me to become a passionate person.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Longwei Wang. He was the first professor who led me, a non-management major student, into the field of management and taught me how to do academic research. Dr. Wang always helped and encouraged me with greatest patience, which enabled me to persist in the face of repeated setbacks. I also greatly appreciate Prof. Xiaolian Zhou, Prof. En Xie, Prof. Zelong Wei, Prof. Jianjun Yang, Prof. Yaqun Yi, Prof. Chengli Shu, Prof. Zhongfeng Su, Prof. Shanxing Gao, Prof. Xu Jiang, Dr. Lei Tao, Prof. Xin Xu, Prof. Kimmy Chan, Dr. Xu Zheng, Dr. Fanni Fine Leung, Dr. Dai Yao, Dr. Xubing Zhang, and Dr. Qiyuan Wang. It is their selfless help that has enabled me to keep improving.

Thanks to my good friends and coauthors, Dr. Meng Wang, Miss. Angela Gao and Miss. Jocelyn Cao. I will never forget every challenging moment we went through and every joyful moment we shared together. Thanks to fellow students in my research groups at Xi’an Jiaotong University. Mr. Li Wang taught me about research methods. Dr. Wang Chen provided me with encouragement to confront the challenges of academic research boldly. Mr. Sihan Li helped me solve many difficulties. Dr. Shujin Lin, Dr. Chao Feng, Dr. Xingyu Zhao, Dr. Tingyu Lu and Miss. Qi Deng provided valuable suggestions for my thesis. I also sincerely thank Miss. Meige Song, Miss. Yiyun Zhang, Mr. Xiaodong Li, Miss. Wenjun Wang, Miss. Ying Han, Miss. Ruqi Li, Mr. Bin Dong, Mr. Yong He, Miss. Jianqi Liu, for their help in my doctoral journey. Thanks to my friends Dr. Siyu Shi, Miss. Liwen Zhao, Miss. Wei Sun, Dr. Cheng Deng, Miss. Kexin Xu, Miss. Zhenli Feng, Mr. Chenggang Duan, Miss. Mingzhu Li, Miss. Yunhui Wang, Mr. Ruijie Jin, Dr. Yi Liu, Mr. Zeyu Sun, Mr. Han Wu, Miss. Yanran Xie, Mr, Zijie Jiang, Miss. Junze Wang, Miss. Zi Li, Miss. Yang Jing and Miss. Wei Zhang. I am forever grateful for the valuable friendship and companionship that my friends have given me.

My special and sincere gratitude goes to Miss. Yanli Xu. Without her generous support in resources and manpower, I would not have been able to collect the data for my thesis successfully.

Last but not least, I would like to express my deepest love and appreciation to my parents, my sister, and my brother. It is because of their unconditional love and support that I was able to pursue my PhD studies without any worries. I am also grateful for the companionship of my adorable puppy Qiangqiang and my lovely kitten Miaomiao. Their innocent gaze and warm presence have been a powerful remedy for all my worries. Finally, my heartfelt gratitude goes to my BEST friend and partner, Mr. Zhuoran Zhao. We will create and experience the incredible future together.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Suppliers' communication creativity is critical to attract and acquire customers in B2B marketing communication (Cortez et al., 2020; Eagle et al., 2021). Communication creativity is defined as the use of original, creative, and meaningful communication message during the communication process (Amabile, 1996; Burroughs et al., 2011). According to Deloitte's 2023 Global Marketing Trends Report, suppliers are increasingly focusing on utilizing communication creativity to enhance their brand advertising and customer acquisition. That is even more important under the current cross-border B2B marketing communication landscape. When suppliers and customers may not meet face-to-face and are situated in different institutional backgrounds (Adamson, 2022; Narus, 2015), suppliers' B2B marketing communication starts with the unilateral communication message, and relies heavily on the communication creativity to obtain customers' response and acquire customers (Batra & Keller, 2016; Eagle et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). However, the current research results on communication creativity are mixed regarding the impact of communication creativity on customer acquisition (Ang et al., 2014; Baack et al., 2016; Reinartz & Saffert, 2013). A refined analysis on the underlying mechanisms by which communication creativity influences customer acquisition is necessary to reconcile the inconsistencies in previous research and to provide more effective practical implications for suppliers to enhance customer acquisition.

Previous communication creativity has distinguished two dimensions of communication creativity, namely, communication relevance and communication novelty. These two types of communication creativity have also been applied to practice of B2B marketing communication. Communication relevance pertains to how the information is related and useful to the customer (Mishra et al., 1993). This type of creative communication message is closely aligned with products and services customers need, also expresses supplier's professional knowledge in product technology and application (Smith & Yang, 2004). A study conducted by HubSpot revealed that email campaigns which are highly relevant to customers tend to have greater open rates, click-through rates, and responses. The 2020 B2B Buyer Behavior Study released by Demand Gen Report also indicated that 40% of B2B marketers believe that offering customers relevant information is deemed one of the most effective methods of attracting them. Whereas, communication novelty refers to the extent to which the information is new and unique (Sethi et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2020). As per the 2019 B2B Marketing Mix Report by Accenture, novel communication message has the potential to elevate brand image, increase brand awareness, and boost customer loyalty. Additionally, a study conducted by Invesp suggested that the utilization of novelty as an assessment criterion for communication effectiveness can result in a 26% increase in communication conversion rates.

Although previous research shed important lights on the positive roles of communication creativity and its two dimensions in fostering customers' positive attitudes towards brands (Zinkhan, 1993) and attracting customers' attention (Ang et al., 2014; Billore et al., 2020), research on the effect of suppliers' communication creativity on customer acquisition in B2B marketing communication is mixed. Some studies argued that communication creativity in the B2B marketing communication can promote customers' information-seeking towards suppliers, and finally lead to successful customer acquisition (Baack et al., 2016; Levin et al., 2016). However, some scholars argued that communication creativity can make customers' purchase task and selection process more complex (Reinartz & Saffert, 2013). If customers cannot fully understand and assimilate suppliers' creative communication message, they will not form strong impression on suppliers' offering (MacInnis et al., 2002). Customer acquisition in B2B marketing communication is a complex process, involving large amounts of money and quantity, multiple decision-makers, and customization activities (Swani et al., 2020). Bargaining and negotiating about technical details, price, delivery, and payment issues can take substantial time, often lasting months or even years (Grewal et al., 2015). Suppliers also need to compete with a large number of peers for limited customer resources (Yoon et al., 2021). Especially under cross-border context, suppliers' customer acquisition process relies mostly on textual communication message without face-to-face meetings, and may encounter institutional differences (Lesscher et al., 2021; Köhler et al., 2017; Sheng et al., 2018). In these cases, how can suppliers leverage communication creativity to increase their customer acquisition? To provide a deeper understanding on the impact of communication creativity on customer acquisition, this research identifies three research gaps that warrant further investigation.

First, the impact of the two dimensions of communication creativity (communication relevance and communication novelty) on suppliers' customer acquisition has not been clearly elucidated.

Previous research on communication creativity has categorized it into two dimensions: communication relevance and communication novelty. However, in both theoretical explanations and empirical investigations, scholars have still predominantly treated communication creativity as a single construct. As a result, there has been a lack of investigation into whether these two dimensions have distinguished impacts on customer acquisition (Ang et al., 2014; Billore et al., 2020; Zinkhan, 1993). Signaling theory states that when there is information asymmetry, firms can determine which signal to send to showcase its qualification and strengths compared with competitors (Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973). In the customer acquisition stage in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, communication relevance and communication may represent different types of suppliers' signals and may have different impacts. On the one hand, customers are experiencing information overload and plain relevant information is easily ignored (Adamson, 2022; Yoon et al., 2021). The supplier who sends novel communication message may be more likely to arouse customers' curiosity and attention, thereby standing out from competitors. On the other hand, in B2B transactions, efficiency and rationality are highly valued, and multiple decision-makers are often involved (Swani et al., 2020). Relevant communication message may be more easily understood by customers, more aligned with their needs, more meaningful to them, and ultimately making it easier for customers to choose. In this case, novel communication message may not catch customers' attention because it may not meet customers' instant needs. In situations of information overload and limited time, novel communication message may be too abstract for customers to comprehend and be disregarded altogether. Faced with such a contradictory situation, the current communication creativity research fails to provide concrete empirical evidence on which dimension of communication creativity should suppliers focus on when attempting to acquire customers. Therefore, it is necessary to determine whether communication relevance or communication novelty is more effective in promoting customer acquisition. The answer to this question can be a way to reconcile the current inconsistency regarding the relationship between communication creativity and customer acquisition.

Second, the underlying mechanism between communication creativity and customer acquisition has not been uncovered. It is unclear how customers will respond to different types of communication creativity.

Signal theory analyzes how two dimensions of communication creativity influence customer acquisition from suppliers' perspective, but it fails to effectively explain customer cognitive response upon receiving these signals. According to information processing theory, in B2B marketing communication, when receiving suppliers' communication message, customers are motivated to generate cognitive response in the information processing to lower down their uncertainty and equivocality (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978; Wang et al., 2016). Customer cognitive response will have an impact on the customer's final purchase decision

(Cortez et al., 2020). Therefore, customer cognitive response can be regarded as an underlying mechanism between suppliers' communication creativity and customer acquisition (Gilliland & Johnston, 1997). However, previous research did not clarify how two dimensions of communication creativity influence customer cognitive response, and thus influence customer acquisition. This could be another reason of the mixed findings between communication creativity and customer acquisition.

In the supplier selection of B2B transaction, customers' uncertainty and equivocality in the information processing manifest in two aspects, and are corresponding to two types of customer cognitive response. The first aspect is to evaluate whether the supplier's offering fits their needs. In this aspect, customer learning, which refers to the customer's searching and learning behaviors towards the supplier (Bonney et al., 2022; Meuter et al., 2005), represents the customer cognitive response when the customer is interested in the supplier and perceives the supplier have potential to meet their needs (Cortez et al., 2020). In the current B2B market, customers are not digital novices, with 94% conducting online research before making purchasing decisions (Fiore & Schneider, 2016; Homburg et al., 2012). That is regarded as an effective way for customers to evaluate whether the supplier's offering is suitable for them. The second aspect is to evaluate the risk involves in the purchase (Hada et al., 2014; Huang et al., 2008). In this aspect, risk evaluation, which is defined as the customer's evaluation on the loss and risk when considering purchasing from the supplier (Gao et al., 2012), represents another customer cognitive response to figure out whether the purchase is risky. Faced with complex purchase task, customers can mainly rely on suppliers' communication message to evaluate the suppliers' reliability. This poses significant risks to the communication process and hinder the supplier's customer acquisition. Given the B2B transaction characteristics, customer learning and risk evaluation are two types of customer cognitive response in the information processing. However, previous research failed to reveal their roles in the link between communication creativity and customer acquisition. The absence of research can result in suppliers being unsure of how to effectively use communication creativity, which may lead to low customer acquisition rate. The mediating effects of customer cognitive response on the link between communication creativity and customer acquisition needs further investigation.

Third, there is a lack of clarity on how institutional constraints influence the cross-border B2B marketing communication.

Under cross-border context, the insufficient investigation on cross-border institutional constraints between the supplier and the customer can be another leading factor of the inconsistencies between communication creativity and customer acquisition. According to institutional theory, firms' behaviors and interfirm relationships with partners are influenced by institutional constraints, including formal and informal (North, 1990; Peng, 2002). Formal institutional constraints refer to government policies, laws and regulations, judicial decisions, and economic contracts that govern the behavior of firms. These factors are regulated by the country, the government, and other official institutions. Informal institutional constraints include social norms and ethics, customs, and culture. These factors are not regulated by the government, but emerge from social activities and business networks. Within business networks, informal institutional constraints that influence firms' behavior include business network norms, reputation, business ethics, and relational norms (Cao & Lumineau, 2015; Polidoro et al., 2011). In the cross-border B2B market, institutional constraints are key factors that influence how cross-border customers select suppliers and how they govern the cooperation (Campbell et al., 2012; Li et al., 2010). For example, agricultural suppliers from Southeast Asian countries face payment problems when engaging in cross-border transactions because their payment methods are not compatible with those used by their customers' countries. Indian IT service providers struggle in the European market as European customers have reservations about the significant differences in legal systems between India and Europe.

Prior studies on cross-border B2B transactions mostly examined the impact of formal institutional constraints provided by governments. Government effectiveness, defined as the efficiency and quality of public services enabled by the government, is a key formal institutional constraint that has a critical influence on the import and export of products in cross-border B2B transactions (Kaufmann et al., 2011). Previous research has investigated how government effectiveness influences firms' new market entry, cross-border mergers and acquisitions, and cross-border interfirm relationship governance (Sheng et al., 2011; Zhou & Xu, 2012). Firms exhibit varying attitudes towards the government and its officials depending on the specific government regulations and legal systems in which they operate (Deng & Yang, 2015). Therefore, when the government effectiveness distance between the supplier's and the customer's countries is large, their cross-border B2B transactions can be influenced.

In addition to formal institutional constraints, informal institutional constraints provided by the business network are also crucial in facilitating cross-border B2B transactions. Without face-to-face meeting, cross-border B2B transactions face numerous risks. In such cases, customers often turn to the business network for assistance and seek trade reference about suppliers. Trade reference refers to the extent to which the customer can obtain this supplier’s reputation, capabilities and experience from the supplier’s previous customers, peers and industrial association (Boyd et al., 2023). As a reputation-based informal institutional constraint provided by the business network, trade reference is prevalent in B2B transactions (Jalkala & Salminen, 2010). Although trade reference is crucial for the supplier to build good reputation and obtain more customers (Tóth et al., 2020), previous studies have often overlooked its roles as an informal institutional constraint in the cross-border context. Scholars called for more relevant research in this area (Boddewyn & Peng, 2021).

In B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, clarifying the contextual roles of government effectiveness distance and trade reference, as formal institutional constraint and informal institutional constraints, is crucial for practitioners to understand how to successfully achieve customer acquisition using communication creativity. However, the relevant empirical evidence is in lack and needs further investigation.

1.2. Research Questions

Suppliers are increasingly realizing the significance of using communication creativity to acquire customers. However, inconsistent findings in previous research have confused scholars and practitioners in concretely analyzing the effect of communication creativity on customer acquisition. How a supplier’s two dimensions of communication creativity (communication relevance and communication novelty) influence customer acquisition in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context remains unexplored. Additionally, although customer cognitive response is crucial in the information processing and B2B purchase decision-making process, it is unclear what role can customer cognitive response play between communication creativity and customer acquisition. Moreover, how can institutional constraints under cross-border context influence the customer acquisition of B2B marketing communication also require further investigation.

According to the research background, this research seeks to solve the key research question: **in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, how will two dimensions of communication creativity of supplier influence its customer acquisition?** To achieve this, the research proposes three specific research questions:

First, in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, how can supplier’s two dimensions of communication creativity (communication relevance and communication novelty) influence customer acquisition?

Although previous communication creativity research has distinguished communication creativity into communication relevance and communication novelty, how these two dimensions influence customer acquisition differently is not clear (Ang et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2016; Lehnert et al., 2014). That inhibits scholars and practitioners from understanding the role of communication creativity precisely. To fill this gap, this research follows previous communication creativity research and distinguishes communication creativity into communication relevance and communication novelty. Base on the B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, this research examines the effects of these two dimensions on customer acquisition using signaling theory. Communication relevance emphasizes that communication messages should be closely related to the customer's business scope and current needs, and should be useful and appropriate (Mishra et al. 1993). Communication novelty refers to communication messages that are novel and different from other suppliers' messages, reflecting the supplier's knowledge of market and technology trends (Sethi et al. 2012; Wang et al., 2020). In the customer acquisition stage when the supplier and the customer are not yet familiar with each other, and the supplier has to compete with multiple competitors to gain customers' attention, will communication relevance and communication novelty have different effects on a supplier's customer acquisition? This question needs to be solved to reconcile the mixed results regarding the impact of communication creativity on customer acquisition. It can also provide clear guidance to suppliers in the customer acquisition stage.

Second, can two types of customer cognitive response (customer learning and risk evaluation) mediate the relationship between two dimensions of communication creativity and customer acquisition? Is there a difference in the mediating role of customer learning and risk evaluation?

Information processing theory states that customer cognitive response is critical in the link between a supplier's offering and its customer acquisition, that is, the customer's purchase intention (Cortez et al., 2020; Flint & Woodruff, 2001). Therefore, understanding and leveraging the effects of two dimensions of communication creativity on customer cognitive response may increase the supplier's customer acquisition. However, empirical evidence regarding this question is in lack. To fill this research gap, based on information processing theory, this research identifies two types of customer cognitive response (customer learning and risk evaluation) to reflect the customer's responses to evaluate the suitableness of the supplier's offering and the risk of the purchase. The research investigates how two dimensions of communication creativity (communication relevance and communication novelty) influence customer learning and risk evaluation, and how these two factors affect customer acquisition. Additionally, the research aims to determine whether customer learning and risk evaluation can mediate the relationship between two dimensions of communication creativity and customer acquisition, and whether the mediating roles are different. Clarifying these issues helps to address the shortcomings of signaling theory in explaining customer information processing and cognitive response. It provides a more concrete understanding of the influence of customer cognitive response in customer acquisition, and further enriches empirical evidence on the underlying mechanism between communication creativity and customer acquisition.

Third, how do institutional constraints (formal vs. informal) affect the customer acquisition in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context?

Institutional theory suggests that interfirm relationships, especially under cross-border context, are strongly affected by formal and informal institutional constraints (North, 1990; Peng, 2002). In customer acquisition stage in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, there is an absence of a formal contract or established relational norms between the customer and the supplier. The customer can mainly rely on external institutional constraints to determine the reliability of the supplier to safeguard the transaction and cooperation (Kaufmann et al., 2011). In these cases, the institutional constraints that impact customers' considerations regarding supplier selection and cooperation governance are twofold. The first aspect pertains to government-related factors, primarily exerting its influence on cross-border B2B transactions and legal enforceability (Sheng et al., 2018). The second aspect encompasses business network-related factors, furnishing customers with insights into the supplier's background. Furthermore, it enables customers to disseminate information regarding supplier opportunistic actions in case of rights violations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; North, 1990; Scott, 1995). To better clarify the effects of communication creativity and customer cognitive response on customer acquisition, understanding how institutional constraints enabled by the government and the business network affect the B2B marketing communication as contextual factors is necessary. Therefore, this research identifies government effectiveness distance to represent formal institutional constraint provided by governments, and trade reference as an informal institutional constraint enabled by the business network, and examines their moderating roles in the link between customer cognitive response and customer acquisition. By clarifying how these institutional constraints affect customers' concerns about safeguarding the transaction, scholars and practitioners can better tailor their communication creativity of the communication message to acquire customers from different institutional backgrounds.

1.3. Theoretical Contributions

By answering three research questions proposed above, this research aims to make three theoretical contributions.

First, by examining the distinct roles of communication relevance and communication novelty in the customer acquisition in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, this research reconciles the conflicting conclusions of prior research on the role of communication creativity (Ang et al., 2014; Baack et al., 2016; Reinartz & Saffert, 2013). The application of signaling theory also enriches the theoretical foundations of communication creativity research. While communication creativity is one of the fundamental elements in B2B marketing communication and is crucial for attracting customers' interests (Billore et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2016), scholars and practitioners have not fully understood its role in customer acquisition. Previous research differentiated communication creativity into communication relevance and communication novelty (Ang et al., 2007; Smith & Yang, 2004), but failed to clarify whether communication relevance and communication novelty have different effects in acquiring customers. In the customer acquisition stage under cross-border context, as global supply chains become increasingly competitive, customers are dealing with an excessive amount of information from numerous suppliers on a daily basis (Adamson, 2022; Yoon et al., 2021). It creates difficulties for customers in selecting the most valuable information for their firms. Consequently, suppliers are facing great challenge of capturing customers' interests and response through communication message. Current empirical evidence does not clearly indicate whether relevant or novel communication message is more effective in attracting customer attention and ultimately increasing the supplier's customer acquisition rate. To respond to controversy on effect of communication creativity in previous research, this research investigates how two dimensions of communication creativity (relevance and novelty) influence customer acquisition differently using signaling theory in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context. In doing so, this research contributes to communication creativity research by determining the most effective creative communication message for customer acquisition. Additionally, the findings also provide practical guidance to suppliers who aim to acquire new B2B customers through B2B marketing communication.

Second, by investigating the mediating roles of two types of customer cognitive response (customer learning and risk evaluation) in the link between communication creativity and customer acquisition, this research enhances the understanding of the underlying mechanisms in the above relationship. While literature on information process theory has acknowledged that customer cognitive response on suppliers' offerings influences the final purchase decision-making process, it remains unclear about the specific role of customer cognitive response in the customer acquisition stage. This has prevented scholars and practitioners from analyzing the effect of communication creativity on customer acquisition deeply. By examining and revealing distinct mediating effects of customer learning and risk evaluation, this research enriches the understanding of the underlying mechanisms in communication creativity research. Additionally, by introducing information processing theory into the framework, this research integrates and investigates the supplier's signal sending and the customer's information processing in one framework. That makes up for the deficiency of signal theory in explaining the effect of two dimensions of communication creativity on customer acquisition.

Third, by investigating how formal (government effectiveness distance) and informal (trade reference) institutional constraints moderate the cross-border B2B marketing communication process, this research adds empirical evidence on the boundary conditions in which customer cognitive response influence customer acquisition. The research findings also echo scholars' call on investigating formal and informal institutional constraints simultaneously under cross-border context. The current international business literature widely investigated the role of formal institutional constraints guaranteed by governments in firm's new market entry, cross-border mergers and acquisitions, and interfirm relationship governance (Chao et al., 2010; Peng, 2002). However, limited attention has been paid to informal institutional constraints under cross-border context (Boddewyn & Peng, 2021). In the cross-border B2B transaction context where suppliers and customers are from different institutional backgrounds, the impact of formal and informal institutional constraints are both important. Based on institutional theory, this research introduces a formal institutional constraint (government effectiveness distance) generated by the government and an informal institutional constraint (trade reference) generated by the business network into the framework. By revealing the distinct moderating roles of government effectiveness distance and trade reference, this research is able to enrich institutional theory by clarifying the effects of formal and informal institutional constraints in customer acquisition stage in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context. The findings also provide practical implications to suppliers when they communicate with customers from different institutional backgrounds.

1.4. Practical Implications

This research suggests three practical implications for suppliers in the customer acquisition stage in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context.

First, in the customer acquisition stage of cross-border B2B marketing communication, suppliers need to understand the distinct roles of two dimensions of communication creativity. Designing an effective customer acquisition campaign can be costly and complex, especially considering the vast amount of communication messages customers receive from suppliers every day. To stand out from the competition, suppliers must know what type of creative communication message is better able to attract customers' attention. Suppliers should send communication message that is relevant to target customers' current expressed needs, so as to make customers feel attractive, valuable, authentic, and reliable. Novel communication message is not as effective as relevant communication message because it may make customers feel too complex to understand, and may induce customers' high level of risk evaluation.

Second, in the cross-border B2B marketing communication process, customer cognitive response plays a crucial role. Although B2B transactions emphasize high efficiency, customers may find it difficult to select the most appropriate supplier due to the overwhelming amount of information available. Evaluating and communicating with one supplier can take up a lot of time and effort, potentially leading to a situation where the customer does not have enough time to evaluate other potential suppliers. To address this issue, suppliers need to catch the customer's attention and encourage them to devote more time and effort to their business. By encouraging the customer to search and learn more about their business, suppliers can increase the customer's relationship-specific investment in their business. This can ultimately lead to successful customer acquisition in cross-border B2B marketing communication.

Third, under cross-border context, suppliers need to know about the impact of both formal and informal institutional constraints on B2B marketing communication. The legal systems and government effectiveness between the supplier's and the customer's countries can be vastly different, which can affect the stability and reliability of the transaction process. To address the customer's concerns about cross-border cooperation governance, suppliers should provide trade reference information to the customer. This information should include evaluations from previous customers, industry associations, and other stakeholders about the supplier's cooperation experience, capabilities, and reputation. By doing so, the supplier can provide the customer with a reputation-based informal institutional constraint that assures the customer of the supplier's reliability and the feasibility of the transaction. This can ultimately lead to suppliers' success in increasing customer trust and customer acquisition.

1.5. Research Approach, Research Methodology, and Research Structure

1.5.1. Research Approach

The key research question is: in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, how will two dimensions of communication creativity of supplier influence its customer acquisition? To address this question, this research follows the research approach as below.

First, based on communication creativity research, this research classifies two dimensions of communication creativity, namely, communication relevance and communication novelty, into the model. The author aims to investigate the influence of communication relevance, communication novelty, and their interacting effect, on customer acquisition, based on signaling theory.

Second, based on information processing theory, this research introduces two types of customer cognitive response, namely, customer learning and risk evaluation into the model, and investigates their mediating effects in the link between communication creativity and customer acquisition.

Third, based on institutional theory, this research introduces government effectiveness distance and trade reference as formal and informal institutional constraints into the model. The author aims to investigate how these institutional constraints moderate the effect of customer cognitive response on customer acquisition.

Fourth, this research aims to use questionnaire data collected from the cross-border B2B customers combined with secondary data and use various empirical test methods to examine the theoretical model.

Finally, according to the empirical results, this research aims to conclude findings of the theoretical model, summarize the theoretical contributions and practical implications. Then this research aims to point out the limitations and future research directions.

1.5.2. Research Methodology

To better solve the research questions and fill gaps, this research combines qualitative research method and quantitative research method.

First, qualitative research method. The author systematically reviews literature on B2B marketing communication, communication creativity research, signaling theory, information processing theory, and institutional theory. According to literature review, the author concludes the key research gaps in the previous literature. To fill the research gaps, the author proposes the research questions, establishes the theoretical model and hypotheses. Based on communication creativity research and signaling theory, the author investigates the effects of two dimensions of communication creativity of message on the supplier’s customer acquisition. Then the author investigates the mediating roles of customer cognitive response based on information processing theory. Finally, the author investigates the moderating roles of formal and informal institutional factors according to institutional theory.

Second, quantitative research method. The author uses survey and secondary data to test the hypotheses. Based on literature review, the author proposes hypotheses of this research. Adapted from mature scales in previous literature, the author develops measures of constructs involved in the research, including communication relevance, communication novelty, customer learning, risk evaluation, customer acquisition, trade reference. Secondary data was used to measure government effectiveness distance. This research conducted pilot study to verify the validity of the questionnaire. According to the results, the author revised and finalized the questionnaire. Then this research conducted formal survey and obtained data from cross-border B2B customers in the electronics manufacturing industry. Finally, based on the questionnaire data and combine with secondary data, this research tested the hypotheses using various quantitative methods including path analysis, hierarchical regression and bootstrapping approaches.

1.5.3. Research Structure

This research has six chapters.

Chapter One is introduction of this research. It includes research background, research questions, potential contributions, research approach, research methodology and research structure.

Chapter Two is literature review. Literature and theories related to constructs in the theoretical framework, including B2B marketing communication, communication creativity research, signaling theory, information processing theory, customer acquisition and institutional theory. Research gaps of the previous literature and theories are summarized.

Chapter Three is theoretical model and hypothesis development. First, the definitions of research constructs of the research are clarified. Second, the theoretical foundations of this research are explained, formation of the conceptual model is presented. Third, the author explains hypotheses and thoroughly explains the relationships between constructs.

Chapter Four is research design and methodology. The author presents the sample and data collection process, including survey background and research context, questionnaire design, data collection process. Basic characteristics of data and nonresponse bias are also tested and presented. Then the author presents the measures of each construct in the research.

Chapter Fiver is data analysis. First, the author examines the reliability and validity of the data. A series of methods are adopted to detect the influence of common method bias. Second, the author adopts path analysis, hierarchical regression and bootstrapping approaches in AMOS, SPSS and PROCESS to test the hypotheses. Third, the author adopts 2SLS method and common method variance method to verify the robustness of the empirical results.

Chapter Six is discussion and conclusion. Based on the results narrated in Chapter Five, the author summarizes the relationship between constructs in detail. Furthermore, the author summarizes the theoretical contributions and practical implications. Finally, the author concludes the limitations of this research and point out the future research directions.

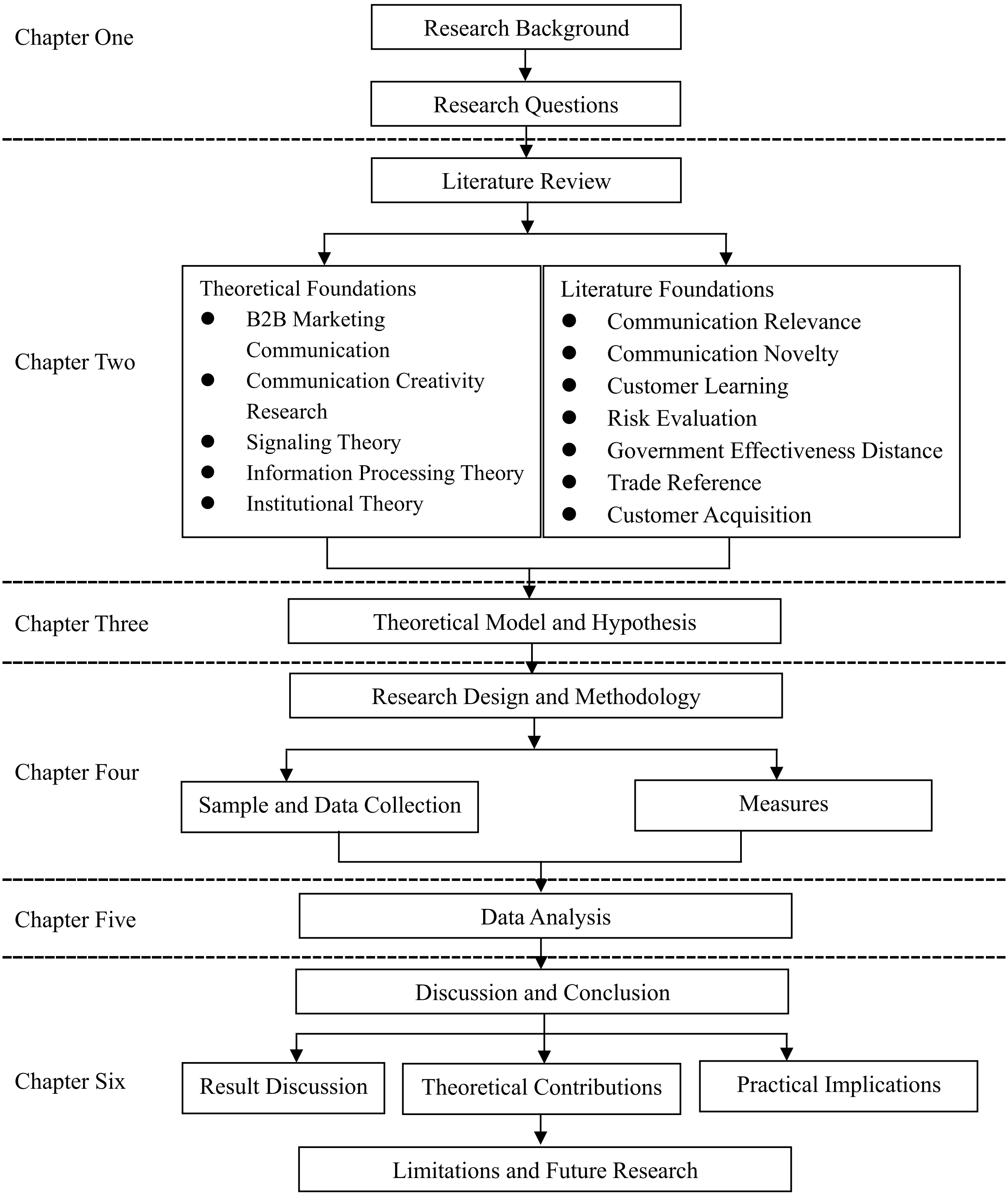


Figure 1-1. Research Structure

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. B2B Marketing Communication

2.1.1. Definition and Current Research on B2B Marketing Communication

1) Definition of B2B Marketing Communication

In marketing research field, marketing communication encompasses the process of gathering information and making decisions in a sequential manner, establishing a connection between all components of the communication mix (Ray, 1973). It can be regarded as the process in which the supplier information is provided and the customer need is expressed (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Frazier & Summers, 1984). In a broad sense, marketing communication involves a range of communication formats, such as promotion, personal selling, advertising, packaging, direct mail, product sampling, publicity and public relations. These activities run through almost every aspect of marketing. In terms of communication channel, there are online marketing communication and offline marketing communication. B2B marketing communication refers to business suppliers and customers' communication through various communication channels (Shankar et al., 2022). Examples of B2B marketing communication include offline face-to-face meeting, conference, industrial exhibition, online third-party B2B transaction platform and social media.

2) Current Research on B2B Marketing Communication

As shown in Table 2-1, previous research has pointed out multiple advantages of B2B marketing communication. In terms of relational outcomes, B2B marketing communication enhances customer loyalty and long-term orientation (Bill et al., 2020; Rose et al., 2021), increases relationship satisfaction (Hossain & Chonko, 2018; Murphy & Sashi, 2018), increases customers' perceived value of brand (Narayanan et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2018), and promotes mutual understanding between suppliers and customers (Arnett et al., 2021). In terms of economic outcomes, scholars focused on customers' purchase intention (Itani et al., 2020; Kim & Kumar, 2018; Wernerfelt, 1996), sales profits and firm financial performance (Lawrence et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2017; Williams & Spiro, 1985). Generally speaking, B2B marketing communication is vital in B2B transaction and has gain an increased research attention.

Existing studies on B2B marketing communication mostly examine the roles of salespeople, communication channels, and communication message. Scholars have pointed out that salespeople's marketing communication behaviors and capabilities are important to maintain customer relationship. For example, Scholars found that salespeople's communication behaviors can influence customers' purchase behaviors (Hasford et al., 2015), loyalty towards the salespeople and the firm (Hossain & Chonko, 2018), and the customer's value creation (Hossain & Gilbert, 2021). Koponen et al. (2019) reviewed and summarized four components that make up B2B sales communication capability, which are behavioral communication, affective communication, cognitive communication and acumen. Recent research has started to focus on how salespeople use online B2B marketing communication tools, such as social media, to interact with business customers. For example, Agnihotri et al. (2016) revealed that in B2B relationship marketing, salesperson social media use can enhance their responsiveness and customer satisfaction. Singh et al. (2020) found that in B2B E-negotiation, salespeople's use of influence tactics via e-mail (compliance vs. internalization-based tactics) can increase buyer attention and contract award. Bowen et al. (2021) also found that salesperson's social media usage can increase their proactive servicing and value-oriented prospecting, and thus increasing salesperson performance. These studies have reached the consensus that salespeople play vital roles in B2B marketing communication.

Marketing communication channel is another important topic that has received much research attention. The current research on communication channel mainly focuses on traditional offline channels and online channels, and the comparisons between different communication channels. Reinartz et al. (2005) investigated that in B2B relationship marketing, how different communication channel strategies should be used to manage distinct customer relationship phase, such as customer acquisition and customer retention. Luo and Kumar (2013) investigated two traditional communication channels, direct mail and phone calls, in B2B relationship marketing. This study revealed the short and long influence of market contacts towards earning of marketing investment in B2B markets. Murphy and Sashi (2018) investigated three communication modes as communication channels, personal, digital and impersonal in B2B relationship marketing. They revealed that three communication modes influence buyer-supplier contacts, rationality, social interaction, reciprocal feedback differently and thus influence relationship satisfaction. Vieira et al. (2019) classified communication channels according to communication initiators, such as firm-initiated communication and market-initiated communication. They revealed how different communication channels influence sales and new customer acquisition differently. Currently, using digital tools of the Internet becomes novel communication channels for firms and customers, which is believed to add new value and provide new opportunities for marketing communication (Deeter-Schmelz & Kennedy, 2002; Li et al., 2018). Fang et al. (2015) investigated how the third-party online platform such as 1688.com influence business buyers and sellers. Itani et al. (2020) investigated social media and customer relationship management technology as two new communication channels, and revealed that both is able to promote seller and buyer's information exchange in B2B sales management context. Rose et al. (2021) showed three social media communication practices can promote B2B customer loyalty and trust. In sum, literature on online B2B marketing communication channel mainly focused on the roles of online communication tools such as social media and online third-party B2B transaction platform. The current research has confirmed the positive roles of these online communication channels and investigated how B2B salespeople should use these communication channels.

Marketing communication message has also been investigated. Relevant research mostly investigated the content and style of the message in the traditional offline context (Moffett et al., 2020). For example, Srivastava and Chakravarti (2009) investigated that in the manufacturer-distributor relationship, how three types of messages and mutual trustworthiness influence the interaction between supplier and distributor. Berger and Iyengar (2013) differentiated the format of communication message into oral communication and written communication, and found that written communication has a stronger impact on consumers and let them mention more interesting products and brands. Petersen et al. (2015) investigated two types of communication message: promotion focused communication and prevention focused communication, and revealed distinguished effects of the two types of communication message. Singh et al. (2018) investigated whether resolving communication or relating communication is more effective in customer query handling. Kim and Kumar (2018) classified B2B marketing communication into economic marketing and social marketing. They found the impacts of economic and relational marketing communication on customer purchase behaviors fluctuate and change over time. Trada and Goyal (2020) investigated two communication message styles, instrumental communication and social communication, in B2B relationship marketing. They found that channel communication reduces channel member opportunism and exchange hazards, and thus increases relationship performance. Oliveira et al. (2022) differentiated communication message into information-oriented message and cost-oriented message, and investigated how these two communication styles influence interfirm disruption resolution. Han et al. (2022) further differentiated the moderating roles of instrumental communication and social communication on the power use in buyer-seller relationship. The above-reviewed studies shed light on the role of communication message in the traditional offline B2B transaction context, primarily within the phase of customer retention. However, the current research has paid rare attention to online B2B marketing communication message, which requires further investigation. Moreover, it is imperative to conduct additional research to assess the effectiveness of various communication messages within the context of customer acquisition.

3) Current Research on the Cross-border B2B Marketing Communication

In the cross-border B2B transaction context, reasons such as trade barriers, high business trip cost and COVID-19 inhibit traditional offline B2B transaction. Global suppliers and customers are turning to online channels to conduct the cross-border B2B transaction. Previous research pointed out the importance of online communication channels in the cross-border B2B transaction. For example, social media is believed to reduce new customer acquisition cost, promote in-time supplier and customer interaction, and enhance their relationship ties (Cortez et al., 2020; Fraccastoro et al., 2021). The majority of existing research has focused on exploring how firms can adapt to online communication channels to conduct cross-border B2B transactions. Under cross-border context, some scholars have noticed the roles of cultural distance in influence the B2B communication context. For example, Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003) found that cultural distance between the supplier and the customer influence the effectiveness of different communication channels. In sum, literature on the B2B marketing communication under cross-border context focused more on the online communication channel and motivated firms to transfer to online channels. Nonetheless, there remains relatively unclear regarding how firms can effectively employ diverse communication messages to capture customers’ attention when engaging in cross-border B2B transactions.

Table 2-1. Selected Key Studies on B2B Marketing Communication

Studies	Communication-related constructs	Outcomes	Online/ Offline	Main findings
Bharadwaj & Shipley, 2020	Digital sales interaction (DSI), salesperson communication effectiveness	Customer mindset	Online	The study proposed the definition of DSI and its typology, and proposed future research directions on DSI.
Bill et al., 2020	Salesperson social media use	Customer loyalty	Online	Salesperson social media use increases customer loyalty only for high-status customers and customers with small buying centers.
Fang et al., 2015	Search advertising service stage	Seller's click price, buyer's click rate, platform search advertising revenue	Online	This study investigates how the behaviors of new and existing buyers and sellers on the third-party online B2B platforms influence the advertising revenue of the platform.
Han et al., 2022	Instrumental communication, social communication	Supplier opportunism	Offline	Instrumental communication weakens, while social communication strengthens, the positive role of coercive power on opportunism.
Hossain & Chonko, 2018	Formality, frequency and bidirectionality in communication	Customers' loyalty to the firm, customers' loyalty to the salesperson, firm performance	Offline	Communication bidirectionality increases customers' loyalty toward the salesperson and the firm. Greater frequency only increases loyalty to the salesperson, and greater formality only increases loyalty to the firm.
Hossain & Gilbert, 2021	Salesperson listening, core contents of communication	Emotional and transactional effectiveness, satisfaction with firm	Online	While various facets of listening differentially contribute to the two value types, the core aspects of SP's communication mainly affect transactional value creation.
Kim & Kumar, 2018	Economic marketing, social marketing	Customer purchase	Online	The effects of economic and relational marketing communication on customer purchase behaviors interplay and vary over time.
Koponen et al., 2019	Behavioral, affective, cognitive communication component, acumen	Solution selling	Offline	This study conceptualizes four components that make up B2B sales communication capability.

Table 2-1. Selected Key Studies on B2B Marketing Communication (Continued)

Studies	Communication-related constructs	Outcomes	Online/ Offline	Main findings
Lawrence et al., 2019	Customer catalog search, customer-salespeople contact	Financial outcomes	Online	A customer's search and purchase from the seller's online channels positively interact with two areas (salesperson contact and customer-specific discount) to increase the seller's customer-level sales and ROI.
Limbu et al., 2014	Information and communication technology (ICT)	B2B sales job satisfaction	Online	ICT increases sales job satisfaction through sales administrative performance.
Luo & Kumar, 2013	Marketing contact (direct mail, phone calls)	Short-term and long-term customers' purchasing behavior	Online	This study reveals the short-term and long-term effects of market contacts (market communication) on the return of marketing investment in B2B markets.
Murphy & Sashi, 2018	Three communication modes (personal, digital, impersonal)	Relationship satisfaction	Both	Three communication modes influence four interactivity dimensions (buyer-suppler contacts, rationality, social interaction, reciprocal feedback) differently and thus influence relations satisfaction.
Ogilvie et al., 2018	Use of social media technology (SMT)	Relationship performance, sales performance	Online	SMT strategy is beneficial for the customer relationship performance and sales performance.
Oliveira et al., 2022	Information-oriented and cost-oriented communication content	Adaption quality	Offline	There are two communication content style in the interfirm project disruption adaption, information-oriented and cost-oriented.
Prins & Verhoef, 2007	Service/ brand/ competitive advertising	Customer's time to adoption of new product or service	Both	Service advertising reduces the time that customer adopt the new product. Moreover, some mass marketing efforts have a greater impact on loyal customers.
Reinartz et al., 2005	Number of contacts (f2f, telephone, email, web)	Customer profitability	Both	Different communications strategy should be used to manage different stages of customer life cycle (customer acquisition and customer retention).

Table 2-1. Selected Key Studies on B2B Marketing Communication (Continued)

Studies	Communication-related constructs	Outcomes	Online/ Offline	Main findings
Rose et al., 2021	Shared beliefs/ vendor-to-customer/ C2C communication	B2B customer loyalty	Online	Three social media communication practices are positively related to B2B customer loyalty and trust.
Rosenbloom & Larsen, 2003	Fax, telephone, e-mail, and written communication	Communication frequency	Online	When cultural distance between international partners is large, the communication frequency between them will be increased.
Singh et al., 2020	Salespeople's use of influence tactics via e-mail	Sales contract	Online	Using compliance or internalization-based tactics as textual cues can increase buyer attention and thus contract award. However, using two tactics simultaneously has a negative effect.
Srivastava & Chakravarti, 2009	Informational/ relational/coercive messages	Bargaining between manufacturer and distributor	Offline	This study investigates how three communication types and mutual trustworthiness influence the bargaining between manufacturer and distributor.
Trada & Goyal, 2020	Instrumental communication, social communication	Channel member opportunism, relationship performance	Offline	Channel communication reduces channel member opportunism and exchange hazards, and thus increases relationship performance.
Vieira et al., 2019	Firm-initiated communication, market-initiated communication	New B2B sales, customer acquisition	Online	This study distinguishes marketing communication channels as firm-initiated and market-initiated, and these channels have different impact on B2B sales and customer acquisition.
Wang et al., 2016	Capabilities of social media apps	B2B firm performance	Online	This study identifies five capabilities of social media apps in B2B context, and reveals that communication performance enhances B2B relationship performance.
Wang et al., 2021	Offensive/ defensive/ emotional/ rational strategy	Consumer e-WOM, consumer trust recovery	Online	Consumers' trust recovery is increased when firms use emotional strategy in crisis response.

2.1.2. Commentary

After reviewing current research on B2B marketing communication and some studies under cross-border context, the author summarizes the following research gap that needs further investigation.

Previous research on B2B marketing communication focused more on the roles of different communication channels, but paid limited attention to how to design online B2B marketing communication message. In the current cross-border B2B market, B2B marketing communication through online channels like emails and social medias has become more popular for suppliers and customers (Almquist, 2018). This is due to a variety of reasons, such as the large amount of cross-border B2B transactions, expensive international travel cost, trade restrictions, advancements in digital technology, and the impact of COVID-19. According to a study by McKinsey & Company in 2021, almost 94% of B2B decision-makers worldwide used digital channels to communicate with suppliers during the pandemic. The largest B2B marketplace, Alibaba.com, reported that over 50% of small and medium-sized suppliers globally have started using online sales platforms to reach new customers. Suppliers need to know what marketing communication message can attract more new customers without face-to-face meeting under cross-border context, so as to enhance their B2B customer acquisition.

The empirical evidence on what online communication message can obtain customers' attention is rare. Although there are studies that classify communication message into different types, their research contexts are basically based on online B2C transactions and offline B2B transactions in the customer retention stage. Research on the customer acquisition stage in the B2B marketing communication under cross-border context is lacking. Therefore, it is not clear which type of B2B marketing communication message is more effective in attracting business customers from different countries and regions. The underlying mechanisms and contextual factors that influence the effect of B2B marketing communication message are also unrevealed. These research questions require further investigation.

2.2. Communication Creativity Research

2.2.1. Signaling Theory

1) Basic Assumptions and Development of Signaling Theory

Signaling theory was originally proposed by American economist Spence (1973), and is part to signaling economics. Its foundation is information asymmetry (Spence, 1973). Information influences the decision-making process of individuals and organizations (Spence, 2002). When there is information asymmetry, insiders (such as sellers) are aware of their own quality, while outsiders (investors, buyers) are not. Insiders can choose to disclose or withhold their true quality information to outsiders. Spence (1973) initially applied signaling theory to the job market, where there is an information asymmetry between employers and job seekers. Employers have insufficient information regarding the caliber of job seekers. Job seekers, on the other hand, use their educational background as a signal of quality to reduce the information asymmetry and increase their chances of being selected by employers. Signaling theory has also been applied to management research field (Connelly et al., 2011; Taj, 2016).

The framework of signaling theory includes signal sender, signal, signal receiver, feedback, and environmental factor (see Figure 2-3). Signal sender is also called insider, who possesses information that is unknown to outsiders, such as information about product quality. In management research field, signal sender often refers to individuals and firms. Signal refers to the information itself. Effective signals have two notable characteristics (Connelly et al., 2011). The first characteristic is signal observability. It pertains to the degree to which outsiders can perceive the signal. If the signal sent by insiders is not easily noticeable by outsiders, it becomes challenging to utilize the signal for effective communication with receivers. The second characteristic is signal cost. It refers to the level of cost incurred by insiders in order to send out the signal. For example, a firm’s legitimacy or qualification can serve as signal costs. High signal cost can reflect the high quality of the signal sender. Signal receiver refers to the outsider who receives the signal, such as individual or firms. The signal receiver will make decisions based on the signal, which is also known as feedback. There is a conflict of interests between signal sender and signal receiver. When signal sender intentionally sends deceptive signals to hide its true quality, the decision-making of signal receiver can be misled. Moreover, the whole signal sending process is influenced by external environment factors.

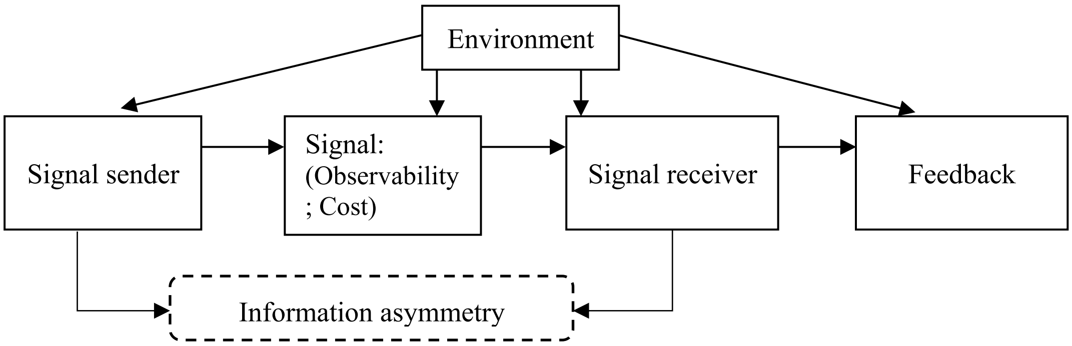


Figure 2-1. The Theoretical Framework of Signaling Theory

2) Application of Signaling Theory in B2B Marketing Communication

Signaling theory framework is similar to that of communication model. Communication model includes communication sender, communication message, communication receiver, communication feedback, external noise factors, and the communication channel used in the process (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998). Compared theoretical framework of signaling theory to communication model, signal sender is the communication sender, signal is the communication message itself, signal receiver is the communication receiver, and they all contains feedback. Therefore, signaling theory has been applied to B2B marketing communication research. For example, Jean and Kim (2021) investigated how two types of credibility signals on international B2B platforms influence suppliers' export sales under different institutional distance. Luo et al. (2022) investigated how firms' reputation serves as the signal to help them survive in cross-border B2B market. Tóth et al. (2022) investigated how B2B suppliers' online WOM serves as a signal of quality and influences sales performance in Alibaba e-platform. Boyd et al. (2023) investigated customer reference information as the signal of a supplier's quality, and examined how customer reference influences customer' s purchase.

In the customer acquisition stage, the communication message sent by suppliers is the primary signal to attract customers. It is the manifestation of suppliers' quality, and is used to reduce information asymmetry between suppliers and customers. In B2B marketing communication, communication creativity is one of the fundamental characteristics of communication message, and serves as the core signal in the customer acquisition stage. Understanding how customers perceive different types of communication creativity, including signal observability and signal cost, is crucial for suppliers to enhance customer acquisition.

2.2.2. Definition and Current Research on Communication Creativity

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, creativity is characterized as the capability to generate or introduce something novel, such as a fresh problem-solving approach, a new technique or tool, or an original artistic creation. Creativity has been studied in various research field, like organizational behaviors, advertising, new product development (Ang et al., 2007; Mkhize & Ellis, 2020; Woodman et al., 1993). Previous studies revealed that creativity can enhance firms' competitiveness (Hjorth et al., 2018; Jeong et al., 2019), increase new product performance (Burroughs et al., 2011; Cheng & Yang, 2019; Im & Workman, 2004), and promote value cocreation between firms and customers (Mahr et al., 2014).

Within the realm of communication research, communication creativity is defined as the extent to which the sender conveys communication message to the receiver in a creative manner, encompassing the production of communication message that is both original and useful (Amabile, 1996; Burroughs et al., 2011). Communication creativity has mainly been applied to advertising research (Ang et al., 2007). Previous research stated that communication creativity in advertising can shape customers' positive attitudes toward the brand (Zinkhan, 1993), attract customers' attention and enhance the effectiveness of advertisement (Smith & Yang, 2004), build firm-customer relationship (Ang et al., 2007; Mahr et al., 2014), and increase firms' sales (Chen et al., 2016). Overall, communication creativity has been regarded as positive in marketing research and practice. However, some scholars also pointed out the negative effects of communication creativity. For example, given the uniqueness of creative communication message in contrast to a conventional one, customers might encounter challenges in interpreting the creative communication message (MacInnis et al., 2002). If customers cannot determine the value of such communication message for themselves, they will not take further action or provide feedback (Reinartz & Saffert, 2013). In sum, the research on the relationship between communication creativity and customer acquisition is still mixed.

2.2.3. Classification of Communication Creativity: Relevance and Novelty

1) Classification of Communication Creativity

Social psychology research of creativity suggested that a creative output must be novel and appropriate (Amabile, 1996; Sethi et al., 2001). As reviewed above, in organizational behaviors, new product development and advertising studies, the definitions of creativity all cover elements that are new and also useful. These studies indicate that creativity is not a single dimension construct. Similarly, in communication creativity research, scholars have differentiated communication creativity into mainly two aspects. As shown in Table 2-2, the author reviewed and summarized research on the classification of communication creativity.

Scholars mainly classified communication creativity into two dimensions. The first dimension is communication relevance, which is also named as meaningfulness, usefulness and appropriateness (Ang et al., 2007; Billore et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2016). Communication relevance refers to that the information is meaningful and useful to the communication receiver. The second dimension is communication novelty, which is also named as divergence and newness. Communication novelty refers to that the information contains something that is new, novel, fresh, unique and divergent. Communication novelty helps gain customer attention, and is a traditional focus of communication creativity. For instance, Lehnert et al. (2014) contended that only novelty, also named as divergence, is the key element of creativity, while relevance is different from creativity. However, some scholars argued that novelty alone in the communication is inadequate for defining creativity, as it may result in random creativity and potentially detrimental creative outcomes. The communication message should convey information relevant to the customer (Ang et al., 2007; Ang et al., 2014). Their findings reveal that communication messages characterized by both novelty and relevance yield heightened ad recall and foster more favorable attitudes towards the brand. Previous research provided empirical evidence that relevance and novelty, both as elements of communication creativity, can benefit advertisement effectiveness and attract customers' attention. For example, Billore et al. (2020) examined how communication creativity of ads built up customer attitudes towards brand in emerging markets. They distinguished creativity into divergence and relevance. They found that relevance and divergence have the same significant effect on customer's attitudes towards advertisement and the brand. Smith and Yang (2004) classified and defined communication creativity in advertising into two dimensions, namely, divergence and relevance. Divergence refers to that an informant possesses elements that are unique or uncommon. It is regarded as the fundamental component of creativity in advertising, contributing to the distinctiveness of the advertisements (Smith & Yang, 2004). Moreover, they also pointed out that the creative information should also be relevant. Relevance is characterized by the degree to which the information includes elements that are useful, meaningful and valuable to the recipient of the communication. In sum, literature on communication creativity mainly regard relevance and novelty in creativity as antecedents and investigate how they influence firms' financial outcomes.

In addition to communication creativity, creativity research in organizational behavior, interfirm cooperation and new product development also investigates different dimensions of creativity. In new product development, scholars differentiated creativity of product into novelty and meaningfulness. Novelty is determined by that the new product is perceived to be distinct and dissimilar to competitors (Im & Workman, 2004). Meaningfulness, also referred to as relevance, is determined by that the new product is perceived to be suitable, appropriate, and beneficial for the target customers (Im & Workman, 2004). Im et al. (2013) classified creativity in new product and marketing program into novelty and meaningfulness. They found that two dimensions both have positive effects on product competitive advantage. Kim et al. (2013) classified creativity in new product into novelty and meaningfulness. They found that novelty enhances product differentiation, while meaningfulness enhances both product differentiation and customer satisfaction. Some scholars also investigated the antecedents and outcomes of novelty and meaningfulness in new product development research field (Nakata et al., 2018; Stock & Zacharias, 2013; Zuo et al., 2019).

Creativity research in interfirm cooperation and value cocreation also differentiates and investigates the roles of different dimensions of creativity. For example, Mahr et al. (2014) distinguished the characteristics of knowledge in the customer cocreation as novelty, relevance and cost. Novelty of knowledge is defined as new insights, unique inspirations and ideas generated from explorative activities. The relevance of knowledge is described as the type which is suitable for a specific project, encompasses details related to the tasks at hand, which is both easily comprehensible and implementable. This knowledge is derived from exploitative activities. They found that the creation high in relevance and moderate in novelty can obtain the most successful outcome. Heirati and Siahtiri (2019) found that in B2B interfirm collaboration, customer collaboration benefits novelty and meaningfulness of the service. Supplier collaboration only enhances service meaningfulness. Dean et al. (2023) investigated that in interfirm R&D collaboration, how shadow of past and future influence novelty and meaningfulness of new product.

In sum, communication creativity research aligns with creativity research in other research fields. The consensus is that creativity, including communication creativity, is a multi-dimension construct, and is widely classified into two dimensions. The first dimension is relevance, which is also called usefulness, appropriateness and meaningfulness. The second dimension is novelty, also named as newness and divergence. Based on the classification, scholars have investigated the antecedents and outcomes of relevance and novelty in various research areas, including advertising, new product development, organizational behaviors and interfirm cooperation.

2) Communication Relevance and Communication Novelty in B2B Marketing Communication

One important research gap in the customer acquisition stage in B2B marketing communication is that, although previous research has stated that communication message should be creative to attract customers (Cortez et al., 2020; Dean et al., 2023), empirical evidence is mixed regarding whether suppliers' communication creativity can enhance customer acquisition. One possible way to reconcile the inconsistency is to differentiate communication creativity and investigate the effects of its different dimensions. Following terminology in previous communication creativity research, this research uses the terminology of communication relevance and communication novelty as two dimensions of creativity in B2B marketing communication message.

Communication relevance refers to that in the communication process, the message contains elements that are closely related, useful and meaningful for the communication receiver (Mishra et al., 1993). A message will be perceived to be relevant by the communication receiver when it is closely responding to the receiver's particular circumstance, life experience, specific needs and expectations (Kreuter & Wray, 2003). In B2B marketing communication, communication relevance of the communication message refers to the message that is closely related to the customer's current business needs, like the products it needs. As an illustration, the supplier sends targeted advertisements or promotions through online communication tools to the customer based on its investigation on the customer firm's current business scope and its predication of customer demand. Communication relevance is also manifested in meaningfulness and usefulness to customers (Ang et al., 2007; Ang et al., 2014). For instance, distributing advertising and recommending products that targeted customers who potentially need them, or is helpful for the customer to make business decisions, are regarded as communication relevance (Mishra et al., 1993). Relevant communication message is believed to convey more customer-focused information, gain customers' interest, shorten the distance with customers, and gain more trust from customers (Smith & Yang, 2004).

Communication novelty refers to that the communication message is novel, new, unique, and different to others (Chen et al., 2016). It is also called divergence and newness in some studies (Smith & Yang, 2014). In B2B marketing communication, communication novelty means that the message does not necessarily closely align with the customer's business scope, but is innovative, novel and new in content and expression styles. For example, the supplier sends message to the customer about the industrial trend, latest technology trend and new customer needs, or conveys the information in a novel style (Dahlen et al., 2008). For example, including an interesting story, using appealing languages, using unique ways to express information, conveying something new but not necessarily related to the customer's current needs, are regarded as communication novelty. Communication novelty is an important way to present communication creativity, and differentiate the supplier from competitors. Some scholars even equal novelty to communication creativity (Lehnert et al., 2014).

Both communication relevance and communication novelty are key dimensions of communication creativity of the B2B marketing communication message. They make the message sender more divergent and unique compared with others (Stuhlfaut & Windels, 2015).

2.2.4. Commentary

Two research gaps of the communication creativity research are summarized.

First, as reviewed above, although most of previous communication creativity research illustrated the positive role of communication creativity (Ang et al., 2007; Billore et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2016), how it influences customer acquisition is not consistent. Similarly, in managerial practice, communication creativity does not always lead to successful customer acquisition. B2B transaction and B2B marketing communication are complex. Through B2B marketing communication, the supplier and the customer have to negotiate complicated issues related to products and services, such as technical details, price, delivery and payment issues, which may even last months or years (Grewal et al., 2015). The process also often involves customization, more decision makers, and larger transaction amount. Moreover, business customers are more interested in suppliers who can satisfy their total needs and derived demand, rather than just providing any specific product. Typically, they require a comprehensive set of solutions that encompass training, technical support, financial assistance, and delivery terms, thus creating a complex scenario (Schoenherr & Mabert, 2011). Especially under cross-border context, the customer acquisition in B2B marketing communication may also be influenced by different market and institution related factors. Therefore, facing the complex cross-border B2B marketing communication, further investigation is required to examine the impact of communication creativity on customer acquisition, to provide clearer practical implications to suppliers.

Second, although communication creativity has been classified into two dimensions (communication relevance and communication novelty), previous research failed to distinguish their different roles, which can be a reason for the inconsistent results of the effect of communication creativity. Previous literature argued that relevance and novelty generate similar positive effects on sales outcomes (Ang et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2016). However, in the cross-border B2B marketing communication, it is possible that communication relevance and communication novelty may have different roles on customer feedback. In the cross-border B2B marketing communication, without face-to-face meeting, suppliers have to use online communication channels to connect potential customers that they have never met before. In this case, which types of communication message should the supplier use to gain customer attention and achieve customer acquisition goal? Is relevant communication message more effective? Or is novel communication message more effective? Answers to these questions are vital for suppliers' success in customer acquisition. This research aims to explore which dimension of communication creativity (communication relevance vs.

communication novelty) is more helpful for suppliers to acquire new customers in the cross-border B2B marketing communication context. This research also aims to explore the underlying mechanism in the link between communication relevance, communication novelty and customer acquisition.

Table 2-2. Selected Key Studies on Classification of Communication Creativity

Studies	Classification of Creativity	Antecedents	Outcomes	Main findings
Ang et al., 2007	Novelty, meaningfulness, connectedness	Novelty, meaningfulness, connectedness in advertisement	Consumers' ad recall, ad attitudes, upbeat feelings	Novel and meaningful advertisements lead to consumers' higher ad recall, more positive ad attitudes and upbeat feelings.
Ang et al., 2014	Novelty, meaningfulness, connectedness	Novelty, meaningfulness, connectedness in advertisement	Consumer ad response	In the advertisement, novelty, combined with meaningfulness and connectedness, can enhance consumer ad response.
Baack et al., 2016	/	Creativity in B2B advertisement	Customer attitude, customer behavior	Creativity in B2B advertisement promotes customers' positive attitudes and behaviors towards brands.
Billore et al., 2020	Relevance, divergence	Relevance and divergence in advertisement	Brand attitude, consumer attention, motivation to process	Both relevance and divergence in advertisement are positively related to consumers' attitude.
Chen et al., 2014	Relevance, divergence	Relevance and divergence in advertisement	Advertisement wear-in and wear-out	Creative ads that high in divergence and relevance wear in immediately and show little sign of wearing-out even over repeated exposures.
Lehnert et al., 2014	Divergence, meaningfulness	Divergence, meaningfulness	Creativity in advertisement	Divergence is an important element of creativity, but meaningfulness is a distinct and separate construct from creativity.
Mahr et al., 2014	Relevance, novelty, costs	Relevance, novelty and costs of knowledge	Customer acceptance, learning success, market success	Regarding the characteristics of customer cocreation of knowledge, a high level of relevance and a moderate level of novelty lead to higher customer acceptance and learning success.
Reinartz & Saffert, 2013	/	Creativity in advertisement	Sales performance	Creative advertisement is not effective compared to non-creative advertisement in promoting sales performance.
Smith & Yang, 2004	Divergence, relevance, effectiveness	Divergence, relevance, effectiveness in advertisement	Customer information processing, customer response	The advertisement with a high level of creativity (divergence, relevance, effectiveness) will promote customer response.

2.3. Customer Cognitive Response

2.3.1. Information Processing Theory

1) Basic Assumptions and Development of Information Processing Theory

Information processing theory originated from Galbraith's research in 1973 and has been continuously enriched and refined by multiple scholars thereafter. Initially, information processing theory focused on individual-level cognitive perspective. Information processing is defined as the process through which sensory organs transmit information from the surrounding environment to the brain, and the subsequent interpretation of this information by the brain (Lindsay & Norman, 2013). The external environment in which individuals are situated provides various information that influences them. The individual's interpretation of this information determines subsequent attitudes and behaviors (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Subsequently, more studies have applied information processing theory at the organizational level.

From the organizational perspective of information processing theory, scholars argue that organizations serve as open systems which can process information. There are three basic assumptions. First, firms need to efficiently and effectively process information in executing complex tasks with significant uncertainty and equivocality (Galbraith, 1973). Uncertainty is defined as the disparity between the information needed for task execution and existing information held by the firm (Tushman & Nadler, 1978). Task, inter-organization and environment are three main sources of uncertainty (Bensaou & Venkatraman, 1995). Equivocality refers to the uncertainty and ambiguity associated with a task, arising from conflicting interpretations of a group situation or environment (Daft & Lengel, 1986). The second assumption is that a firm's organizational structure and business process determine its information processing capability (Bensaou & Venkatraman, 1995). The third assumption is the match between information processing need and information processing capability can most effectively enhance firm performance (Galbraith, 1973). Firms can enhance its information processing efficiency either by decreasing information processing need or increasing information processing capability (Zalesny & Ford, 1990).

2) Application of Information Processing Theory in B2B Marketing Communication

Gilliland and Johnston (1997) incorporated information processing theory into the B2B communication process, and constructed comprehensive model of B2B marketing communication. This model stated that in B2B marketing communication towards organizational buying, customers will generate cognitive response towards suppliers' communication stimuli. The cognitive response will then influence customers' consequent behaviors and final feedback towards suppliers' communication (see Figure 2-4). In the B2B marketing communication model, suppliers' communication message is the sources of communication stimuli. It is also the source of uncertainty and equivocality. Customers' cognitive response is the process to reduce external uncertainty and equivocality by analyzing, interpreting and assimilating the communication message. The consequence of the process usually refers to customers' purchase intention, interaction with brands or relationship ties with suppliers (Cortez et al., 2020). The model indicates that information process serves as the mediator between suppliers' communication stimuli and customers' feedback.

Scholars summarized and ranked several communication mediums based on the degree to which they reduce uncertainty. Offline face-to-face meetings are considered the most effective form of communication to reduce customers' uncertainty, followed by telephone conversations, email exchanges, memos, and letters (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Yu et al., 2021). However, online communication technology makes offline face-to-face communication not irreplaceable. Scholars start to investigate how online communication mediums influence customer cognition and feedback. For example, Deng et al. (2021) investigated B2B advertisement in social media and the effects of six linguistic features of the advertisement on customers' brand engagement, such as "Like" and "Retweet". Cortez et al. (2020) enriched and developed Gilliland and Johnston's model by integrating advertisement creativity appeals and communication channels into it. By doing so, these studies highlight the significance of staying updated with the latest advancements in communication technologies. They also emphasize the importance of exploring communication stimuli, customer cognitive response, and communication feedback within online B2B marketing communication.

In the customer acquisition stage of B2B marketing communication, when receiving suppliers' communication message, customers are motivated to reduce uncertainty and equivocality related to the information. The purpose of customer information processing is twofold: first, to assess whether the products or services offered by the supplier meet their own needs, and second, to identify the risks associated with purchasing from the supplier. The customer cognitive response generated from the information processing determine the customer's purchase intention towards the supplier.

Robust information transmission of the supplier side and effective information processing of the customer side are both key elements for the supplier's success in customer acquisition through B2B marketing communication (Wang et al., 2016). When investigating the effect of communication creativity on the supplier's customer acquisition, it is necessary to understand the way customers process and respond to the two dimensions of communication creativity. In practice, to assess whether the supplier's offering fit the customer's needs, the customer tends to search for and learn more about the supplier if it predicts the cooperation with the supplier is beneficial (Cortez et al., 2020). In contrast, to assess the potential risks of purchasing from the supplier, the customer tends to generate risk evaluation and perception towards the supplier's offering. Both sides influence a customer's purchase intention, cooperation willingness, long-term orientation, trust and loyalty towards the supplier. Therefore, considering the practice in B2B marketing communication and research on information processing theory, this research introduces two types customer cognitive responses, that is, customer learning and risk evaluation, into the framework. Based on information processing theory, this research seeks to uncover the mediating roles of customer cognitive response in the link between supplier's communication creativity and customer acquisition.

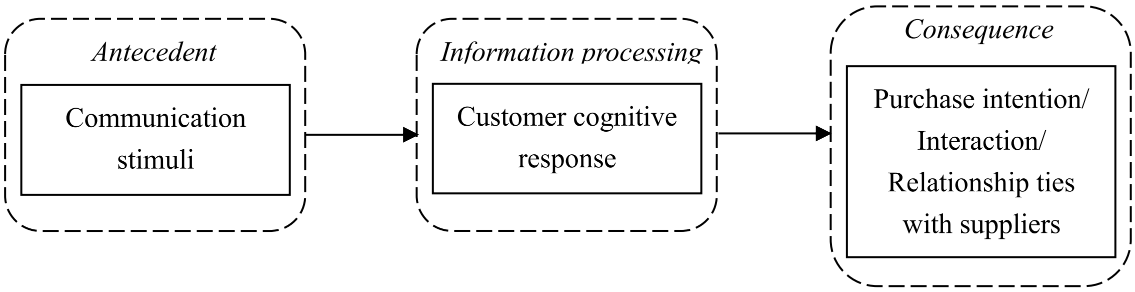


Figure 2-2. Integrating Information Processing into B2B Marketing Communication Model

2.3.2. Customer Learning

1) Definition of Customer Learning

Customer learning refers to the business customer's learning behaviors towards its supplier (Bonney et al., 2022). The process of customer learning encompasses the acquisition of information by the customer, the dissemination of information, shared interpretation, and the formation of organizational memory (Zhou et al., 2005). In B2B marketing communication, customer learning refers to that after receiving the supplier's communication message, the customer proactively learns about the supplier, including acquiring, disseminating, sharing, interpreting and memorizing the communication message sent by the supplier. Customer learning serves as a customer cognitive response that aims to verify whether the supplier's offering fits the customer' needs. It reflects the customer's strong curiosity and interest in the supplier (Cortez et al., 2020). During the customer learning process, the customer pays attention to, shows interests and curiosity, and proactively spends cost on disseminating and analyzing the supplier's communication message. Moreover, the customer is a source integrator that integrates its own experience and knowledge with what it obtains from the supplier (Hibbert et al., 2012). A high level of customer learning represents the customer's strong potential to have further and deeper connections with the supplier (Murray, 1991). In sum, during the customer learning process, the customer is a learner, a source integrator, a value creator and who spends time and effort on building ties with the supplier.

2) Research on Customer Learning

Customer learning, as an important part of the customer journey, contains the process from awareness to advocacy of a brand or a product (Bonney et al., 2022). It can be regarded as a customer cognitive response in the information processing (Zahay & Griffin, 2004). Pervious research has stated the positive role of customer learning in create firms' competitive advantages. For example, Murray (1991) argued that customer's information searching on the product and service can reduce its perceived risk. Mittal and Sawhney (2001) found that in selling electronic information products and services, firms should prioritize the promotion of content-based and process-based learning among customers, as these types of learning have advantageous implications for the firm's revenue. Bell and Eisingerich (2007) revealed that in financial service context, customer knowledge can lead to high customer loyalty. Ahearne et al. (2022) argued that customer knowledge can change the interaction between the seller and buyer. Bonney et al. (2022) investigated the role of salespeople in influencing customer learning. They found that salespeople's information exchange, recommendations, ingratiation, inspirational appeals and promises have positive effects on customers' basic learning and reflective learning. Research on interfirm relationship pointed out that business customer's learning activities towards the supplier can increase the information sharing, joint interpretation on the same information and mutual memory (Chang & Gotcher, 2007). This type of customer learning can serve as a safeguard mechanism to enhance the supplier's competitive advantages (Chang & Gotcher, 2007; Jean et al., 2010). Overall, the current research has reached the consensus that customer learning-related elements, such as customer knowledge and customer education, can benefit the firm's profits.

In B2B markets, where supplier selection process and purchase decision-making are more complex, customer learning is more common and necessary (Meuter et al., 2005). Although majority of studies discussed about the advantages of customer learning, few studies tended to reveal what strategies firms can adopt to encourage customer learning. To be specific, there are two research gaps need to be fulfilled. First, most of the research focused on individual customer's learning behaviors, but few focused on business customer's learning behaviors in the B2B transactions. Second, most of the research did not distinguish online and offline context. For example, under cross-border context when suppliers and customers face institutional and cultural differences and mainly rely on online communication, how can suppliers encourage customer learning using different types of communication message? This research is motivated to regard customer learning as one of the customer cognitive response in the information processing, and aims to investigates how a supplier's communication relevance and communication novelty influence customer learning, and thus the customer acquisition.

2.3.3. Risk Evaluation

1) Definition of Risk Evaluation

Customer's risk evaluation refers to customer's evaluation of risk and loss when considering using a product or service (Gao et al., 2012). It reflects the customer cognitive response in the information processing that aims to evaluate the purchase risk from a supplier. Literature on risk management stated that when the customer's risk evaluation is high, its intention to select the product or service is low (Gao et al., 2012). Bettman (1973) differentiated customer's risk into inherent risk and handled risk, and revealed the antecedents that increase and decrease risk evaluation. This study indicated customer's risk evaluation is highly related to the customer's perception on uncertainty, quality and price of the product, information non-transparency, difficulty to make purchase choice and alternative purchase choice. Rao et al. (2007) argued that customer's risk evaluation will lower their tendency to purchase from e-marketplace. Ganesan (1994) found that a customer's risk evaluation can reduce its long-term orientation with its supplier in the interfirm relationship.

2) Research on Risk evaluation

There are numerous studies that focused on how to reduce customer's risk evaluation in B2B research fields. Customer's high risk evaluation in the B2B transaction context mainly comes from three aspects. The first aspect is the customer's concerns on the supplier's unstable product quality, imperfect after-sales service, failure to customize products based on the customer's needs, and failure to provide technical guidance (Gao et al., 2012). These factors will inhibit the customer's purchase intention. The second aspect is the customer's concerns on the supplier selection. Establishing a stable supplier-customer relationship is complex, which not only includes product and service purchasing, but also involves long-term cooperation and joint value creation. Therefore, paying more attention to develop relationships with a supplier means the customer does not have enough time and effort on other supplier at the same time (Tse et al., 2019). Choosing a wrong supplier can be harmful for the customer's supply chain stability. The third aspect is the customer's concerns on the supplier's opportunistic behaviors after their cooperation, such as fail to deliver the product and service on time or fail to solve problem as needed (Zhao et al., 2022). In sum, to reduce the customer's high risk evaluation, the supplier should guarantee its product and service quality and competitive advantages against other suppliers before the customer's purchase, and provide cooperation governance to decrease the customer's concern after their cooperation. Some studies also pointed out the importance of salespeople in inhibiting customer's risk evaluation (Hossain & Gilbert, 2021). Moreover, trust and commitment are also vital elements in reducing customer's risk evaluation (Franklin & Marshall, 2019).

2.3.4. Commentary

As two important types of customer cognitive response of information processing, customer learning and risk evaluation are supposed to help customers to reduce uncertainty and equivocality, and thus influence the customer's purchase decision making and cooperation willingness with the supplier. Under different transaction contexts, there are different driving factors of customer learning and risk evaluation. In the customer acquisition stage in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, where suppliers and customers cannot meet face-to-face and are not familiar with each other, how can the supplier drive its customer cognitive response? This research introduces customer learning and risk evaluation into the framework as mediators, to investigate how the supplier's communication relevance and communication novelty influence these two customer cognitive responses, and thus influence customer acquisition.

2.4. Customer Acquisition

2.4.1. Definition and Measure of Customer Acquisition

Customer acquisition is described as initial phase of the customer-firm relationship, commencing from the customer's first interaction with the supplier to their first purchase (Thomas, 2001). Customer acquisition contributes to a firm's competitiveness and profits (Villanueva et al., 2008). Voss and Voss (2008) revealed that when competitive density in the market is high, customer acquisition can enhance firm performance through emphasizing innovation and competitor learning. Lewis (2006) provided empirical evidence that customer acquisition can help predict customer repurchase, that is, the firm's customer retention rate. Arnold et al. (2011) revealed that a firm's customer acquisition orientation benefits its customer knowledge, thus its innovation performance.

Some scholars measured customer acquisition using newly acquired customer size. For example, Becker et al. (2009) measured customer acquisition performance using two informative indicators to account for the rate of new added and exist customers. You and Joshi (2020) investigated the roles of different advertising tools on customer acquisition and customer retention in automobile/ mobile game industries. To assess customer acquisition, they utilized the monthly count of new customers who purchased brand model cars. Villanueva et al. (2008) examined whether marketing investment or word-of-mouth investment induce more customers using the data of an online application. They measured customer acquisition using the number of newly registered customers resulting from marketing activities or word-of-mouth activities. Some scholars measured customer acquisition using the firm's sales revenue. For example, Stahl et al. (2012) examined how brand equity affects customer acquisition and customer retention based on data from the U.S. automobile market. They measured customer acquisition by customer purchase volume. Wang and Goldfarb (2017) investigated how the opening of a retailer's offline stores influence the sales of its online stores. To quantify customer acquisition, they employed the purchase volume attributed to new customers. Vieira et al. (2019) investigated two types of communication according to different initiators, and their impacts on B2B sales and customer acquisition. They measured customer acquisition using new sales gained from newly acquired customers.

In B2B markets, customer acquisition does not only refer to the supplier's selling of a product or service, but also about establishing a tie with the customer (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2001). The supplier and the customer are likely to maintain a long cooperation, not just make a deal once (Dyer & Singh 1998). Firms recognize that their most valuable resources are the connections they establish with their customers. The relationship marketing not only benefits the supplier firm, but is also conducive for the customer. High-involvement relationship with the supplier helps the customer to get stable and high-quality service, which hold substantial value and appeal for the customer (Berry, 1995). Therefore, research in B2B relationship management also used purchase intention to measure customer acquisition. For example, Dodds (1991) measured customer acquisition using the customer's purchase intention. Wuyts and Geyskens (2005) measured customer acquisition using the customer's willingness to cooperation in the perspective of the customer firm. Wuyts et al. (2009) investigated the partner selection in the B2B information service market. They used the customer's intention to choose a service provider as the signal of the service provider's customer acquisition.

This research intends to reveal how a supplier's communication creativity of communication message influences its B2B customer acquisition. Considering the research context and objectives, the author defines customer acquisition in this research as the customer's intention to purchase from the supplier.

2.4.2. Influencing Factors of Customer Acquisition

Previous research on customer acquisition has provided empirical evidence on the antecedents of customer acquisition in different perspectives, both in B2C markets and B2B markets. Given that the research focus is the customer acquisition in the supplier-customer relationship in B2B markets, this research reviewed previous studies and summarized the antecedents of customer acquisition in three aspects: the characteristics of the supplier, the customer, and the external market-related factors.

First, characteristics of the supplier. The characteristics of the supplier that may influence its business customer acquisition or willingness of cooperation include the supplier's own business reputation, word-of-mouth, product and service quality, price advantage, its marketing capabilities, communication and support to the customer, and salespeople's capabilities. v. Wangenheim and Bayón (2007) revealed a supplier's word-of-mouth can attract more new customers. Becker et al. (2009) found that technological implementation and organizational implementation of a firm can positively influence CRM performance (acquisition, maintenance, retention). de Vries et al. (2017) examined and contrasted the roles of traditional advertising and social media in customer acquisition. They suggested firms can integrate both traditional advertising and social media to better improve brand building and customer acquisition. You and Joshi (2020) discovered that user-generated content (UGC) is more successful in facilitating customer acquisition, whereas traditional media is more effective in customer retention. Stahl et al. (2012) investigated how brand equity (i.e., knowledge, relevance, esteem, and differentiation) influence the firm's customer acquisition. Mittal et al. (2021) listed some factors of a supplier that can positively influence its customers' satisfaction and its own financial performance in B2B markets. Deeter-Schmelz et al. (2001) found that online B2B supplier can promote customer's online purchase activities through encouragement, guidance and incentives.

Second, characteristics of the customer. From the customer's perspective, B2B relationship management literature also investigates how a buyer, a distributor, or a customer, select their business seller, supplier, and partner. The customer's own transaction goal, risk acceptance, purchase experience, organizational culture, uncertainty, perceived benefit, risk evaluation, substitute supplier choices, purchase decision-making complexity, budget, trust and commitment towards the supplier, perceived effectiveness, the customer's information verification capabilities can influence its judgement on the supplier. Li et al. (2008) found that when the firm's alliance goal is more radical, it is more likely to select friends to be partners. Wuyts and Geyskens (2005) investigated how organizational culture influences a firm's decision to choose a close partner. Their findings indicate that when considering different organizational cultures, higher levels of uncertainty avoidance and collectivism contribute to an increased likelihood of selecting close partners. Conversely, higher levels of power distance result in a decreased tendency to select close partners. Wuyts et al. (2009) discovered that the favorable impact of establishing a strong personal tie on the probability of selecting a service provider is more pronounced when the service is subjective in nature. However, this effect is weakened when the service holds strategic significance. Furthermore, they observed that the positive influence of interpretation and advice on the likelihood of choosing a service provider is stronger when the service is subjective in nature and also holds strategic importance. Beckman et al. (2004) pointed out that the firm-specific uncertainty a customer faces can influence its new partner selection. A firm with high firm-specific uncertainty tends to form alliance relationships with new partners. Moreover, factors such as trust, commitment, governance mechanisms, are also frequently considered when a customer chooses the supplier.

Third, characteristics of external market-related factors. External market-related factors can also influence how a supplier acquire new customer and how a customer select its new supplier. For example, in international business context, culture-related factors may influence customers' choice. Tsuchiya et al. (2022) revealed that for international brands, cultural distance and economic distance between the customer and the international brands moderate customer value and willingness to pay. Apart from that, market uncertainty, legal enforceability, competitive intensity and supplier heterogeneity also have potentials to influence a supplier's customer acquisition. For example, when the supplier heterogeneity is high in the market, it will be harder for a customer to identify a qualified supplier to cooperate with (Wang et al., 2021).

2.4.3. Commentary

After reviewing the literature related to customer acquisition, this research summarizes the following research gap. Previous research failed to investigate how supplier can acquire new customer in the cross-border B2B transaction context. B2B relationship management literature mostly focuses on the offline transaction context, investigating influencing factors such as trust, interpersonal relationship, governance, and institution. With the development of international business and the increased usage of online communication tools in B2B marketing communication, it is surprising that the relevant empirical evidence on how suppliers acquire business customer via marketing communication under cross-border context is in lack. It is still not clear how a supplier's communication creativity of communication message (communication relevance and communication novelty) influences the supplier's cross-border customer acquisition. Moreover, it is unclear what contextual factors can influence the effects of communication creativity on customer acquisition. There are various aspects that have potential to influence the link between communication creativity and customer acquisition, such as the characteristics of the supplier, the customer, and the external factors, such as market uncertainty, legal environment, cultural distance. Further investigation is needed to answer these questions.

2.5. Institutional Constraints

2.5.1. Institutional Theory

Institutions is the "rules of the game in a society" (North, 1990). Similarly, Scott (1995) describes institutions as cognitive, normative, and regulative structures that provide stability and meaning to social behavior. According to institutional theory, institutions is critical in the overall environment, including individual level, organizational level and inter-organizational level (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Oliver, 1997).

Firms under the same institution tend to be similar due to three mechanisms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The first is coercive isomorphism, which refers to laws and regulations issued by the state, the government and other power agencies. The second is mimetic process, which refers to that organizations imitate high-performing organizations in uncertain environments. The third is normative pressures. It refers to that, organizational members engaged in the same occupation are influenced by social norms formed by the diffusion of organizational behavior due to similar cognition and occupational network. Scott (1955) asserted that institutions exert control over organizations at various levels through culture, social structures, and organizational practices. An institution comprises three fundamental elements. The first element is the regulative pillar, which oversees organizational behaviors by establishing rules and implementing rewards and punishments. The second element is the normative pillar, which governs organizational behaviors through social values, role expectations, and social norms. The third element is the cognitive pillar. Within this pillar, the organization constructs its institutional environment, assigning meaning to its behavior and recognizing the constraints imposed on the organization by defining its identity as "what we are". Regulative pillar, normative pillar and cognitive pillar constraint organizational behaviors through coercive isomorphism, mimetic process and normative pressures.

2.5.2. Formal and Informal Institutional Constraints

In the B2B transaction context, whether the cooperation interests can be well-protected is critical for the customer to determine if purchasing from the supplier or not (Abdi & Aulakh, 2012). The governance of interfirm relationship originates from the institutional environment where firms are operated in. According to institutional theory, there are formal and informal institutional constraints (North, 1990).

Formal institutional constraints are enabled by the government and the national legal system. Illustrations of formal institutions encompass political regulations, judicial rulings, and economic agreements. Informal institutional constraints are provided by the society, cultural background and business networks firms are located in. That includes socially sanctioned norms of behavior, social customs, ethics, cultures and reputation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995). Peng (2002) condensed three primary informal institutional constraints, namely the interpersonal relationships among executives, external connections that link these executives to key stakeholders, particularly government officials, and the reputation of a firm.

Due to the influence of institutional frameworks, any strategic decision made by firms is inevitably influenced by the formal and informal constraints of the institutional framework (Peng, 2002). The institutional constraints, both formal and informal, influence interfirm relationship in some ways. First, the common-shared cognitive frameworks enable that partners have common beliefs and behavioral norms, which reduce misunderstanding and misinterpretation among partners (Abdi & Aulakh, 2012). Moreover, these common beliefs and behavioral norms implicitly define what is acceptable and what is forbidden in the interfirm relationship. Second, regulatory institutions, encompassing both formal and informal aspects, establish a pre-existing default framework of responsibilities and obligations for partners engaged in exchanges (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Additionally, they facilitate the potential for efficient monitoring and enforcement of the agreements between partners. To sum up, the strategic choices made by firms and the governance of interfirm relationships are not solely determined by firm-specific resources. Rather, they also reflect the formal and informal constraints presented within a specific institutional framework that decision-makers encounter (Oliver, 1997; Scott, 1995).

In cross-border B2B transactions, when the supplier and the customer are from different countries and regions, they are surrounded by different formal and informal institutional constraints (Campbell et al., 2012; Hossain & Chonko, 2018). The difference between the supplier and the customer may lead to some difficulties. First, under different legal systems and cultural background, the behavioral norms, common beliefs and institutionalized behaviors can be different for the supplier and the customer (Peng, 2002). Second, to govern cross-border interfirm relationship, the supplier and the customer may encounter inconsistencies in the effectiveness and regulation of different governments, which may hinder the monitoring process and enforcement of contracts of their interfirm relationship (Meyer et al., 2009). Third, whether informal institutional constraints, such as business networks, are still valid in governing and regulating firms' interfirm relationship and behaviors are questionable. Literature on institutional theory in international business widely focused on formal institutional constraints, such as laws and regulations (Peng et al., 2008). Scholars stated that there is inadequate attention paid to informal institutional constraints in international business, and call for more research to investigate informal institutional constraints in the international business field (Boddewyn & Peng, 2021)

In the customer acquisition stage in the cross-border B2B marketing communication context, when the supplier and the customer have not cooperated before, there are no established formal contracts or relational norms within the interfirm relationship. The factors that the customer rely on and determine whether the purchase and cooperation with the supplier can be protected are twofold. First, formal institutional constraints provided by the government. When purchasing and cooperating with a supplier from different country and region, the customer needs to consider whether there is regulation conflict and whether their formal contract and profits can be well-protected. Second, informal institutional constraints provided by the business network. As stated before, links between firms and reputation of a firm can be regarded as informal institutional constraints that influence interfirm relationship governance (Cao et al., 2018; Peng, 2002). In B2B transactions, when the customer is not familiar and feel uncertain about the supplier, a common practice is that the customer will get reference from business network, such as peers, other suppliers, and industrial associations, to verify the supplier's reputation, experience and capabilities. Therefore, it is important to clarify that under formal institutional constraints provided by the government and the informal institutional constraints provided by the business network, how will the supplier's communication creativity influence the supplier's successful customer acquisition. Based on institutional theory, this research identifies government effectiveness distance as the formal institutional constraint provided by the government, and identifies trade reference as the informal institutional constraint provided by the business network in this research.

2.5.3. Government Effectiveness Distance

Government effectiveness is one of six indicators in the world governance indicators of

World Bank. It measures the formal institutional environment of a country or region. It signifies the evaluation of public service quality, the quality and independence of the civil service from political influences, the formulation and execution of policies, and the government's credibility in upholding and implementing these policies (Kaufmann et al., 2011). Government effectiveness distance is defined as the variation in formal institutional constraints between countries, in terms of the development of government regulations, rules, and administrative efficiency.

Firms operating in countries with different levels of government effectiveness may have varying attitudes towards the role of government and its officials (Deng & Yang, 2015). In countries where government effectiveness is high, firms may rely on formal institutions to solve problems and conduct business, and may resort to legal means to address legal issues. These firms often require their partners to adhere to laws and regulations as they do (Zhou & Poppo, 2010), and believe that the government can provide adequate public services that benefit their business. In contrast, firms operating in countries with low government effectiveness may not rely on formal institutions to solve problems (Zhou & Xu, 2012). As North (1990) noted, when formal institutions are not effective, informal institutions may play a larger role. In such situations, firms may seek to promote their business by building interpersonal ties with government officials to gain access to policy-related information and other benefits. Additionally, they may attempt to resolve conflicts with partners through negotiation or interpersonal relationships rather than using legal means (Sheng et al., 2011).

In cross-border B2B transactions, firms in different countries are influenced by distinct formal institutional constraints. As a consequence, this gives rise to the development of diverse business approaches, as well as the utilization of regulatory and legal tools. The literature on institutional distance has reached a consensus that institutional distance can impact how international businesses choose their partners. For instance, when firms cooperate with partners from different institutional backgrounds, especially there are trade barriers between two countries, their transaction may encounter uncertainty and may even fail, as their legal systems are inconsistent. This inconsistency can make it difficult for firms to resolve conflicts through legal means. Moreover, if there is a wide disparity in government effectiveness, particularly in cross-border B2B transactions, the delivery of products or services may be sluggish due to the inconsistent efficiency of the exporter and the importer. Previous literature on institutional distance has primarily focused on how firms enter new markets with different institutions or achieve cross-border mergers and acquisitions. However, little is known about how formal institutional factors, such as government effectiveness distance, can impact successful customer acquisition by suppliers in the cross-border B2B marketing communication context (Campbell et al., 2012; Chao & Kumar, 2010). Government effectiveness is closely linked to cross-border B2B transactions since the implementation and modification of government policies can directly influence the feasibility of cross-border transactions. It remains unclear how customers will respond to suppliers' communication messages when the government effectiveness distance is high. Answering this question is critical for suppliers to design their B2B marketing communication message for customers from different formal institutional backgrounds.

2.5.4. Trade Reference

In addition to formal institutional constraints imposed by governments, informal institutional constraints arising from business networks are also crucial in cross-border B2B transaction. While existing research has predominantly explored the impact of formal institutions in cross-border context (Aguilera-Caracuel et al., 2013; Golesorkhi et al., 2019; Salomon & Wu, 2012), attention to the influence of informal institutional constraints in managing cross-border interfirm relationships within the context of B2B transactions remain insufficient (Boddewyn & Peng, 2021).

In B2B transactions, business customers typically invest effort in investigating suppliers' backgrounds (Boyd et al., 2023). Yoon et al. (1993) discovered firm's reputation affects its customers' purchasing intentions. Aarikka-Stenroos and Sakari Makkonen (2014) examined how experiential information, like customer references and word-of-mouth, affects industrial buyers' purchases in complex buying situations through a case study. There are several ways for a business customer to gather information about a supplier's reputation. The customer may request the supplier to provide contact information of previous customers to obtain evaluations of the supplier's reputation, capabilities, and product/service quality. Additionally, the customer may access the supplier's reputation information from other suppliers, peer customers, and industrial associations. That is referred to as trade reference, which allows the customer to learn about the supplier's reputation-related background and assess their performance (Jaakkola & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2019). Trade reference is a common phenomenon in B2B transactions. In many cases, customers trust more in review content provided by the business network such as peer reviews and group discussions than content provided by the supplier itself (Fiore & Schneider, 2016).

Research on trade reference, also known as customer reference and customer referencing, has indicated that it significantly impacts supplier reputation and business customer's purchase intentions (Helm & Salminen, 2010; Terho & Jalkala, 2017; Tóth et al., 2020). Furthermore, trade reference can also serve as a supplier's marketing asset to showcase their experience, performance, and capabilities (Jalkala & Salminen, 2010). However, it is surprising that most trade reference and customer reference research is qualitative and lacks empirical evidence on how trade reference influences customer's supplier selection and supplier success in customer acquisition.

In international business, particularly in B2B transactions, trade reference is a direct way for the customer to learn about the supplier and ensure the reliability of the transaction. By using trade reference, the customer can access the supplier's reputation information and spread their behaviors to the business network if the supplier acts opportunistically during the cooperation process. That is to say, trade reference can serve as an informal institutional constraint provided by the business network to govern the interfirm relationship. However, it remains unclear how trade reference, as an informal institutional constraint, impacts the cross-border B2B marketing communication process and feedback.

2.5.5. Commentary

Generally speaking, the purpose of establishing institutions is to reduce uncertainty and facilitate smooth business operations (Peng, 2002; Zhou & Poppo, 2010). However, in a cross-border context, institutional differences among countries and regions may create more uncertainty and impede cross-border transactions. In the cross-border B2B marketing communication, institutional factors are crucial for customers to evaluate the feasibility of cross-border purchases. After reviewing the literature on institutional theory, government effectiveness distance, and trade reference, this research identified two research gaps.

First, there is a scarcity of empirical evidence regarding the significance of government effectiveness distance in cross-border B2B marketing communication. Previous research investigated on how formal institutions, such as government-related factors, influence MNEs' new markets entry, financial performance, and cross-border M&A. However, it remains unclear how governance effectiveness distance influences the supplier and customer's communication, such as, customer acquisition.

Second, the research attention on the effect of informal institutional factors in cross-border context is inadequate. Although trade reference is a common phenomenon in B2B transactions, it is not clear how it acts as an informal institutional constraint in influencing the cross-border customer's supplier selection. For example, it is unclear how trade reference influences the effect of customer cognitive response on a customer's purchase intention, that is, the supplier's successful customer acquisition.

2.6. Research Review

After conducting a thorough literature review on B2B marketing communication, communication creativity research, signaling theory, information processing theory, customer learning, risk evaluation, institutional theory, government effectiveness distance, trade reference, and customer acquisition, three significant research gaps have been summarized.

First, although communication creativity is important in attracting customers, there is still debate over whether communication creativity can enhance suppliers' customer acquisition in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context. Especially, how two dimensions of communication creativity (communication relevance and communication novelty) influence customer acquisition differently is unclear. Previous communication creativity research failed to provide empirical evidence regarding these questions. Although communication creativity has been distinguished into two dimensions, scholars still mainly investigated and examined communication creativity as a unified construct, and did not differentiate the distinct roles of communication relevance and communication novelty. However, considering the definitions and characteristics of communication relevance and communication novelty, they may have different impact on customer acquisition in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context. Under such a context, suppliers and customers may not meet face-to-face, and are surrounded by different institutional environment. With the intensified competition in global supply chain, customers are overwhelmed with plenty of communication messages from different suppliers. It is difficult for the supplier to stand out from all other competitors. The communication starts with a supplier's unilateral communication message. The supplier can only rely on the communication creativity of the message to attract customers. Therefore, it is urgent for suppliers to understand how they can effectively use creative communication message with their cross-border customers. Moreover, previous communication creativity research lacks of theoretical foundations to explain the effect of communication creativity in B2B marketing communication. To reconcile the mixed findings in previous research, this research distinguishes two dimensions of communication creativity of the supplier's communication message, namely, communication relevance and communication novelty. Based on signaling theory, this research aims to reveal how communication relevance and communication novelty influence customer acquisition, and whether these two types of communication creativity have different impacts.

Second, according to information processing theory, customer cognitive response in the information processing influences whether the customer decide to purchase a product and service. However, empirical evidence is limited regarding what role can customer cognitive response play in the cross-border B2B marketing communication process. Signal theory is criticized for its lack in effectively illustrating how customers, as signal receivers, will respond to external signals (information). Most of the research on customer cognitive response focused on the purchase behaviors of individual consumers. However, business customers' purchase process is much more complex. For example, the business purchase involves larger purchase volume and more transaction amount. Moreover, the business purchase process usually involves more decision makers when selecting an appropriate supplier, product and service. Understanding customer cognitive response when receiving different types of communication message is important for suppliers to effectively design and implement B2B marketing communication message. Based on information processing theory, this research aims to introduce customer learning and risk evaluation into the framework, and reveal how suppliers' communication relevance and communication novelty influence the customer learning and risk evaluation, thus influence suppliers' customer acquisition.

Third, previous research overlooked the impact of formal and informal institutional constraints on cross-border B2B marketing communication and outcomes. During the customer acquisition stage, when there is no established contract or relational norms between the supplier and customer, the latter must rely on external formal and informal institutional constraints to assess the reliability of the purchase and cooperation. Formal institutional constraints that affect cross-border B2B transactions mainly stem from the government and national legal system, such as the government effectiveness distance. Informal institutional constraints which affect cross-border B2B transactions, on the other hand, mainly arise from the business network, including trade reference from other peers, suppliers, and industrial associations. Although prior studies have explored the impact of formal institutional constraints under cross-border context, there is insufficient research on the effect of informal institutional constraints. To fill this gap, this research incorporates government effectiveness distance and trade reference as formal and informal institutional constraints into the theoretical model based on institutional theory, with the aim of elucidating their impacts on the cross-border B2B marketing communication process.

2.7. Brief Summary

This chapter provides a review of relevant theories and literature related to the research, including B2B marketing communication, communication creativity research, communication relevance, communication novelty, signaling theory, information processing theory, customer learning, risk evaluation, institutional theory, government effectiveness distance, trade reference and customer acquisition. Through the review, this research explicates the development of theories and literature, identifies research gaps, and highlights potential contributions to the research field. Based on the groundwork, this research will establish a theoretical framework aimed at addressing the identified research gaps and offering novel insights into the relationship between communication creativity and customer acquisition.

Chapter 3. Theoretical Model and Hypothesis Development

3.1. Definitions of Key Constructs

3.1.1. Communication Relevance and Communication Novelty

In this research, the author focuses on the B2B marketing communication under cross-border context. It is a process wherein suppliers in the cross-border B2B market interact with customers across diverse communication channels, with the goal of customer acquisition. As reviewed in Chapter 2, communication creativity is defined as the extent to which the supplier conveys communication message to the customer in a creative manner. It manifests in the generation of communication message that is original, and also useful (Amabile, 1996; Burroughs et al., 2011). Based on the definition, scholars have prevalently distinguished two dimensions of communication creativity, namely, communication relevance and communication novelty (Ang et al., 2007; Chen et al., 2016). Communication relevance is defined as that the communication message is closely aligned with the communication receiver (Mishra et al., 1993). It encompasses the aspects of meaningfulness, usefulness, and appropriateness, which are integral components of communication creativity. In B2B marketing communication, communication relevance is demonstrated by the supplier's communication message being closely aligned with the customer's current needs, business scope and experience (Billore et al., 2020). This involves providing information that is directly relevant to the customer's specific situation and concerns (Smith & Yang, 2004).

In contrast, communication novelty can be described as the degree to which a communication message stands out by being distinct, unique, novel, and divergent from conventional approaches (Sethi et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2020). Communication novelty does not require the communication message be closely relevant to the customer, but captures the uniqueness, newness, unusualness and divergence of communication creativity (Billore et al., 2020). In B2B marketing communication, examples of communication novelty include using interesting stories, appealing language, or unique methods of conveying information, even if the information is not directly relevant to the customer's immediate needs (Ang et al., 2014). Communication novelty has been regarded as a way to differentiate the supplier from other competitors (Stuhlfaut & Windels, 2015).

3.1.2. Customer Learning

It is a prevalent practice for a customer to conduct a thorough search and learn about a supplier's information before making a purchase decision. This phenomenon has gained significant attention from both scholars and practitioners (Bonney et al., 2022; Hibbert et al., 2012). Customer learning is defined to be the proactive behaviors that the customer exhibit to seek out information about a supplier and familiarize themselves with the supplier's products and services (Zhou et al., 2005). Customer learning is widely regarded as an aspect of customer cognitive response in the information processing. It reflects the customer's interest, and effort towards the supplier (Anderson & Simester, 2013; Zahay & Griffin, 2004). The customer who exhibits a high level of customer learning typically demonstrates a strong willingness to engage with a supplier's communication message. For example, the customer may actively seek out additional information, and discuss the supplier with colleagues within its firm. These behaviors serve as positive signals indicating the customer's interests in the supplier.

3.1.3. Risk Evaluation

Customer's risk evaluation refers to the customer's evolution of potential risk and loss when considering purchasing the supplier's product or service (Gao et al., 2012). Risk evaluation is a type of customer cognitive response in the information processing that aims to reduce customer's uncertainty and assess the risk associated with purchase from a supplier (Flint & Woodruff, 2001; Mitchell, 1999). During the customer acquisition stage, risk evaluation can be heightened due to various factors, including the absence of in person interaction, uncertainties about supplier's reputation, and doubts concerning the quality of the supplier's offerings (Zhang & Li, 2019). A high risk evaluation can hinder trust and commitment between the customer and supplier (Gao et al., 2012). The customer might exhibit reluctance to interact with a supplier's communication or proceed with initiating a business connection due to concerns over potential losses (Yoon et al., 2021). Consequently, understanding how different types of communication message impact customer's risk evaluation is crucial for enhancing the efficiency of B2B marketing communication and increasing the success rate of customer acquisition.

3.1.4. Customer Acquisition

Customer acquisition is a vital metric for measuring supplier performance (You & Joshi, 2020). It commences from the customer's initial interaction with the supplier and continuing until the first purchase is made (Thomas, 2001). Previous research has used various approaches to measure customer acquisition. In the B2C research field, scholars have used metrics such as newly acquired customer size, newly increased sales profit, and brand market share to measure a firm's customer acquisition (Becker et al., 2009; You & Joshi, 2020). In addition to economic outcomes, scholars in the B2B research field have also measured successful customer acquisition using relational outcomes, such as the customer's long-term orientation, relationship performance, willingness to cooperate, and purchase intention (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2001; Wuyts & Geyskens, 2005). In this research, following previous B2B customer-supplier relationship research, this research uses the customer's purchase intention as the indicator of the supplier's customer acquisition (Dodds et al., 1991). A high level of customer acquisition serves as a crucial indicator of the effectiveness of the supplier's communication message.

3.1.5. Government Effectiveness Distance

Government effectiveness reflects the efficiency of public services provided by the government (Kaufmann et al., 2011). More specifically, this index encompasses the evaluation of the government's public services and civil service quality, the effectiveness of policy formulation and implementation, the level of independence from political influences, and the credibility of the government's dedication to upholding these policies. Government effectiveness, one of the six key indicators of the World Bank's world governance index, evaluates a country or region's formal institutional environment (Campbell et al., 2012; Kaufmann et al., 2011). The index is rated on a -2.5 to 2.5 scale, with each country or region being assigned an estimate value. Government effectiveness distance between two countries is calculated using the absolute difference between their index values (Kaufmann et al., 2011). This distance is a reflection of the formal institutional constraint provided by governments in cross-border B2B transactions that influences how customer firms choose suppliers and protect their cooperation interests (Chao & Kumar, 2010).

3.1.6. Trade Reference

Trade reference refers to that the customer can obtain a supplier's information from various sources, such as the supplier's past customers, peers in the same industry, industrial associations, and other suppliers (Jalkala & Salminen, 2010). This information allows the customer to assess the supplier's reputation, quality of products and services, and cooperation capabilities (Aarikka-Stenroos & Sakari Makkonen, 2014). A high level of trade reference enables the customer to make a more informed decision when selecting a supplier (Tóth et al., 2020). Moreover, in the event that the supplier engages in opportunistic behavior, the customer can also spread the information using the channels of trade reference. In this perspective, trade reference can be regarded as an informal institutional constraint provided by business networks that influences the customer's supplier selection, based on the supplier's reputation (Boyd et al., 2023).

3.2. Theoretical Model Construction

3.2.1. Theoretical Foundations

1) Investigating the Relationship between Communication Creativity and Customer Acquisition Based on Signaling Theory

Cross-border B2B suppliers are getting used to obtain B2B customers and conduct transaction through B2B marketing communication (Lindberg-Repo & Gronroos, 2004; Fang et al., 2015; Kumar et al. 2017). With intensified competition in global supply chain, suppliers need to compete for limited customer resources (Adamson, 2022). Therefore, suppliers face significant challenges in effectively differentiating themselves from their competitors and capturing the attention of customers through B2B marketing communication. In cross-border B2B marketing communication, suppliers mainly rely on one-way communication message output to acquire customers due to the lack of in person communication (Lawrence et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2020). In such a situation, creativity of suppliers' communication message becomes crucial (Eagle et al., 2021). However, conclusions remain mixed regarding the impact of communication creativity on customer acquisition. Some studies stated that communication creativity can increase customers' interest and thus firms' sales performance (Ang et al., 2014; Baack et al., 2016). In contrast, other findings showed communication creativity makes customers' purchase task more complex and inhibit customers' effective information processing, thus is not conducive for customer acquisition (Cortez et al., 2020; Reinartz & Saffert, 2013). In practice, the low customer acquisition rate through cross-border B2B marketing communication also indicates that suppliers are still confused about how to use communication creativity in their communication message. For example, what types of creative communication messages can suppliers employ to amplify their customer acquisition efforts in the cross-border B2B market?

Previous communication creativity research has classified communication creativity into two aspects: communication relevance and communication novelty (Ang et al., 2014; Smith & Yang, 2004). However, these studies have failed to distinguish the potentially different roles of communication relevance and communication novelty (Ang et al., 2007; Ang et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2016). Instead, they treated communication relevance and communication novelty as having the same effects in their conclusions. However, communication relevance and communication novelty may have different effects in the cross-border B2B marketing communication context. On the one hand, competition among suppliers is intensive. The communication message sent by suppliers are usually homogeneous. It is difficult for a supplier to stand out of similar competitors. In this perspective, novel communication message may have the potential to attract customers more, while relevant communication message may seem plain and be easily ignored. On the other hand, customer's time is limited (Swani et al., 2020). Purchase managers and specialists receive numerous communication messages from different suppliers. Therefore, they do not have enough time to handle the message of each supplier. In this perspective, relevant communication message may have higher chances to be picked up because it is closely related to the customer and is easy to be understood by the customer. However, novel communication message may be ignored because the customer may be confused about its value.

The above contradictory conditions indicate that customers may perceive communication relevance and communication novelty as different signals sent by suppliers. In the customer acquisition stage, information asymmetry exists between suppliers and customers. What type of signals should suppliers send to better demonstrate their quality and advantages compared to other competitors? How do customers, as signal receivers, perceive the signal observability and signal cost of communication relevance and communication novelty? Is more relevant communication message better or is more novel communication message better for customer acquisition? Moreover, if the supplier uses communication relevance and communication novelty simultaneously, how will its customer respond to the communication? These questions worth further investigation to determine the impact of communication creativity on customer acquisition and provide practical implications to suppliers.

To answer the above-mentioned questions, this research focuses on the customer acquisition stage in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, and investigate the effects of communication creativity (communication relevance and communication novelty) on suppliers' customer acquisition based on signaling theory. To be specifically, this research aims to verify whether there is a difference in the effects of communication relevance and communication novelty on increasing customer acquisition. Moreover, this research explores the impact of their interaction on customer acquisition. The "communication creativity → customer acquisition" link has been shown in Figure 3-1.

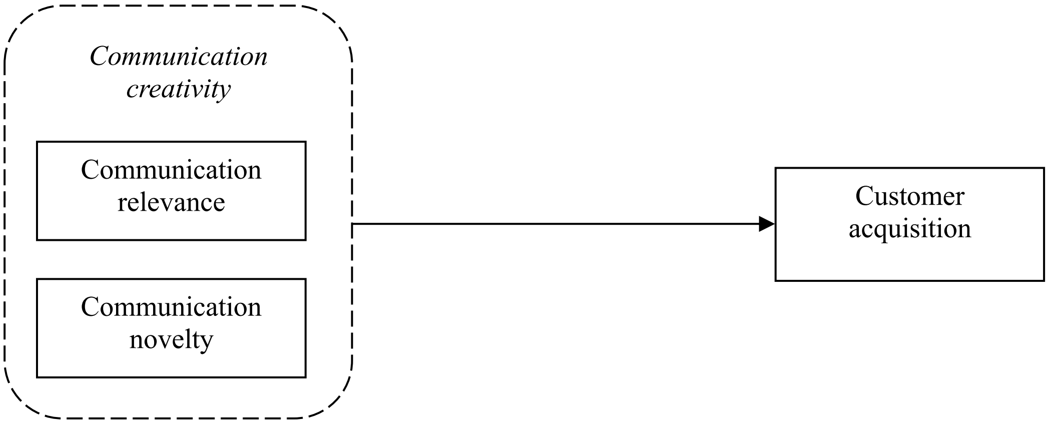


Figure 3-1. The Theoretical Framework based on Signaling Theory

2) Investigating the Mediating Effects of Customer Cognitive Response Based on Information Processing Theory

Information processing theory illustrated that customers are motivated to reduce uncertainty and equivocality after receiving external information (Cortez et al., 2020; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Moreover, different external information may influence customers' information processing needs and information processing capabilities differently (Gligor et al., 2021). Customer will generate cognitive response in the information processing, which will influence their final purchase decision (Deng et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2016). Therefore, clarifying what customer cognitive response will customers generate is significantly important for suppliers to design effective communication creativity of the communication message.

Investigating customer cognitive response in cross-border B2B marketing communication requires consideration of the practical characteristics of B2B purchase. In the customer acquisition stage in B2B marketing communication, customers' information processing mainly has two goals: to assess whether suppliers' offering is suitable to purchase, and to assess the risk associated with the transaction (Hibbert et al., 2012; Singh, et al., 2020). Customer learning corresponds to the first goal of information processing. Customer learning pertains to the degree to which the customer search for and learn about the supplier after receiving the supplier's communication message (Bonney et al., 2022; Meuter et al., 2005). Scholars have demonstrated that an elevated level of customer learning can reduce the customer's uncertainty in the transaction, which increases their purchase intention (Murray, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1996). Scholars have investigated some antecedents of customer learning, such as the customer's learning motivation and collaborative learning

(Chiang et al., 2017), learning environment and personal factors (Hibbert et al., 2012), as well as salespeople's encouragement (Bonney et al., 2022). However, these studies mostly focused on B2C purchase context and offline scenarios. In the cross-border B2B marketing communication context, can the supplier's communication creativity arouse its remote customer's learning? Is communication novelty better? Or is communication relevance better? The author aims to answer these questions by examining the effects of communication novelty and communication relevance on customer learning, and thus on the customer acquisition.

The second goal of customer's information processing is risk evaluation. Customer's risk evaluation refers to the customer's evaluation of risk and loss when considering purchasing from the supplier (Gao et al., 2012). In the cross-border B2B marketing communication, the customer may face challenges in determining the reliability of the supplier and the potential benefits of cooperation, as they are interacting with an unfamiliar supplier from different institutional backgrounds (Zhou & Poppo, 2010). This makes customer's risk evaluation an important factor that will influence the customer's final purchase decision. Risk evaluation is not a novel construct and has been investigated in many research field (Gao et al., 2012; Tse et al., 2019). However, previous research failed to investigate how communication creativity influence customer's risk evaluation, especially in the cross-border B2B marketing communication context. B2B transactions typically involve larger transaction amounts, highly customized products, more complex transaction processes, and more decision makers (Grewal et al., 2015). As a result, the potential risk for customers is high. Therefore, to increase customer acquisition rate, suppliers have to know how different types of communication creativity influence the customer's risk evaluation. For relevant communication and novel communication, which types of them can make the customer feel safer and more reliable? The author seeks to clarify the roles of communication relevance and communication novelty on customer's risk evaluation, and thus on the supplier's customer acquisition.

To sum up, this research incorporates information processing theory into the theoretical framework, and introduces customer learning and risk evaluation as two types of customer cognitive response between communication creativity and customer acquisition. As shown in Figure 3-2, the author seeks to verify how communication relevance and communication novelty influence customer learning and risk evaluation, respectively. In addition, the author also explores the impacts of customer learning and risk evaluation on customer acquisition.

Moreover, the mediating effects of customer learning and risk evaluation in the "communication creativity → customer acquisition" link will also be investigated.

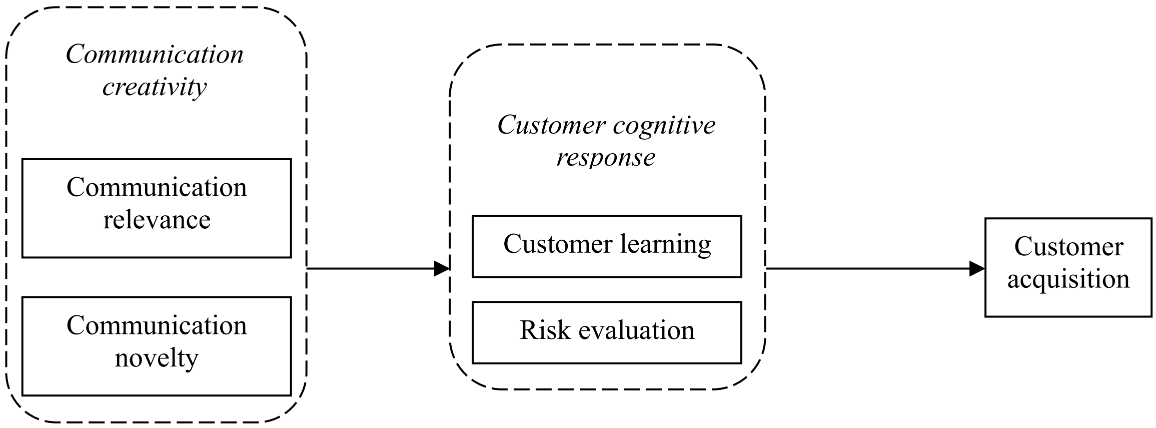


Figure 3-2. Including Mediators into the Framework based on Information Processing Theory

3) Investigating the Moderating Effects on Institutional Constraints Based on Institutional Theory

Institutional theory illustrated firms' strategic behaviors will be influenced by institutional factors (Peng, 2002). Traditional offline B2B transaction that can be governed by formal contracts and boundary spanners' personal ties (Zhao et al., 2021). However, in the customer acquisition stage of the cross-border B2B marketing communication, there is no established formal contract and relational norms. In this case, the customer largely relies on external formal and informal institutional constraints to evaluate whether their rights and interests can be protected during the collaboration. Although the customer will generate different cognitive responses after receiving communication message, whether or not they decide to make a purchase is ultimately determined by whether their transactions can be safeguarded (Inemek & Matthyssens, 2013). Therefore, the varying formal and informal institutional constraints among different countries and regions may influence how the customer responds to the supplier's communication messages and the final purchase decision. Previous research in international business focused on how formal institutional constraints influence new market entry and cross-border mergers and acquisitions (Chao & Kumar, 2010; Golesorkhi et al., 2019; Zhang & Yang, 2022), and paid less attention to the role of informal institutional constraints (Boddewyn & Peng, 2021). However, these studies failed to investigate how institutional constraints influence the cross-border B2B marketing communication. What institutional constraints might impact the way that communication creativity and customer cognitive response affect the supplier's customer acquisition? How can the customer ensure that its purchase and collaboration with the supplier is properly protected?

From the perspective of formal institutional constraints, cross-border B2B transactions are primarily affected by government-related factors, such as government effectiveness. This is because import and export transactions are highly influenced by and dependent on government's design and implementation of policies (Kaufmann et al., 2011). Previous research has investigated how government effectiveness influences firms' marketing strategies (Jiao et al., 2015) and firms' interfirm relationship governance mechanisms (Zhao et al., 2021). In the international business, scholars usually focused on government effectiveness distance, which is defined as the difference of government effectiveness between two countries (Kaufmann et al., 2011). Although prior research stated the significance of government effectiveness distance in the realm of international business (Moalla & Mayrhofer, 2020; Zhang & Yang, 2022; Zhou & Poppo, 2010), empirical evidence is still in lack regarding how government effectiveness distance influences the cross-border B2B marketing communication. How will the government effectiveness distance, as a formal institutional constraint, influence the customer cognitive response, and thus influence the supplier's customer acquisition?

From the perspective of informal institutional constraints, B2B suppliers and customers mostly rely on business network they are embedded in and obey business norms shared by business network members (Peng, 2002). Previous research stated that business network offers informal institutional constraints that help firms to protect their rights and punish their partners' opportunistic behaviors (Liu et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2013). Therefore, trade reference offered by the business network serves as an important informal institutional constraint that influence suppliers' and customers' behaviors (Jaakkola & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2019). Obtaining trade reference before purchasing is a common practice for B2B customers (Boyd et al., 2023). Scholars stated that positive trade reference indicates that a supplier has good reputation among customers and the industry, which helps it attract more customers (Tóth et al., 2020). Based on trade reference, the customer can evaluate whether the supplier is reliable in terms of reputation, capabilities and experience (Helm & Salminen, 2010). That is to say, trade reference is important for both the supplier and the customer. Despite the significant role of trade reference, previous research has failed to reveal its impact on cross-border B2B transactions. As the current research has paid little attention to informal institutional constraints in international business (Boddewyn & Peng, 2021), it is crucial to explore how trade reference, as an informal institutional constraint, can influence the process of cross-border B2B marketing communication and ultimately affect the supplier's customer acquisition.

To sum up, both formal and informal institutional constraints can influence the cross-border B2B marketing communication process and outcome. As shown in Figure 3-3, based on institutional theory and the characteristics of cross-border B2B transactions, this research introduces government effectiveness distance and trade reference into the framework, as formal and informal institutional constraints, respectively. By doing so, this research aims to investigate how government effectiveness distance and trade reference vary the impacts of customer cognitive response (customer learning and risk evaluation) on the supplier's customer acquisition.

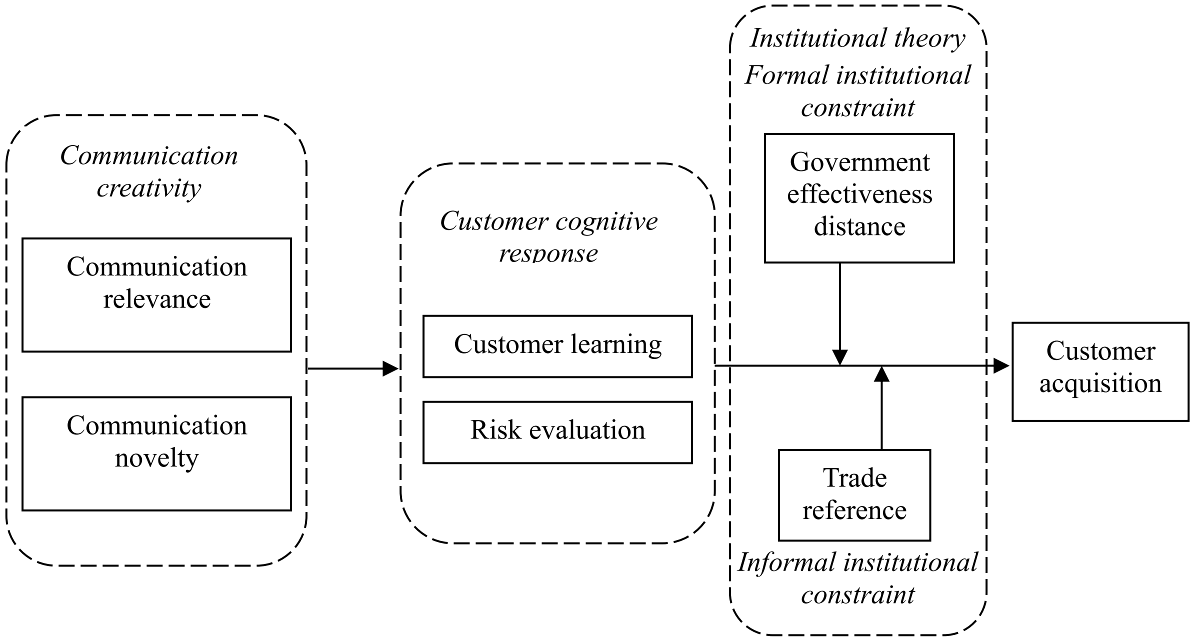


Figure 3-3. Including Moderators into the Framework based on Institutional Theory

3.2.2. Formation of Theoretical Model

The above theoretical development enables the research to form the theoretical model, as shown in Figure 3-4. First, this research investigates how two dimensions of communication creativity (communication novelty and communication relevance) influences the supplier's customer acquisition. The interaction effect of communication relevance and communication novelty will also be investigated. Second, based on information processing theory, this research identifies customer learning and risk evaluation as two types of customer cognitive response and reveal how they mediate the link between communication creativity and customer acquisition. Third, based on institutional theory, this research identifies government effectiveness distance and trade reference as formal and informal institutional constraints and investigate how they moderate the effects of customer cognitive response on customer acquisition. Following three steps mentioned above, this research aims to reveal how the supplier's communication creativity of message influences its customer acquisition in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context. Moreover, this research aims to provide managerial implications to suppliers in the customer acquisition stage.

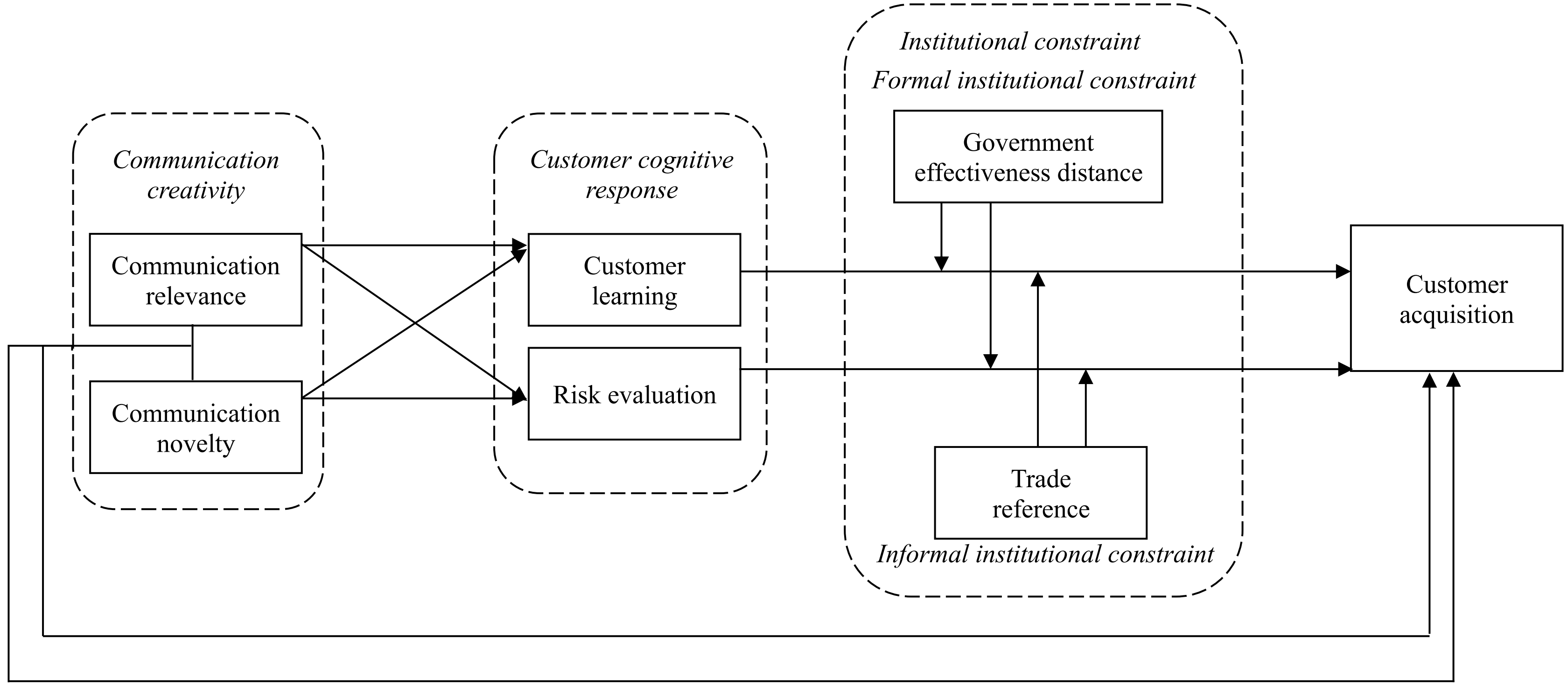


Figure 3-4. Theoretical Model of the Research

3.3. Hypothesis Development

3.3.1. Communication Creativity and Customer Acquisition

Communication message, as the core product of the cross-border B2B marketing communication process, should be creative to attract B2B customer's attention and purchase (Cortez et al., 2020). Previous communication creativity research has stated that, communication relevance and communication novelty, as two dimensions of communication creativity, are important in attracting customers' attention (Smith & Yang, 2004), increasing customers' recall and purchase (Ang et al., 2007; Chen et al., 2016), leading to higher customer acceptance and learning success in customer cocreation (Mahr et al., 2014). Despite communication relevance and communication novelty have distinct definitions and characteristics, these studies failed to distinguish their different roles. To be more specific, do communication relevance and communication novelty have distinct effects on customer acquisition? Answering these questions can assist suppliers in enhancing customer acquisition by designing and implementing effective and creative communication message. Therefore, this research focuses on the B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, distinguishes communication creativity into communication relevance and communication novelty, to explain their distinct effects on customer acquisition using signaling theory.

1) Communication Relevance and Customer Acquisition

This research predicts that the supplier's communication relevance and communication novelty in the communication message have different impacts on its B2B customer acquisition. More specifically, this research posits that communication relevance is positively related to customer acquisition.

First, relevant communication message makes it easier for the customer to analyze and assimilate. Relevant communication message pertains to the customer's current business scope, such as the products and services it provides to its downstream customers (Mishra et al., 1993). That is to say, communication relevance is an observable signal for the customer. Regarding the customer's knowledge reserves, message that is relevant is more likely to be familiar to the customer, making it easier for it to understand, analyze, and assimilate (Mahr et al., 2014). The customer can use its own knowledge and experience to assess the relevant information (Luo, 2007). That is, the information asymmetry between the supplier and the customer is reduced. When the customer and the supplier have similar knowledge reserves, the perceived distance between them can be reduced, increasing the likelihood that the customer will consider purchasing from the supplier.

Second, relevant communication message can satisfy the customer's needs. Sending a relevant communication message that is closely aligned with the customer's business scope can help the supplier meet the customer's demands for products or services more effectively (Vorhies & Morgan, 2005; Wilden et al., 2016). Purchase specialists and managers receive numerous promotional messages from various suppliers daily, resulting in the need to invest significant time and effort in sorting through these communications. As a result, they may ignore some of the messages due to limited time and resources (Adamson, 2022). Using a highly targeted communication message can simplify the customer's process of handling information, making it easier to assess whether the supplier's offerings are suitable for their supply chain (Luo, 2007). Even if the customer does not have an immediate purchase plan, if they determine that the supplier is appropriate based on the communication, they are more likely to consider the supplier for future purchase and collaboration.

Third, sending relevant communication messages can reduce the customer's perceived uncertainty and increase its trust in the supplier. For B2B customers, selecting a reliable and trustworthy supplier is a major concern, which includes evaluating the supplier's capabilities and integrity (Gu et al., 2019). When the supplier provides communication messages that are relevant to the customer's products and services, it demonstrates that the supplier understands and can fulfill the customer's needs more effectively (Vorhies & Morgan, 2005; Wilden et al., 2016). The customer is more likely to trust a supplier who demonstrates professional capabilities that meet their needs and is better equipped to maintain a satisfactory supply chain. That leads to increased confidence in cooperation with the supplier (Gu et al., 2019). Additionally, during communication with the supplier, the customer gains more insights into the products, services, and markets that it is interested in, which can reduce its perceived uncertainty about the supplier (Reimann et al., 2008). Therefore, when communication is relevant, the customer is more likely to purchase from the supplier.

H1: The supplier's communication relevance is positively related to its customer acquisition.

2) Communication Novelty and Customer Acquisition

In contrast to the straightforward positive impact of communication relevance on customer acquisition, the author posits that the effect of communication novelty on customer acquisition is much more intricate. Different from communication relevance, communication novelty refers to the presentation of the communication message is unique, divergent, novel and new (Sethi et al. 2012; Wang et al., 2020). For instance, if a customer needs product A, and the supplier does not directly provide information about product A, but instead sends information about the industrial trends, technological advancements, and market forecasts related to product A, then it is considered a novel communication message that is not closely relevant. Previous communication creativity research has stated that, as an important manifestation of creativity, novelty is supposed to attract customer attention and be beneficial for sales profits (Ang et al., 2007; Chen et al., 2016; Smith & Yang, 2004). However, some scholars also argued that communication creativity can make customers feel difficult to understand, which may reduce customers' purchase intention (Reinartz & Saffert, 2013). B2B purchase is characterized by large amounts of money involved, high quantities of goods or services being provided, long communication cycles, and multiple decision makers (Grewal et al., 2015). In cross-border B2B purchasing and transactions, the lack of in person meetings between the customer and the supplier increases uncertainty of the transaction process, making B2B marketing communication more complex (Kim & Kumar, 2018). In this case, this research posits that there are both positive and negative influence of communication novelty on customer acquisition.

On the positive side, first, the novel communication message can provide the customer with unique information and value (Smith & Yang, 2004). That sets the supplier apart from other competitors. B2B purchase specialists and managers receive promotional messages from numerous suppliers on a daily basis (Yoon et al., 2021). Since most suppliers send messages with similar formats, aims, and contents, customers are faced with ordinary and unattractive information, which can easily become repetitive and tiresome (Dean et al., 2023). In contrast, novel communication message with innovative content and style is more likely to stand out. The novel communication message reflects the supplier's advanced understanding of market trends and customer needs, and shows its high cost embedded in sending the signal (Heirati & Siahtiri, 2019). Compared to other suppliers, those who offer unique communication message have the advantage in providing the customer with fresh knowledge that is valuable in gaining insights into the market and downstream customers (Mahr et al., 2014). This implies that by collaborating with such a supplier, the customer can access innovative solutions and services that help them to better serve downstream customers (Wang et al., 2023). Consequently, the customer may consider the supplier as a better option to purchase from and cooperate with.

Second, the novel communication message is more effective in arousing the customer's latent and unexpressed needs. Previous studies on marketing orientation have emphasized that customers may not always have a clear understanding of their exact needs, making it crucial for suppliers to educate them (Blocker et al., 2011). To build competitiveness, the supplier must identify and stimulate its customer's unexpressed needs (Wang et al., 2021). By providing a communication message that differs from competitors, the supplier has a greater chance of arousing the customer's curiosity and stimulating it to consider potential needs for new products and services (Kim et al., 2013). This enables the supplier to offer a more distinctive value proposition, providing unique benefits to the customer and making it feel that working with this supplier is profitable.

On the negative side, however, the supplier's communication novelty may not increase customer acquisition. First, the novel communication message can make it difficult for the customer to identify the authenticity and value of the information being provided. That is to say, the signal observability is low. Although the novel communication message showcases the supplier's new knowledge and new insights, the customer can still get confused if it cannot understand and assimilate the novel information (Riedl et al., 2013). Therefore, the information asymmetry between the supplier and the customer is enlarged. Especially in the case of B2B customer purchase behavior, the top priority for the customer firm and its decision-making team is to minimize uncertainty and ensure a stable supply chain (Yoon et al., 2021). In such cases, novel communication that is not closely related to the customer's current business needs may be viewed as unnecessary during the supplier selection process. Therefore, in order to avoid making the wrong choice in the supply chain, the customer is unlikely to choose a supplier who emphasizes communication novelty.

Second, the novel communication message may not be suitable for the customer's current needs. As purchase specialists and managers are bombarded with communication messages from suppliers every day, they tend to prioritize information that is most relevant to their needs and can help them choose the most suitable supplier (Koufteros et al., 2012). However, the supplier who sends a novel communication message may not necessarily provide information that closely aligns with the customer's needs. Therefore, the customer may choose to ignore the information because it's not relevant (Stock & Zacharias, 2013). Moreover, even if the customer recognizes that the information is novel and innovative, it may not have an immediate need because its current business scope does not require the supplier's offering. In such cases, selecting a supplier based on novelty rather than relevance is not cost-effective for the customer, leading to low customer acquisition for the supplier.

In conclusion, there are reasons supporting both the positive and negative influences of communication novelty on customer acquisition.

H2: The supplier's communication novelty does not significantly influence its customer acquisition.

3) The Interacting Effects of Communication Relevance and Communication Novelty

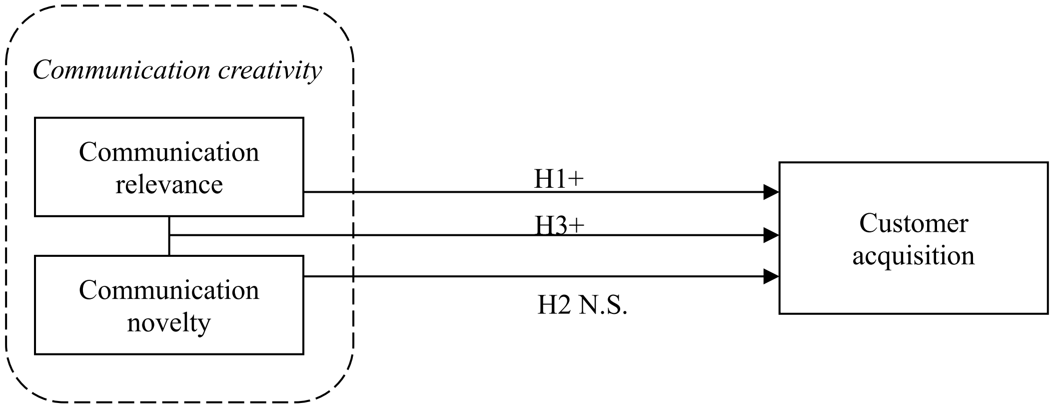
During the customer acquisition stage of the B2B transaction, the marketing communication between the supplier and the customer can be complex (Vieira et al., 2019). The communication process before the first formal transaction can last for several months or even years (Grewal et al., 2015). In such cases, it is unlikely that the communication strategies used by the supplier will be simplistic or one-dimensional. That implies when communicating with the customer, the supplier may employ both communication relevance and communication novelty simultaneously. For this reason, the author further explores the interacting effect of the two dimensions on customer acquisition. This research posits that when the supplier's communication message is both relevant and novel, its customer acquisition can be increased.

First, relevant and novel communication message can better attract the customer's attention. From the supplier's perspective, this type of communication message serves not only to inform the customer about the products and services that the customer is most interested in, but also demonstrates the supplier's unique insights into the market and downstream customers (Billore et al., 2020). This kind of signal has a high level of observability to be understood by the customer, and also shows high signal cost that sets the supplier apart from competitors. Therefore, this signal can make the supplier more memorable to the customer. From the customer's perspective, by working with a supplier that provides both relevant and novel communication messages, the customer does not only satisfy its immediate purchasing needs, but also explore new business opportunities by analyzing and interpreting the supplier's novel and unique information (Wang et al., 2021). These advantages can help the customer outperform its competitors, build a stable supply chain, and establish a competitive position in the market.

Second, the supplier who provides both relevant and novel communication messages can effectively reduce the customer's perceived uncertainty. Relevant information is easier for the customer to verify and analyze, which can alleviate its concerns and increase trust in the supplier (Lehnert et al., 2014). In addition, novel information can also enhance the supplier's attractiveness, as it demonstrates the supplier's ability to forecast market trends and anticipate downstream customer demand. Therefore, for the customer, choosing a supplier whose communication messages are both relevant and novel is a safer and more stable option compared to other suppliers. Such a choice is more likely to receive support from the customer's internal purchase decision-making team (Grewal et al., 2015).

H3: When the supplier's communication is both relevant and novel, its customer

acquisition will be increased.



Note: N.S. represents “Not significant”

Figure 3-5. The Relationship between Communication Relevance, Communication Novelty and Customer Acquisition

3.3.2. Communication Creativity and Customer Cognitive Response

Previous communication research indicated that customer cognitive response in the information processing is an important intermediary mechanism between communication message and customer feedback (Cortez et al., 2020; Gilliland & Johnston, 1997). Although this research applies signaling theory to explain the role of communication creativity as signal from the supplier’s perspective, signaling theory has drawbacks in explaining the customer’s response and information processing. Therefore, this research introduces information processing theory to investigate customer cognitive response towards the supplier’s communication creativity (signals). The author seeks to explore the roles of two customer cognitive response (customer learning and risk evaluation) in the link between communication creativity and customer acquisition.

1) Communication Creativity and Customer Learning

Customer learning reflects the customer’s proactive attitude towards learning from the supplier (Murray, 1991; Zahay & Griffin, 2004; Zhou et al., 2005). It indicates the customer’s positive evaluation of the supplier’s communication message, curiosity about the supplier, and potential interest in purchasing from the supplier (Hibbert et al., 2012). Thus, this research proposes that customer learning is a crucial mediating factor between the supplier’s communication creativity and customer acquisition. Specifically, this research hypothesizes that supplier’s communication relevance is positively related to customer learning.

First, relevant information saves the customer’s time on selection and evaluation. Efficiency is essential in the cross-border B2B marketing communication, where purchase specialists and managers aim to select the most suitable supplier for their firm with minimal time and effort (Grewal et al., 2015). The relevant communication message is familiar to the customer. Therefore, the customer can process and understand the familiar information faster (Luo, 2007). That means relevant communication message reduces the customer's information processing needs and increasing the customer's information processing capability. Facing the relevant communication message sent by the supplier, the customer can quickly grasp the key points expressed by the supplier based on its own experience and knowledge, which can save the customer's time and effort (Gouthier & Schmid, 2003). By providing relevant communication message, the supplier increases its chances of being considered by the customer. Then the customer is inclined to search and learn about the supplier, because the customer will feel easy to understand what the supplier wants to express and promote (Chang & Gotcher, 2007). By focusing on the communication closely related to the targeted products and services, the customer can avoid wasting time and effort in verifying the authenticity of communication message sent by the supplier. Relevant and familiar information makes the customer feel connected to their business interests and strengthens the notion that searching for more information about the supplier is a valuable use of their time.

Second, relevant communication message is more able to satisfy the customer's needs. When the customer perceives that the information provided by the supplier is relevant to its current needs, it is more likely to engage with the supplier and evaluate the supplier's suitability (Mahr et al., 2014). The communication that is closely aligned with the customer's needs can lead to deeper and more thorough interactions between the customer and the supplier, resulting in a stronger willingness by the customer to continue engaging with the supplier (Bonney et al., 2022). As communication between the customer and supplier continues, the customer gains a deeper understanding of the supplier, which can enhance their learning orientation towards the supplier.

Third, relevant communication message is more likely to attract more attention and consideration from the customer's purchase team. B2B purchase decisions are typically made by a team rather than an individual (Anderson et al., 2000). To effectively engage the entire purchase team, the supplier needs to provide targeted and relevant information that is closely aligned with the customer's business scope (Vorhies & Morgan, 2005; Wilden et al., 2016). By doing so, the supplier's offering is more easily understood by the customer's purchase team, increasing the likelihood of further consideration. In the joint purchase decision-making, the purchase team will typically conduct additional research on the supplier's product and service quality to confirm its reliability (Aarikka-Stenroos & Sakari Makkonen, 2014). Therefore, a supplier whose communication message is highly relevant is more likely to be considered and evaluated, rather than being overlooked.

H4a: The supplier's communication relevance is positively related to customer learning.

Moreover, this research posits that the supplier's communication novelty is also positively associated with customer learning. First, novel communication message can attract the customer's attention. People are naturally curious about the unknown and the new (Kim et al., 2013). Novel communication message can provide the customer with information that is unfamiliar, unique, and fresh, increasing its interest in searching and learning more (Smith & Yang, 2004). In highly competitive B2B markets, where many suppliers offer similar products or services, standing out can be challenging (Wang et al., 2021). However, if the supplier can offer a novel communication message that sets it apart from the competition, it is more likely to be noticed by the customer's purchasing team. Intrigued by the novel insights and information presented, the customer is likely to proactively seek out more information about the supplier (Terho & Jalkala, 2017).

Second, novel communication message has the potential to enhance competitiveness of the customer. For the customer, competition of the downstream customer market is intense and highly homogeneous (Ghauri et al., 2016). Therefore, the customer needs to find ways to differentiate itself from peers. In the B2B market, suppliers often have an information advantage over customers as they are better informed about the latest technological trends and new market developments (Wang et al., 2021). Consequently, the novel communication message sent by the supplier can be a resource for the customer to learn more about the current market and alleviate the information asymmetry between the supplier and the customer (Huang et al., 2018). Thereby, the customer is motivated to learn more about the supplier, to determine if the supplier can provide the support needed to complement its business needs. Selecting a supplier who can provide novel market-related and downstream customer-related knowledge and insights is beneficial for the customer to increase and update its knowledge of the market and downstream customers, thereby enhancing its own competitiveness (Tse et al., 2019). In this case, the customer is highly motivated to learn more about the supplier.

H4b: The supplier's communication novelty is positively related to customer learning.

2) Communication Creativity and Risk Evaluation

Customer's risk evaluation is a reflection of the customer's evaluation of risk and loss when considering a product or service offering (Gao et al., 2012). Risk evaluation is defined as the expected negative utility associated with the product or service, or the concern of making the wrong choice and bearing a loss (Peter & Ryan, 1976). In cross-border B2B marketing communication, the supplier needs to understand how communication relevance and communication novelty can influence customer's risk evaluation.

This research posits that the supplier's communication relevance decreases the customer's risk evaluation. First, relevant communication message makes it easier for the customer to identify the authenticity and value of supplier information (Luo, 2007). That means the customer does not need to spend extra time and effort verifying the communication message from the supplier because the relevant information is already familiar to it. With less effort required for information processing and a lower level of difficulty, the customer will experience a lower level of risk evaluation towards the relevant communication message (Kim et al., 2008). Second, the customer receives numerous similar communication messages that relevant to it every day (Yoon et al., 2021). Therefore, the customer can conveniently compare the supplier's offerings with those of other suppliers, evaluate the uniqueness of the product and price, and assess the correctness of the communication message (Aarikka-Stenroos & Sakari Makkonen, 2014). Through comparison, the customer can be more familiar with the supplier's products and services. Thus, the customer's risk evaluation is low.

H5a: The supplier's communication relevance is negatively related to the customer's risk evaluation.

In contrast, this research proposes that the supplier's communication novelty can increase the customer's risk evaluation, for three reasons. First, novel communication message can make customers feel unfamiliar, resulting in lower trust in the supplier (Kim et al., 2008). The customer may also need to spend more on assessing such information, which can be challenging and may make it difficult to evaluate the value of the information (Chang & Gotcher, 2007). Second, since the novel communication message is distinct from those of other suppliers, it becomes challenging for the customer to find comparison points and evaluate its usefulness based on their own knowledge and experience (Aarikka-Stenroos & Sakari Makkonen, 2014). This lack of benchmarks reduces the customer's information processing capability. Third, the novel communication message may not be aligned with the customer's current needs, leading to skepticism about the supplier's motives and the relevance of the message. In some cases, the customer may even perceive the communication as spam or fraud (Fraccastoro et al., 2021). As the communication is not closely related to the customer's needs, they cannot evaluate the quality of the product or service being offered, which can further increase their risk evaluation of doing business with the supplier.

H5b: The supplier's communication novelty is positively related to the customer's risk evaluation.

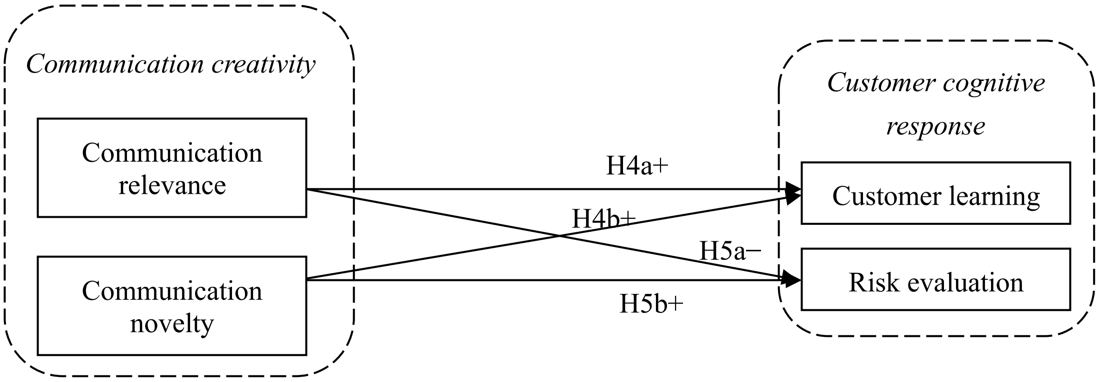


Figure 3-6. The Relationship between Communication Relevance, Communication Novelty and Customer Learning, Risk Evaluation

3.3.3. Customer Cognitive Response and Customer Acquisition

In the B2B market, customer acquisition is often evaluated based on the customer's intention to make a purchase (Dodds, 1991; Dyer & Singh, 1998). In line with previous research, this research measures the supplier's customer acquisition as the customer's purchase intention towards the supplier. As discussed above, customer learning and risk evaluation are two underlying mechanisms between the supplier's communication creativity (communication relevance and communication novelty) and customer acquisition. The author will analyze the impacts of customer learning, risk evaluation on customer acquisition.

This research posits that customer learning increases customer acquisition. First, in the cross-border B2B marketing communication, customer learning is crucial in helping the customer become more familiar with the supplier (Bonney et al., 2022). In the process of customer learning, the customer is motivated to invest time and effort to search and learn about the supplier's information, and even discuss about the supplier within their purchasing team (Zhou et al., 2005). As the customer acquires more information about the supplier, its perceived uncertainty decreases, which in turn increases its trust in the supplier (Claycomb & Frankwick, 2010). Therefore, the more the customer learns about the supplier, the more trust they develop, which ultimately leads to higher purchase intention.

Second, customer learning signifies the customer's interest in the supplier. By selecting the supplier from a pool of options, the customer has already demonstrated its intention for further communication and potential cooperation. When customers engage in learning behaviors towards the supplier, it is more likely to respond and communicate with the supplier (Zahay & Griffin, 2004). The increased communication allows both the customer and supplier to know better about each other's transactional habits, expectations for cooperation, product and service requirements, and relational norms (Joshi, 2009; Petersen et al., 2015; Srivastava & Chakravarti, 2009). As a result, the supplier may tailor its product or service solutions to better suit the customer's characteristics and needs, resulting in greater customer satisfaction (Wang et al., 2021). Typically, in B2B customer acquisition campaigns, it takes several months, or even a year, for the customer to make the first purchase (Grewal et al., 2015). With ongoing communication and engagement, the customer's purchase intention towards the supplier will be increased, which means the supplier's customer acquisition can be enhanced.

Third, customer learning encourages the customer to invest more into the relationship between it and the supplier. Engaging in searching and learning activities requires the customer to dedicate significant time and effort to understanding the supplier, and that is a specific investment in the relationship (Boyd et al., 2023). Prior research on interfirm relationships suggests that greater specific investment can enhance the relational embeddedness of the customer within the relationship, thus strengthening its long-term commitment to the supplier (Chang & Gotcher, 2007; Liu et al., 2014; Ryu et al., 2007). Additionally, as the customer spends more time communicating with and learning about the supplier, it is less likely to pay attention to other suppliers (Tse et al., 2019). Given the emphasis on efficiency in B2B transactions, when a purchase demand arises, the customer is more inclined to choose the supplier with whom they have invested time and effort.

H6: Customer learning is positively related to the supplier's customer acquisition.

In contrast, this research posits the customer's risk evaluation decreases the supplier's customer acquisition. First, high risk evaluation requires the customer to pay extra cost on cooperation governance (Gao et al., 2012). If a customer decides to purchase from a supplier that is perceived to have high risks, it needs to invest significant time and effort into designing and implementing a contract that can protect its profits (Zhao et al., 2022). However, this process can be costly. Additionally, in cross-border B2B transactions, the legal systems in different countries and regions can vary greatly, making it challenging for the customer to resolve any disputes through legal means, even if the supplier breaks the terms of the contract (Sheng et al., 2018). As a result, purchasing from a high-risk supplier may ultimately lead to additional costs for the customer, which is not cost-effective.

Second, choosing a high-risk supplier will increase the customer's cost of trial and error. If the chosen supplier cannot satisfy the customer's requirements, the customer can suffer high sunk costs (Wang et al., 2023). Furthermore, the customer may miss out on the opportunity to work with other suppliers who offer better quality products and services and are more reliable. In B2B transactions, the customer and supplier may not only establish a short-term purchasing relationship, but also aim to build a long-term strategic alliance (Berry, 1995; Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2001). Selecting the wrong supplier can have significant long-term consequences and result in substantial losses for the customer (Li et al., 2008). Therefore, the customer is less likely to purchase from a supplier who makes it perceive high risks.

Third, if the customer perceives a high level of risk evaluation when considering a potential supplier, it may hesitate to engage in further communication due to concerns about potential losses and uncertainties. In such cases, the customer may abandon communication with the supplier and turn to other potential suppliers (Yoon et al., 2021). The customer is not inclined to take risks by purchasing from a supplier that conveys a potential risk. Instead, the customer tends to prefer reliable suppliers with lower risks, particularly in the context of cross-border B2B transactions where selecting a trustworthy supplier can be challenging.

H7: The customer's risk evaluation is negatively related to the supplier's customer acquisition.

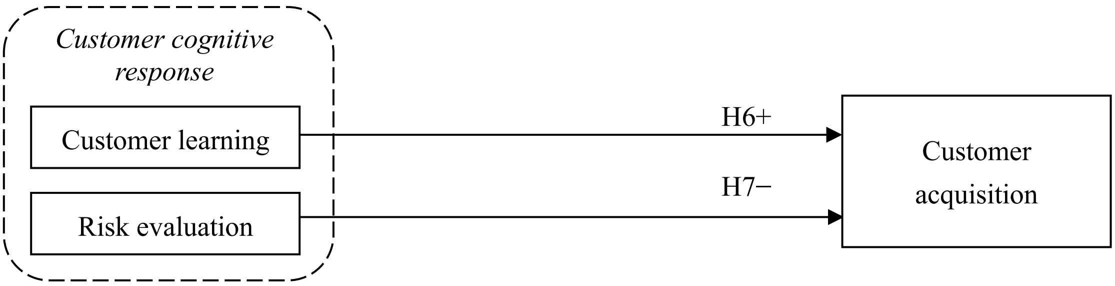


Figure 3-7. The Effects of Customer Learning, Risk Evaluation on Customer Acquisition

3.3.4. The Mediating Roles of Customer Cognitive Response

Based on communication creativity research, signaling theory and information processing theory, this research proposes the relationship between communication creativity (communication relevance and communication novelty) and customer cognitive response (customer learning and risk evaluation), also the impact of customer cognitive response on the supplier's customer acquisition. As hypothesized above, communication relevance positively influences the supplier's customer acquisition, while communication novelty does not exert a significant impact on customer acquisition. The relationship between communication message and communication outcome, particularly with regards to communication novelty and the supplier's customer acquisition, is therefore not straightforward. In light of information processing theory, the research proposes that two types of customer cognitive response (customer learning and risk evaluation) play significant roles in the cross-border B2B marketing communication process. The research further reveals the mediating roles of customer learning and risk evaluation, in order to provide insights on the underlying mechanisms by which communication creativity influences the supplier's customer acquisition.

1) The Mediation in the Link between Communication Relevance and Customer Acquisition

Hypotheses (H1-H7) discussed earlier have demonstrated the influence of communication relevance on customer acquisition, and the influence of communication relevance on customer learning and risk evaluation. Additionally, the author explored the effects of customer learning and risk evaluation on customer acquisition. It is argued that customer learning and risk evaluation serve as mediators in the link between communication relevance and customer acquisition.

This research posits that communication relevance increases the supplier's customer acquisition by enhancing customer learning. Customer learning is a crucial process in the customer-supplier relationship. It involves the customer gathering relevant information about the supplier, its products, and services, and assimilating this information (Zhou et al., 2005). This process can have significant impacts on the customer's willingness to choose the supplier over other competitors. First, customer learning allows the customer to verify the authenticity of the relevant information and focus more on the supplier (Bonney et al., 2022). In the highly competitive B2B market, where many suppliers offer similar products and services, gaining the customer's attention and trust is essential (Wang et al., 2021). By dedicating time and effort to nurturing the relationship with the supplier, the customer becomes more inclined to choose the supplier as their preferred option (Ryu et al., 2007). Second, customer learning promotes communication between two sides. When the customer receives communication messages that are relevant to its needs, it is motivated to interact and ask questions about the supplier (Mahr et al., 2014). As a result, the customer and the supplier can communicate more frequently and become more familiar with each other. During this process, customer learning enables the customer to be clearer about whether the relevant communication message sent by the supplier is valuable or not.

This research also proposes that communication relevance increases the supplier's customer acquisition by reducing the customer's risk evaluation. First, relevant communication message allows the customer to feel more familiar with the supplier. As the relevant information is closely aligned with the customer's business scope, the customer has sufficient previous knowledge and experience to evaluate the accuracy of the communication message (Gouthier & Schmid, 2003). That lowers the customer's risk evaluation associated with purchasing from the supplier and makes it a safer choice for the customer. Second, relevant information enables the customer to make informed comparisons with other suppliers. By comparing the supplier's offerings with others, the customer can determine the most cost-effective transaction option in terms of product, service quality and price (Aarikka-Stenroos & Sakari Makkonen, 2014). This comparison also reduces information asymmetry in the communication process. Therefore, the customer is more inclined to ultimately choose to purchase from the supplier.

H8a: Customer learning mediates the effect of communication relevance on customer acquisition.

H8b: Risk evaluation mediates the effect of communication relevance on customer acquisition.

This research further hypothesizes that the mediating effect of customer learning is stronger than that of risk evaluation in the link between communication relevance and the supplier's customer acquisition.

First, for the customer, searching for information about a supplier can be time-consuming and require significant effort. In B2B customer acquisition, the process can take several months or even years, during which the customer needs to spend a lot on building a relationship with the supplier (Wang et al., 2023). Due to the search cost and the principle of efficiency, the customer is likely to continue purchasing from the current supplier, even if there are other options available. This is because switching to another supplier would require the customer to invest additional time and effort in learning about the new supplier, which would be costly (Tse et al., 2019). Second, customer learning can help reduce risk evaluation. By learning more about the supplier, the customer can reduce uncertainty and risk evaluation, which can increase its likelihood of purchasing from the supplier (Homburg et al., 2012; Jean et al., 2010). Therefore, compared to risk evaluation, customer learning enforces the customer to invest more on the supplier, and has a stronger effect on the link between communication relevance and the supplier's customer acquisition.

H8c: In the link between communication relevance and customer acquisition, customer learning has a stronger mediating effect than risk evaluation.

2) The Mediation in the Link between Communication Novelty and Customer Acquisition

This research proposes that customer learning mediates the relationship between communication novelty and the supplier's customer acquisition. First, customer learning turns communication novelty into signal that with high value and high observability. While innovative information that provides insight into the market has the potential to arouse a customer's interest, the customer may be unsure of the usefulness of the information (Zuo et al., 2019). As the novel offering may not be directly aligned with the customer's current needs, the latter may not make an immediate purchase. However, through proactive learning about the supplier, the customer can better analyze the supplier's offerings and identify the value of the novel information more accurately (Hibbert et al., 2012). Second, customer learning enables the customer to ascertain what the supplier can offer and how they can collaborate. Simply receiving novel information may not directly increase the customer's purchase intention, as the information may not be closely related to its current needs (Ang et al., 2007). Nevertheless, if the supplier's communication is novel and interesting, the customer is likely to be motivated to learn more about the supplier (Billore et al., 2020). Through actively seeking out and assimilating the supplier's information, the customer can identify potential opportunities for collaboration and determine how to incorporate the novel information into its own firm (Hibbert et al., 2012). Therefore, customer learning can amplify the effect of communication novelty on the supplier's customer acquisition.

In contrast, this research posits that through the customer's risk evaluation, communication novelty is negatively related to the supplier's customer acquisition. First, from the customer's perspective, analyzing a novel communication message can be challenging. When the information is unfamiliar, the information is regarded as the signal that with low observability, and requires the customer to pay more effort in information processing. When it is difficult for the customer to assess its authenticity and value, the customer can generate high uncertainty and risk evaluation (Rao et al., 2007). As a result, the customer may hesitate to make a purchase. Second, novel information often lacks benchmarks when compared to the messages sent by other suppliers, thereby reducing the customer's information processing capability (Aarikka-Stenroos & Sakari Makkonen, 2014). This situation can cause the customer to become uncertain and confused about whether the supplier's offering is necessary or not. Third, in the cross-border B2B marketing communication, novel information may raise concerns about cooperation governance. In the absence of third-party regulation and district legal systems, the customer may feel more vulnerable to risk when presented with novel information (Yoon et al., 2021). This heightened sense of risk can further diminish the customer's purchase intention.

H9a: Customer learning mediates the effect of communication novelty on customer

acquisition.

H9b: Risk evaluation mediates the effect of communication novelty on customer acquisition.

Moreover, this research hypothesizes that in the relationship between communication novelty and the supplier's customer acquisition, customer learning has a stronger mediating role than that of risk evaluation. First, customer learning is critical in verifying the value of novel communication messages, that is often the customer's biggest concern. In B2B markets, the customer aims to select the most suitable supplier to maintain supply chain stability and increase its competitiveness (Wang et al., 2021). Therefore, compared to risk evaluation, the customer tends to care more about the perceived benefits brought by customer learning. In this case, customer learning enables the customer to determine whether a supplier sending novel information is valuable and reliable or not, aligning with its purpose of selecting suppliers. Second, in the context of cross-border B2B marketing communication, risk may be widespread, but novel communication message is rare (Griffith et al., 2017). Since most suppliers provide similar information, novelty in communication is scarcer. If the information is novel and attractive enough, the customer tends to search and learn more about the supplier instead of abandoning it due to a high level of risk evaluation (Bonney et al., 2022). With novel information and high potential benefits, customer learning can outweigh risk evaluation.

H9c: In the link between communication novelty and customer acquisition, customer learning has a stronger mediating effect than risk evaluation.

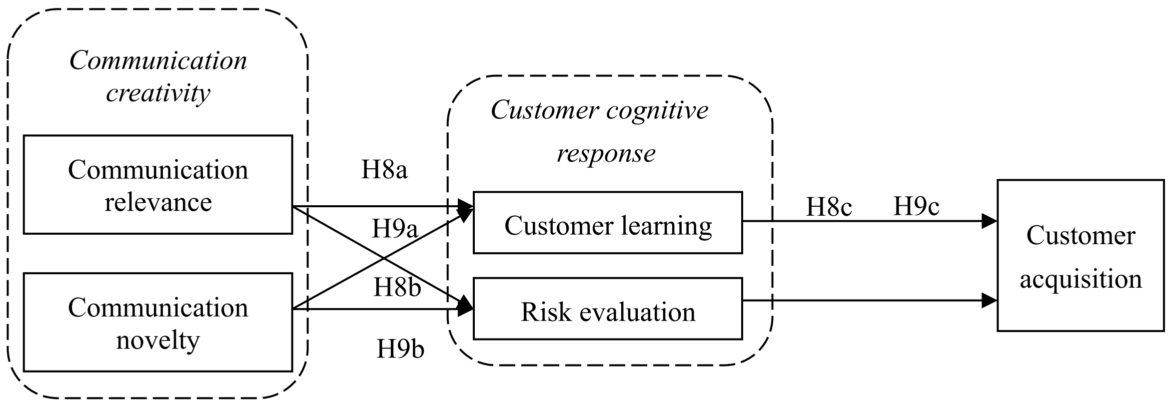


Figure 3-8. The Mediating Effects of Customer Learning and Risk Evaluation

3.3.5. The Moderating Roles of Institutional Constraints

As discussed above, this research examines the effects of communication creativity (communication relevance and communication novelty) on supplier's customer acquisition, as well as the mediating effects of customer cognitive response (customer learning and risk evaluation). In the cross-border B2B marketing communication process, various factors can impact the communication outcome between the supplier and the customer (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998). Under cross-border context where the supplier and the customer cannot meet, governing the purchase process and cooperation can be one of the biggest concerns for the customer in the supplier selection process (Yang et al., 2018). Institutional theory illustrated that the interfirm governance is affected by both formal institutional constraints and informal institutional constraints (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Formal institutional constraints pertain to the legal environment in which the interfirm relationship is located in, which is guaranteed by the government effectiveness (Sheng et al., 2018). Informal institutional constraints, usually generated and guaranteed by the business network, include regulations of business ethics and moral standards of the market (Chan & Du, 2022), and relational governance mechanisms in the interfirm relationship (Zaheer & Venkatraman, 1995), such as socialization, business ethics, relational norms, and cultural issues (Cousins & Menguc, 2006). Previous research has indicated that both formal and informal institutional constraints can influence the governance of the interfirm relationship. In the cross-border B2B marketing communication, these two institutional constraints may also impact the main communication process and outcome.

This research focuses on how formal and informal institutional constraints affect the impact of customer cognitive response on supplier's customer acquisition. Specifically, this research identifies government effectiveness distance between two countries as the formal institutional constraint, as it reflects the differences in government effectiveness, policy implementation, and administrative quality of the two countries (Kaufmann et al., 2011). Additionally, this research identifies trade reference as the informal institutional constraint provided by the business network, as it reflects the knowledge that the customer gains to evaluate the supplier's reputation and capabilities (Jaakkola & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2019). This research investigates how government effectiveness distance and trade reference moderate the relationships between customer learning, risk evaluation, and customer acquisition.

1) The Moderating Effects of Government Effectiveness Distance

As a reflection of formal institutional distance, government effectiveness distance prevalently exists among countries and regions (Kaufmann et al., 2011). In the cross-border

B2B transactions, import and export transactions are heavily dependent on the formulation and implementation of government policy (Deng & Yang, 2015; Mariotti & Marzano, 2021). Government effectiveness, particularly in terms of import and export regulations, can significantly impact the effectiveness of cross-border B2B transactions (Campbell et al., 2012). In countries where the government is effective, firms can enjoy efficient administrative processes, effective protection of intellectual property and business profits, and a fair market environment (Sheng et al., 2018). In contrast, in countries where the government is ineffective, firms may struggle to effectively conduct import or export business due to a lack of effective regulation and complex approval processes (Zhou & Poppo, 2010). Considering the significant economic and cultural disparities among nations, the effectiveness of government also differs across countries. The research aims to investigate how government effectiveness distance between the supplier's and the customer's countries influences their cross-border B2B marketing communication process and outcome. Specifically, the research strives to determine how the roles of customer learning and risk evaluation change under different levels of government effectiveness distance.

This research posits that government effectiveness distance negatively moderates the impact of customer learning on supplier's customer acquisition. First, a high government effectiveness distance increases the customer's concern on cooperation governance. The significant formal institutional distance between the two governments implies that they have different administrative efficiencies and institutional environments, which can result in varying market regulations and business activity protection in the two countries (Campbell et al., 2012). All these factors can hinder the customer's interests that stem from its learning about the supplier. Despite the customer recognizing the great potential for cooperation and benefits with the supplier, it can be challenging for the customer to ignore the substantial gap in government effectiveness. Moreover, a high level of government effectiveness distance indicates that the legal system and enforceability are also different between the countries of the supplier and the customer (Zhou & Poppo, 2010). That potentially leaves the customer's profits unprotected if the supplier fails to comply with the contract. As a result, the customer's concerns about cooperation governance and uncertainty will be increased. That lowers the customer's purchase intention towards the supplier, thus hindering the supplier's customer acquisition. For example, Indian IT service providers have been stymied in their plans to tap the European market. That is because that the government effectiveness of India and that of many European countries are largely different. The high level of government effectiveness distance hinders the European customers' confidence in cooperating with Indian

IT service providers, because they are afraid their rights and profits would not be protected.

Second, a high government effectiveness distance increases the customer’s concern on transaction efficiency. The huge government effectiveness distance indicates that the two governments may have different approval processes, particularly in terms of import and export issues (Moalla & Mayrhofer, 2020). This mismatch in approval efficiency can cause the supplier or the customer to spend extra time and effort on getting authorization from the government, leading to unexpected delays in delivery or payment, which is not conducive to cross-border B2B transactions. As a result, the customer’s purchase intention may be reduced. Moreover, when the government effectiveness distance is high, the customer will be more unfamiliar with the supplier’s institutional environment (Campbell et al., 2012). That increases the customer’s concern about uncertainty and risk, which in turn reduces its communication intention with the supplier. Conversely, when the supplier’s and the customer’s government effectiveness are similar, they can understand each other better in terms of import and export approval processes, laws and regulations, and administrative service quality. It should also be noticed that, when the level of government effectiveness is comparable between the supplier and the customer, whether both are low or both are high, it leads to a mutual familiarity with each other’s legal systems and regulations. Furthermore, this similarity in government effectiveness signifies that the supplier and the customer share akin perspectives on the utilization of legal tools, and their attitudes towards government officials (Sheng et al., 2018). Therefore, their interests aroused by customer learning can further lead to purchases.

Moreover, this research posits that when the government effectiveness distance is high, the customer’s risk evaluation will decrease the supplier’s customer acquisition more. High government effectiveness distance and high risk evaluation can significantly increase the customer’s cost of cooperation governance (Singh & Gaur, 2021). Firms in countries with different government effectiveness tend to have different approaches to using government administrative resources and legal tools (Sheng et al., 2018). In countries where the government effectiveness is high, firms can follow the established processes set by their government without worrying about whether their profits will be protected or not. They do not need to rely on other channels to seek assistance from government agencies. In contrast, in countries where the government effectiveness is low, firms may encounter difficulties in obtaining good administrative services and may need to build personal ties with government officials, so as to get policy-related information and administrative support (Peng, 2002). This different understanding of government administrative services and institutional environment can lead to conflicts between the supplier and the customer. In addition, with a high government effectiveness distance, certain behaviors which are legitimate in a country may not be legitimate in the other country, and the legal enforceability may be different (Zhou & Xu, 2012). This can lead to doubts for the customer regarding the effectiveness of the legal system in both its own country and the supplier's country in protecting its profits. Therefore, the customer may perceive a higher level of risk, which can potentially decrease its intention to make a purchase.

H10a: When government effectiveness distance is at a high level, the positive effect of customer learning on customer acquisition will be weakened.

H10b: When government effectiveness distance is at a high level, the negative effect of risk evaluation on customer acquisition will be strengthened.

2) The Moderating Effects of Trade Reference

Trade reference refers to that the customer can obtain information about a supplier from various sources, including former customers of the supplier, industrial associations, other suppliers, and peer customers (Jalkala & Salminen, 2010). By utilizing trade reference, the customer can gain valuable knowledge on a supplier's business ethics, product and service quality, cooperation compliance, integrity, and ways of conducting business (Aarikka-Stenroos & Sakari Makkonen, 2014). That can reduce the information asymmetry between the two. In the cross-border B2B marketing communication, will trade reference significantly influence the effects of customer learning and risk evaluation on the supplier's customer acquisition, even in the lack of in person meetings?

This research proposes that when trade reference is high, the positive impact of customer learning on the supplier's customer acquisition can be enhanced. First, trade reference can promote trust generated by customer learning. Customer learning enables the customer to know better about the supplier, which in turn may foster trust and minimize uncertainty in the cooperation (Jean et al., 2010; Murray, 1991). A substantial amount of trade reference indicates that the customer can access to a wealth of information regarding the supplier's reputation from multiple sources, thereby facilitating an easier establishment of trust between the customer and the supplier (Jaakkola & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2019). Consequently, this helps mitigate information asymmetry between the two.

Second, trade reference strengthens the relational ties between the customer and the supplier. As previously mentioned, customer learning can be regarded as an investment in building a relationship (Boyd et al., 2023). The more the customer invests in the relationship, the more likely it is to make a purchase from the supplier (Ryu et al., 2007). Trade reference enables the customer to learn more about the supplier from various sources such as their past customers, industrial association, and other peers (Aarikka-Stenroos & Sakari Makkonen, 2014). As a result, the customer invests more time and effort in verifying the supplier's reliability. Switching to other suppliers would require the customer to expend extra time and effort, which contradicts the efficiency of B2B purchasing. Therefore, the customer is more likely to have a stronger intention to make a purchase.

Third, trade reference serves as an informal institutional constraint that ensures cooperation between the supplier and the customer. As mentioned earlier, formal institutional constraint may not be sufficient to protect the customer's rights and profits, especially in cross-border transactions where legal systems are different among countries (Sheng et al., 2018). However, having trade reference allows the customer to spread information about the supplier's cooperation behaviors to industrial associations, peer customers, and other potential customers of the supplier (Liu et al., 2014). If the supplier engages in opportunistic behaviors, the customer can quickly spread negative feedback in the business network, which can harm the supplier's reputation and opportunities to acquire new customers (Zhao et al., 2021). In the highly competitive B2B market, a supplier's reputation is crucial to its competitiveness and ability to acquire new customers (Peng, 2002). Thus, by having a high level of trade reference, the customer can access more information about the supplier from multiple sources, and establish channels to spread the customer's word-of-mouth. This helps reduce the customer's governance cost and increase its trust in the supplier, ultimately leading to a higher purchase intention.

Moreover, this research posits that trade reference alleviates the negative effect of risk evaluation on the supplier's customer acquisition. First, trade reference mitigates the information asymmetry in the communication process, thereby empowering the customer to make well-informed purchasing decisions. This is because trade reference provides the customer with extensive information about the supplier's reputation and authentic feedback from the business network (Boyd et al., 2023). This wealth of information reduces the customer's perceived uncertainty and lowers its risk evaluation. Second, trade reference enables the purchase and cooperation between the two sides to be more stable and reliable. Trade reference serves as a signal of the supplier's reputation and cooperation capabilities (Helm & Salminen, 2010). Based on this signal, the customer can be more confident in the supplier's capabilities and decide whether to purchase from the supplier. With trade reference, the customer's cost of trial and error is reduced.

H11a: When trade reference is at a high level, the positive effect of customer learning

on customer acquisition will be strengthened.

H11b: When trade reference is at a high level, the negative effect of risk evaluation on customer acquisition will be weakened.

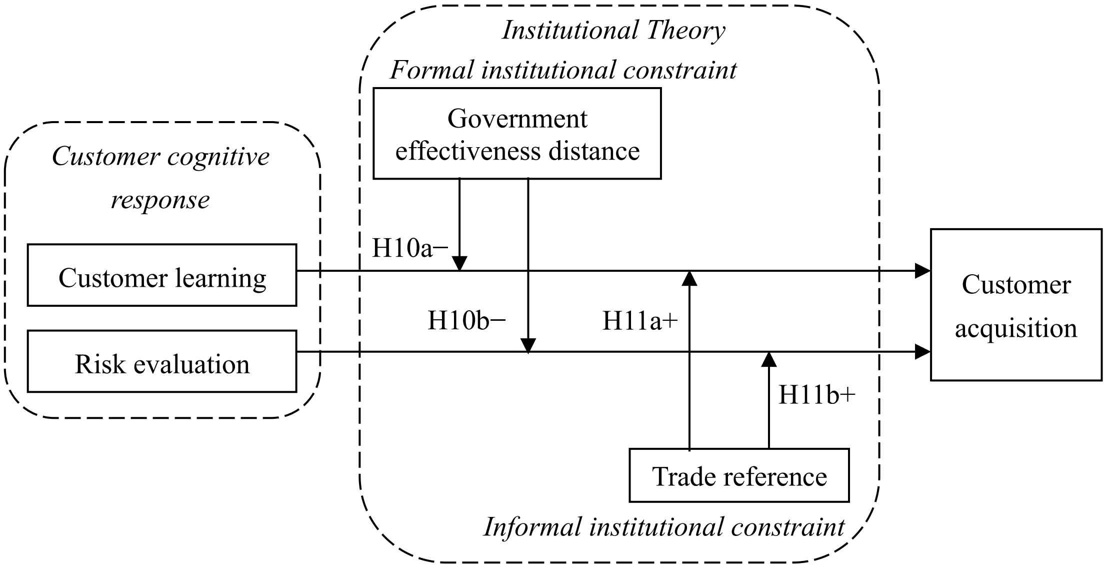


Figure 3-9. The Moderating Effects of Government Effectiveness Distance and Trade Reference

3.4. Brief Summary

In this chapter, this research investigates that how communication relevance and communication novelty influence the supplier's customer acquisition through customer learning and risk evaluation. This research also examines the moderating effects of government effectiveness distance and trade reference on the effect of customer cognitive response on customer acquisition. 19 hypotheses have been proposed. First, H1, H2 and H3 hypothesize the effects of communication relevance, communication novelty on the supplier's customer acquisition, and their interacting role on the customer acquisition. Second, H4a, H4b, H5a and H5b hypothesize the effects of communication relevance and communication novelty on customer learning and risk evaluation. Third, H6 and H7 hypothesize the effects of customer learning and risk evaluation on the supplier's customer acquisition. Fourth, H8a, H8b, H8c, H9a, H9b and H9c investigate the mediating roles of customer learning and risk evaluation, and the comparison of their mediating effects. Finally, H10a, H10b, H11a and H11b hypothesize the moderating effects of government effectiveness distance and trade reference on the link between customer learning, risk evaluation and customer acquisition. Table 3-1 provides a summary of the hypothesis statements.

Table 3-1. Summary of Hypothesis Statements

No	Statement
The relationship between communication creativity and customer acquisition	
H1	The supplier's communication relevance is positively related to its customer acquisition.
H2	The supplier's communication novelty does not significantly influence its customer acquisition.
H3	When the supplier's communication is both relevant and novel, its customer acquisition will be increased.
The relationship between communication creativity and customer cognitive response	
H4a	The supplier's communication relevance is positively related to customer learning.
H4b	The supplier's communication novelty is positively related to customer learning.
H5a	The supplier's communication relevance is negatively related to the customer's risk evaluation.
H5b	The supplier's communication novelty is positively related to the customer's risk evaluation.
The relationship between customer cognitive response and customer acquisition	
H6	The customer's customer learning is positively related to the supplier's customer acquisition.
H7	The customer's risk evaluation is negatively related to the supplier's customer acquisition.
The meditating roles of customer cognitive response	
H8a	Customer learning mediates the effect of communication relevance on customer acquisition.
H8b	Risk evaluation mediates the effect of communication relevance on customer acquisition.
H8c	In the link between communication relevance and customer acquisition, customer learning has a stronger mediating effect than risk evaluation.
H9a	Customer learning mediates the effect of communication novelty on customer acquisition.
H9b	Risk evaluation mediates the effect of communication novelty on customer acquisition.
H9c	In the link between communication novelty and customer acquisition, customer learning has a stronger mediating effect than risk evaluation.
The moderating roles of formal and informal institutional constraints	
H10a	When government effectiveness distance is at a high level, the positive effect of customer learning on customer acquisition will be weakened.
H10b	When government effectiveness distance is at a high level, the negative effect of risk evaluation on customer acquisition will be strengthened.
H11a	When trade reference is at a high level, the positive effect of customer learning on customer acquisition will be strengthened.
H11b	When trade reference is at a high level, the negative effect of risk evaluation on customer acquisition will be weakened.

Chapter 4. Research Design and Methodology

4.1. Sample and Data Collection

4.1.1. Survey Background and Research Context

This research seeks to explore three research questions. First, in the customer acquisition stage in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, how will the supplier's communication creativity, such as communication relevance and communication novelty, impact its customer acquisition? Second, what is the role of customer cognitive response as underlying mechanism between communication creativity and customer acquisition? Third, how do both formal and informal institutional constraints affect the cross-border B2B marketing communication process? To solve these questions, the author conducted a thorough review of relevant literature and theories. Using this background knowledge, the author developed a questionnaire to conduct the research.

To align with the theoretical hypotheses and address the research questions, the research was situated in the cross-border B2B transaction context within the electronics manufacturing industry, for two reasons. First, firms in the electronics manufacturing industry are interconnected globally, rely on technology, and have complicated channel structures. In this industry, B2B customers purchase worldwide to find the most suitable suppliers and enhance supply chain stability and competitiveness. Therefore, communication between upstream suppliers and downstream customers across the world is widespread. Second, cross-border B2B transactions are substantially influenced by institutional constraints that differ across countries and regions, both formal and informal. This context is suitable for evaluating the role of institutional constraints. Overall, the sample provides an appropriate context for evaluating the framework in this research.

4.1.2. Questionnaire Design

1) The Questionnaire Design Stage

With the research focus on the customer acquisition stage in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, the author first reviewed relevant literature on B2B marketing communication, communication creativity research, signaling theory, information processing theory, customer acquisition, and institutional theory in top-tier journals in management and marketing fields. Based on the literature, the author collected measures that are related to the research focus. Second, as the research context is B2B marketing communication, the author screened out measures that were set in B2C or C2C transactions and communication. Third, to make sure the questionnaire can reflect business practice, the author interviewed five managers from electronics manufacturing firms.

Through open interviews, the author asked managers about the problems they met in the cross-border B2B marketing communication, as well as how they acquired and retained customers. Based on their answers, the author adjusted the questionnaire and framework to make sure the research reflects the managerial practice.

2) The Questionnaire Revision Stage

After adjusting the theoretical framework, the author further identified the key constructs of this research, including communication relevance, communication novelty, customer learning, risk evaluation, government effectiveness distance, trade reference, customer acquisition, and control variables. The author designed the questionnaire by adapting measures of these constructs from existing literature and initially created it in English. The questionnaire was translated back into Chinese then. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, two independent translators performed a translation of the Chinese version back into English.

The author then performed a pilot study to make sure managers understand the questions of the questionnaire, so as to correct problems before the formal survey. The pilot study involved 15 managers from electronics manufacturing firms located in Austria, Türkiye, Brazil, Germany, Philippines, Singapore, the United States, Iran, and Czech Republic. The results illustrated that the questionnaire was straightforward to comprehend. The answer obtained from the pilot study also had a solid construct validity. Subsequently, the author incorporated the feedback from the managers and modified a few items to finalize the questionnaire.

3) The Structure of the Questionnaire

The formal questionnaire had two parts. Part A was about the cross-border B2B marketing communication and customer acquisition. Part B was about the cross-border B2B marketing communication and customer retention. Part A and Part B had some overlap questions, such as the customer firm’s characteristics and the external market-related questions. This research mainly used the data from Part A, which focused on customer acquisition. For the overlap questions in two parts involved in this research, the author calculated their averages when using them. Part A of the questionnaire has been presented in Appendix A. First, the author provided an explanation regarding the academic aim of the research and emphasized the importance of maintaining data confidentiality at the start of the questionnaire. Second, the questionnaire involved six sections of questions. Section A asked the informants about the basic information of their firms (the focal firm), including firm age, firm size, firm revenue, firm location and industry. Section B was about the communication between the focal firm and the supplier. The author asked questions about their communication format, channel, frequency, relationship length, and the focal firm's perception on the supplier's communication. Section C was about the characteristics of the focal firm, including questions such as the focal firm's risk acceptance, cross-border B2B transaction experience and satisfaction, and purchase-decision making complexity. Section D focused on the focal firm's feedback on the supplier's communication, such as customer acquisition and overall impression. Section E focused on the external environment the focal firm faced, such as market turbulence, competitive intensity and legal enforceability. Section F asked the informants about his or her age, position in the firm, working experience in the firm and in the industry, and knowledgeability about the firm.

4) The Principle of the Questionnaire Design

The author adhered to the following principles when designing the questionnaire. First, the author explicitly stated the academic objective of the questionnaire and reassured the respondents about the confidentiality of their data, aiming to alleviate any concerns they may have regarding privacy. Second, the author revised the items for several rounds to make sure the items were easy to understand and answer. The author avoided using words that were too academic, tendentious or sensitive for informants, to reduce misinterpretation. Third, in addition to firm location, firm size and relationship length with suppliers that needed to be filled in by the informants, other questions were all designed in the form of a closed 7-pointed Likert scale. For each measurement item, the informants chose from 1 to 7 according to the extent of their agreement. From 1 to 7, the scales represented strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neutral, somewhat agree, agree, and strongly agree, respectively. This measurement method made it easier for the informants to choose from, and made the data results more comparable in the data analysis process.

4.1.3. Data Collection Process

Data collection had three steps. First, pilot study was conducted. The second stage was the formal survey. Third, the data collection and analysis were conducted. To fit the research focus, the research context was set in the cross-border electronics manufacturing firms. As previously mentioned, this context was suitable for investigating the cross-border B2B marketing communication strategies employed by suppliers and the feedback from customers.

1) Pilot Study

In July 2022, the author invited 15 managers who were familiar with their firm's purchasing activities to participate in this research via email. The managers represented firms operating in subdivisions of the electronics manufacturing industry, including automotive electronics, electronic communication devices, defense industry, telecommunications, medical electronic equipment, and industrial and automatic control. The firms were from Austria, Türkiye, Brazil, Germany, Philippines, Singapore, the United States, Iran, and Czeh Republic, while their suppliers were from China, India, Hong Kong SAR, Iran, Vietnam, Korea, and the United States. Their complex cross-border supplier-customer relationships met the research needs well. To invite the managers to join in the research, the author sent them emails explaining the research purpose, and after they agreed to participate, the author followed up with a phone call to further explain the purpose and ask them to complete the questionnaire according to their firms' actual situation of cross-border purchases. After the managers completed the questionnaire, the author listened to their comments and suggestions on the questionnaire's readability and whether the questions fit the actual situations of cross-border B2B transactions. Based on their feedback, the author revised some questions and items, such as adjusting the communication channels and the categories of firm industry. Additionally, the author analyzed the reliability and validity of the data of the pilot study. The results showed the questionnaire was well-designed.

2) Formal Survey

The formal survey was conducted from July 2022 to November 2022. As the cross-border firms' data was difficult to collect by individuals, the sample frame was obtained with the assistance of an anonymous B2B electronic components firm in Shenzhen, China (Firm X hereinafter). Firm X operates its supply chain globally, with upstream suppliers and downstream customers from over 20 countries and regions. Therefore, Firm X's customer pool was a suitable sample frame for the research context.

The author selected 500 firms at random from Firm X's customer pool and obtained their email addresses. To ensure a multi-informant approach, the author invited two representatives from each firm to participate in the research via email. These representatives needed to be involved in their firms' purchase activities and supplier relationships and have a high level of knowledge about them. A cover letter was provided, which outlined the research's academic purpose and ensured the data's confidentiality. The questionnaire was posted on Qualtrics, a professional questionnaire collection platform. Two links were given to each firm. One informant was asked to complete Part A (customer acquisition), while the other was asked to fill out Part B (customer retention). To encourage the informants to participate proactively in the survey, Firm X promised order discounts and lucky draws for those who completed the survey. The prizes included iPhone, iPad, and wireless Bluetooth earphones.

3) Data Collection and Analysis

After five months and four rounds of reminders, the author obtained 236 returned questionnaires. Out of these, 41 questionnaires were excluded for two reasons. First, 38 questionnaires had a high proportion of missing data, with less than 90% of the questionnaire being completed. Second, three questionnaires were found to have been filled out carelessly, as the respondents had given almost the same answers for all questions. As a result, this research collected 195 complete responses in total, corresponding to a response rate of 39% (out of 500). On average, the respondents took 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The data was recorded directly by Qualtrics, so there was no need for manual data input. The author downloaded the data from Qualtrics, deleted any invalid data, checked the format, and then imported the data into data analysis software. Two research assistants reviewed the process and ensured that the data was properly organized.

4) Secondary Data

Given that this research involves firms from diverse countries and regions with varying institutional environments and cultural backgrounds, this research incorporated secondary data to represent these cross-border institutional factors in order to supplement the database. To measure the government effectiveness distance, this research utilized the government effectiveness index from the World Bank's world governance indicators, while Hofstede's six cultural dimensions were used to assess the cultural distance between different countries and regions. Further explanation of the measurement of government effectiveness distance and cultural distance will be provided later.

4.1.4. Basic Characteristics of Data

This research conducted an analysis of the basic descriptive statistics of the sample. Various firm characteristics such as firm age, size, revenue, industry, and location were reported. In addition, this research provided a summary of informant characteristics such as their position, age, and work experience.

As shown in Table 4-1, this research measured the customer firm size with the firm's number of employees. There are 83 firms with fewer than 50 employees, accounting for 42.6% of the total sample. 46 firms have employees range from 51 to 200, accounting for 23.6 of the total sample. 27 firms have employees range from 201 to 500, and 39 firm have more than 500 employees, accounting for 13.8% and 20%, respectively. In terms of firm age, there are 34 firms whose firm age are less than 5 years, accounting for 17.4%. 49 firms' age range from 5 to 15 years, accounting for 25.1%. The number of firms with age from 15 to 25 are 59, account for the largest percentage in the sample, which is 30.3%. The number of firms with age from 25 to 50 are 47, accounting for 24.1%. There are also 6 firms whose age are over 50 years, which is 3.1% of the total sample.

The author asked the informants to fill out the average revenue of their firms in the last three years in million USD. As shown in Table 4-1, 47 firms have less than 1 million, accounting for 24.1%. 82 firms' average revenue are from 1 to 10 million, accounting for 42.1%. There are 32 firms with average revenue range from 10 to 50 million, accounting for 16.4%. 17 firms' average revenue are from 50 to 100 million, accounting for 8.7%. There are also 17 firms' revenue are over 100 million, accounting for 8.7%.

The sample firms are mainly from electronics manufacturing industry, as shown in Table 4-1. There are several subdivisions in the sample. 45 firms come from automotive electronics, accounting for 23.1%. 34 firms come from electronic communication device, accounting for 17.4%. 21 firms come from industrial and automatic control, accounting for 10.8%. 17 firms come from power electronics, accounting for 8.7%. There are samples from other subdivisions of electronics manufacturing industry, including home appliance (3.6%), medical electronic equipment (7.7%), defense industry (3.6%), telecommunications (6.7%) and others (18.4%).

This research summarized the characteristics of the informants in Table 4-2. In terms of informant age, 35-44 age group has the largest number of informants, with a total of 70 people, accounting for 35.9%. Informants in the age group of 25-34 are the second most, with 61 people, accounting for 31.3%. Informants in the age group of 45-54 are 31, accounting for 15.9%. Informants in the age groups of 18-24 and 55-64 are both 15, and both account for 7.7%. There are 3 informants over 65 years old, accounting for 1.5%. In terms of informant position, most of them are from purchasing department. 30.3% are Purchasing managers and 26.2% are Purchasing specialists, which means these informants have rich experience in purchasing activities of their firms and are familiar with the firms' relationships with suppliers. The informants also hold titles including CEO (7.2%), Associate CEO (3.6%), Marketing manager (17.9%), R&D manager (2.6%) and others (12.2%). On average, the individuals have a work experience of 7.01 years within the firm and 10.4 years in the industry. These statistics demonstrate the level of knowledge that the respondents have regarding their firms' operations and relationships with suppliers is satisfying.

Table 4-1. Firm Characteristics

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Firm size	≤50	83	42.6
(Number of employees)	51-200	46	23.6
	201-500	27	13.8
	> 500	39	20
Firm age	≤5	34	17.4
(Year of foundation)	5-15	49	25.1
	15-25	59	30.3
	25-50	47	24.1
	> 50	6	3.1
Firm revenue	≤1	47	24.1
(Million USD)	1-10	82	42.1
	10-50	32	16.4
	50-100	17	8.7
	≥100	17	8.7
Industry	Automotive electronics	45	23.1
	Electronic communication device	34	17.4
	Home appliance	7	3.6
	Medical electronic equipment	15	7.7
	Defense industry	7	3.6
	Telecommunications	13	6.7
	Industrial and automatic control	21	10.8
	Power electronics	17	8.7
	Others	36	18.4

Table 4-2. Informant Characteristics

Informant age	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Informant position	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-24	15	7.7	CEO	14	7.2
25-34	61	31.3	Associate CEO	7	3.6
35-44	70	35.9	Marketing manager	35	17.9
45-54	31	15.9	Purchasing manager	59	30.3
55-64	15	7.7	R&D manager	5	2.6
65 and above	3	1.5	Purchasing specialist	51	26.2
			Others	24	12.2
Work experience in the firm	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**	**Work experience in the industry**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
1-5 years	109	55.9	1-5 years	68	34.9
5-10 years	47	24.1	5-10 years	51	26.2
10-15 years	23	11.8	10-15 years	34	17.4
15-25 years	10	5.1	15-25 years	34	17.4
Over 25 years	6	3.1	Over 25 years	8	4.1
Average = 7.01			**Average = 10.4**		

Table 4-3 presented the geographic positions of both customer firms and their suppliers. According to the left side, the customer firms are based in 22 countries and regions across Asia, Europe, North America, and South America. The majority of firms are from China (31.28%), followed by the Philippines (16.41%), Iran (15.38%), and Türkiye (8.72%). The reason may be because that the Firm X who helps collect data has more customers in these countries. The right side of Table 4-3 displays a summary of supplier locations. Suppliers originate from 25 countries and regions, spanning Asia, Europe, North America, and South America. The majority of suppliers come from China (43.59%) and the United States (11.79%). This can be attributed to the fact that the electronics manufacturing industries in these two countries have a strong presence and are key players in the global supply chain for electronic components.

As shown in Table 4-4, the author reported the government effectiveness distance and cultural distance of the sample firms. 195 pairs of business relationships are generated between the customer firms and suppliers. There are 57 different government effectiveness distance among these pairs, ranging from 0 to 2.27. 53.8% of the government effectiveness distance range from 0 to 0.5. 22.1% of them range from 0.5 to 1. 10.3% range from 1 to 1.5. 9.2% range from 1.5 to 2. 4.6% of the government effectiveness distance are larger than 2. The largest pair is between Iran and South Korea, whose government effectiveness distance is 2.27. There are also 57 pairs of cultural distance in the sample as well. 47.2% of the pairs of the sample have the cultural distance between 0 to 1. 17.4% of the pairs have the cultural distance range from 1 to 2. 22.6% of the pairs have the cultural distance range from 2 to 3. 4.6% of the pairs have the cultural distance range from 3 to 4. 8.2% of the pairs have the cultural distance that larger than 4. Among them, China and Netherlands have the largest cultural distance, which is 4.4.

To summarize, the countries and regions included in the research exhibit differences in institutional distance, cultural background, geographic features, population, industrial structure, and economic aggregates. This results in a varied and diverse sample for the research.

Table 4-3. The location of the Focal Firms and Suppliers

Focal firm (from 22 countries/ regions)			Supplier (from 25 countries/ regions)		
Country/ Region	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**	**Country/ Region**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Austria	2	1.03	Bangladesh	1	0.51
Brazil	5	2.56	Cambodia	2	1.03
China	61	31.28	Canada	2	1.03
Czech Republic	3	1.54	China	85	43.59
Germany	1	0.51	Finland	1	0.51
India	2	1.03	Germany	8	4.10
Indonesia	1	0.51	Hong Kong, China	2	1.03
Iran	30	15.38	India	10	5.13
Japan	2	1.03	Indonesia	4	2.05
South Korea	1	0.51	Iran	10	5.13
Malaysia	2	1.03	Italy	1	0.51
Myanmar	1	0.51	Jamaica	1	0.51
Philippines	32	16.41	Japan	2	1.03
Singapore	11	5.64	South Korea	2	1.03
Taiwan, China	2	1.03	Malaysia	1	0.51
Thailand	2	1.03	Netherlands	1	0.51
Türkiye	17	8.72	Pakistan	1	0.51
United Arab Emirates	2	1.03	Philippines	13	6.67
United Kingdom	2	1.03	Russia	1	0.51
United States	11	5.64	Singapore	7	3.59
Vietnam	3	1.54	Taiwan, China	5	2.56
Yemen	2	1.03	Thailand	2	1.03
			Türkiye	8	4.10
			United Arab Emirates	2	1.03
			United States	23	11.79

Table 4-4. The Government Effectiveness Distance and Cultural Distance

Government effectiveness distance	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**	**Cultural distance**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
0-0.5	105	53.8	0-1	92	47.2
0.5-1	43	22.1	1-2	34	17.4
1-1.5	20	10.3	2-3	44	22.6
1.5-2	18	9.2	3-4	9	4.6
≥2	9	4.6	≥4	16	8.2

This research also summarized the communication related statistics between customer firms and their suppliers. Table 4-5 displays the summary of communication frequency of the sample firms. 2 firms stated that they were contacted by their suppliers less than once per month, accounting for 1% of the total. 10 firms communicated with their suppliers once per month, accounting for 5.1%. 16 firms communicated with their suppliers 2-3 times per month, accounting for 8.2%. 53 firms communicated with their suppliers 1-3 times per week, accounting for 27.2%. Among all frequencies, 55 firms communicated with their suppliers 4-5 times per week, accounting for 28.2%, which is the highest proportion. 29 firms reported that their suppliers communicated with them daily, accounting for 14.9%. 30 firms communicated with their suppliers multiple times per day, which is 15.4%.

Table 4-5. The Communication Frequency between the Customer Firms and Their Supplier

Communication frequency	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than once per month	2	1.0
Once per month	10	5.1
2-3 times per month	16	8.2
1-3 times per week	53	27.2
4-5 times per week	55	28.2
Daily	29	14.9
Multiple times per day	30	15.4

As shown in Table 4-6, the author summarized the communication channels and communication formats used by the customer firms and supplier firms in the cross-border B2B marketing communication. The left side of Table 4-6 displays the communication channels and their frequency. In the questionnaire, the author listed 12 communication channels and asked the informants to tick the channels through which suppliers contacted them, and it was a multiple choice. Informants usually ticked several communication channels in this question. There were 12 communication channels, including email, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Tik Tok, online call, online meeting/seminar, Skype, third party online B2B platform, WeChat, WhatsApp, and others. In the left side, in the multiple-choice survey, a total of 438 selections were made for all communication channels. Among them, email was selected 150 times, accounting for 34.25% of the total, making it the most popular online communication channel. Other popular communication channels included online call (62 times, 14.16%), WeChat (57 times, 13.01%), WhatsApp (42 times, 9.59%), and Skype (32 times, 7.31%). A smaller number of firms also utilized online meetings/seminars (25 times, 5.71%), Facebook (20 times, 4.57%), LinkedIn (19 times, 4.34%), third party online

B2B platforms (7 times, 1.6%), Twitter (6 times, 1.37%), and Tik Tok (3 times, 0.68%) for communication. These findings are further illustrated in Figure 4-1.

The right side of Table 4-6 and Figure 4-2 present the communication formats employed by customer firms and their suppliers. The questionnaire listed five communication formats, including text message, picture, video content, live streaming, animations and emoji. Informants were asked to indicate the communication content formats used by their suppliers in the messages through a multiple-choice question. The survey revealed that the five communication formats were selected 388 times. Among them, text message was the most commonly used format with 185 selections, accounting for 47.68% of the total. Picture was chosen 102 times, accounting for 26.29% of the total. Suppliers also frequently utilized video content (49 times, 12.63%), and animations and emoji (27 times, 6.96%). Some customer firms reported that their suppliers used live streaming (25 times, 6.44%) to showcase products and services, which is a relatively new communication format.

Based on the statistics of communication channels and communication formats, it is found that using email to convey text messages to potential B2B customers is still the mainstream mode of the cross-border B2B marketing communication. When both the customer and supplier cannot communicate face-to-face, the supplier mainly relies on the creativity of the communication message to acquire new B2B customers. This practical background again highlights the importance of this research, as it helps B2B suppliers understand how various types of communication creativity can impact B2B customers' perceptions and feedback towards the suppliers' communication creativity.

Table 4-6. Communication Channels and Communication Formats

Communication channel	Frequency N=438	Percentage (%)	Communication format	Frequency N=388	Percentage (%)
Email	150	34.25	Text message	185	47.68
Facebook	20	4.57	Picture	102	26.29
LinkedIn	19	4.34	Video content	49	12.63
Twitter	6	1.37	Live streaming	25	6.44
Tik Tok	3	0.68	Animations and emoji	27	6.96
Online call	62	14.16			
Online meeting/ Seminar	25	5.71			
Skype	32	7.31			
Third party online B2B platform	7	1.60			
WeChat	57	13.01			
WhatsApp	42	9.59			
Others	15	3.42			

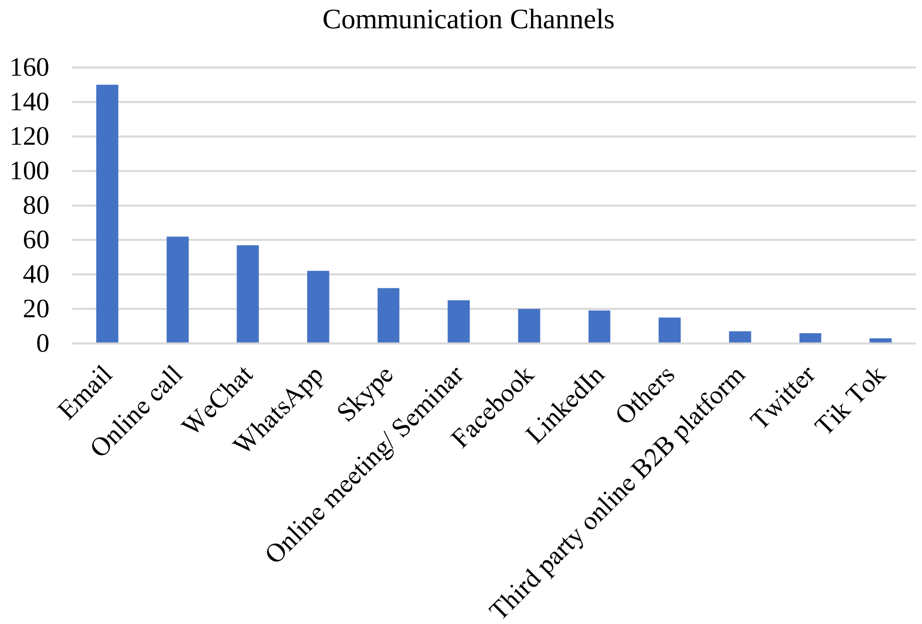


Figure 4-1. Communication Channels

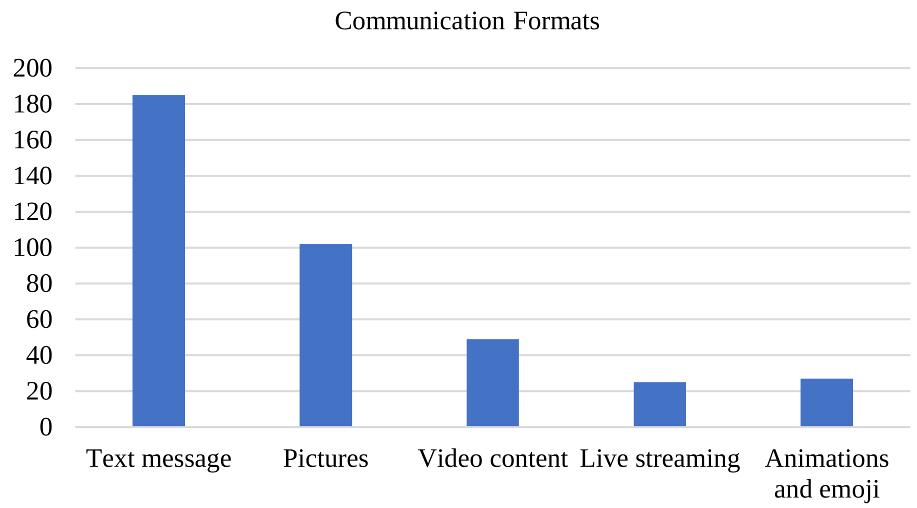


Figure 4-2. Communication Formats

4.1.5. Nonresponse Bias

During the process of gathering data, some individuals who were approached to answer the questionnaire did not respond or did not complete it. That could introduce a nonresponse bias to the sample. To address this issue, this research utilized two methods to examine and exclude the nonresponse bias.

First, this research compared the basic characteristics of responding firms and nonresponding firms. To do this, the author obtained the main values of the firm revenue, firm size and firm age of the nonresponding firms from Firm X who helped collect the data. After that, the author used a one-sample T-test to compare these characteristics with those of the responding firms. The results indicated that all p-values were above 0.1, suggesting that there was no significant variation. That indicates nonresponse bias is not a threat in the research.

Second, this research conducted an independent sample T-test to compare early respondents (those who responded promptly after the initial email notification) with late respondents (those who responded after several rounds of email reminders were sent). This research compared the basic characteristics including firm revenue, firm size, firm age. Moreover, this research also compared the key variables of the theoretical framework, including customer acquisition, communication relevance, communication novelty, customer learning, risk evaluation, government effectiveness distance and trade reference. The analysis did not reveal significant differences, suggesting nonresponse bias not influence the sample.

In sum, the threat of nonresponse bias can be excluded in this research.

4.2. Measures

The author asked informants to specify a potential cross-border supplier who reached out to them recently, and without any physical interactions. The author then requested the informants to evaluate the supplier's communication strategy towards them, their firms' basic information and characteristics, and their evaluation on external environments. Because the sample firms are from multiple countries and regions, the author also incorporated secondary data including world governance indicators and cultural distance dimensions in this research. All measures are adapted from previous mature scales from top-tier journals. The measurement scales and their sources have been summarized in Table 4-7.

Table 4-7. The Measures Scales and Sources

Variable
Dependent variable
Customer acquisition (adapted from Dodds et al. 1991; measured by questionnaire)
Please indicate your agreement regarding the following statements.
1. We are very likely to purchase from Supplier A.
2. If we were going to buy one product, we would give priority to buying from Supplier A.
3. The probability that we would consider buying from Supplier A is very high.
Independent variables
Communication relevance (adapted from Mishra et al. 1993; measured by questionnaire)
This set of questions focus on the relevance of communication message provided by Supplier A. The information:
1. was relevant to our business scope and business need.
2. was useful for our business decisions.
3. was helpful for us to keep updated on market development.
Communication novelty (adapted from Sethi et al. 2012; Wang et al., 2020; measured by questionnaire)
This set of questions focus on the novelty of communication message provided by Supplier A. The information:
1. was new to us.
2. was different compared to information provided by other suppliers.
3. involved new ideas about the products and market.
4. was presented in an innovate style.
Mediators
Customer learning (adapted from Bonney et al. 2022; measured by questionnaire)
Please indicate to what extent the following statements are true, since Supplier A initially contacted you.
1. We search extensively to get more information about Supplier A.
2. We learn from other sources to know more about Supplier A.
3. We learn and process the information from Supplier A.
Risk evaluation (adapted from Gao et al. 2012; measured by questionnaire)
During the communication with Supplier A, you evaluate that:
1. The level of overall risk in cooperating with Supplier A is very high compared to cooperating with other suppliers.
2. We worry about the quality of the product/ service provided by Supplier A.
3. We worry about the potential risk if we make transactions with Supplier A.

Table 4-7. The Measures Scales and Sources (Continued)

Variable
Moderators
Government effectiveness distance (adapted from Kaufmann et al., 2011; measured by world governance indicator of the World Bank)
Government effectiveness index of the World Bank's governance indicators.
Trade reference (adapted from Jalkala & Salminen, 2010; measured by questionnaire)
1. Supplier A provided us with the contract information of its previous customers for us to learn more about its business reputation.
2. We are able to know the business reputation of Supplier A from other peers.
3. We are able to know the business reputation of Supplier A from our industrial associations.
4. We are able to know the business reputation of Supplier A from other suppliers.
Control variables
Firm revenue (measured by questionnaire)
In the last three years, what is the average revenue of your firm? (Million USD)
1. Less than 1 Million USD; 2. 1-10 Million USD; 3. 10-50 Million USD; 4. 50-100 Million USD; 5. Above 100 Million USD
Firm age (measured by questionnaire)
When was your firm founded? (Year)
Communication frequency (adapted from Fisher et al. 1997; measured by questionnaire)
In general, how frequently has Supplier A been communicating with you?
1=Not frequently at all, 7=Very frequently.
Information authenticity (adapted from Chiu et al. 2012; measured by questionnaire)
Please evaluate the authenticity of the information provided by Supplier A.
1. The information is authentic.
2. The information seems in line with the real industry situation.
3. There is an abundance of facts so that we believe the information is authentic.
Product differentiation (adapted from Homburg et al. 2010; measured by questionnaire)
1. It is difficult for us to differentiate Supplier A from other suppliers in the same product categories based on technical product specifications. (R)
2. With regard to functionality, Supplier A's products are similar to other suppliers' products. (R)
3. Supplier A's products and other suppliers' products provide similar benefits for us. (R)
Price attractiveness (adapted from Garnefeld et al. 2018; measured by questionnaire)
The price/ promotion offered by Supplier A:
1. was very attractive.
2. indicated a good buy.
3. was very appealing.
Regulatory quality distance (adapted from Kaufmann et al., 2011; measured by world governance indicator of the World Bank)
Regulatory quality index of the World Bank's governance indicators.
Cultural distance (adapted from Campbell et al. 2012; measured by Hofstede's six cultural dimensions)
Cultural distance is based on Hofstede's six cultural dimensions: individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, indulgence, masculinity.

4.2.1. Measures of Independent Variables

1) Communication Relevance

Communication relevance is a three-item construct adapted from Mishra et al. (1993) to assess the extent to which the communication message is relevant to the customer's business scope and can catch the customer's current expressed needs. Sample items include "the information was relevant to our business scope and business need", "the information was useful for our business decisions", and "the information was helpful for us to keep updated on market development".

2) Communication Novelty

Communication novelty is a four-item construct adapted from Sethi et al. (2012) and Wang et al. (2020). It measures the extent to which the communication message is novel and different from other suppliers. Sample items include "the information was new to us", "the information was different compared to information provided by other suppliers", "the information involved new ideas about the products and market", and "the information was presented in an innovate style".

4.2.2. Measures of Mediators

1) Customer Learning

Customer learning is a three-item construct adapted from Bonney et al. (2022). It measures to extent to which the online business customer tends to search, learn and analyze the information and knowledge of the online supplier when receiving the supplier's communication message. Sample items include "we search extensively to get more information about Supplier A", "we learn from other sources to know more about Supplier A" and "we learn and process the information from Supplier A".

2) Risk Evaluation

Risk evaluation is a three-item scale adapted from Gao et al. (2012). It measures the extent to which the customer evaluates how much risk in the purchase from the supplier. Sample items include "during the communication with supplier A, the customer evaluate that the level of overall risk in cooperating with Supplier A is very high compared to cooperating with other suppliers", "we worry about the quality of the product/ service provided by Supplier A" and "we worry about the potential risk if we make transactions with Supplier A".

4.2.3. Measures of Moderators

1) Government Effectiveness Distance

Government effectiveness distance refers to the difference in government effectiveness between the customer's country and the supplier's country (Kaufmann et al., 2011). I calculated government effectiveness distance between two countries using the absolute value of the subtraction of government effectiveness indices of two countries. It is measured using the government effectiveness index of world governance indicators of the World Bank. Government effectiveness distance represents the formal institutional distance between the customer and the supplier.

2) Trade Reference

Trade reference is a four-item scale measure adapted from Jalkala and Salminen (2010). It refers to the extent to which the customer can obtain information of the supplier from the supplier's previous customers, its own peers, industrial associations and other suppliers. Sample items include "supplier A provided us with the contract information of its previous customers for us to learn more about its business reputation", "we are able to know the business reputation of Supplier A from other peers", "we are able to know the business reputation of Supplier A from our industrial associations", and "we are able to know the business reputation of Supplier A from other suppliers".

4.2.4. Measures of Dependent Variable

Customer acquisition is a three-item scale adapted from Dodds et al. (1991). It refers to the online business customer's willingness to purchase from the supplier, which also represents the supplier's success in customer acquisition. Sample items include "we are very likely to purchase from Supplier A", "if we were going to buy one product, we would give priority to buying from Supplier A", and "the probability that we would consider buying from Supplier A is very high".

4.2.5. Measures of Control Variables

This research included eight control variables from three aspects. First, this research controlled the customer firm's characteristics such as firm revenue and firm age. Second, this research also controlled variables that reflect the dyadic communication between the customer and the supplier. This research also controlled communication frequency (Fisher et al., 1997), the customer's perceived information authenticity (Chiu et al., 2012), product differentiation (Homburg et al., 2010) and price attractiveness (Garnefeld et al., 2018), because these variables may influence the customer's willingness to communicate with the supplier. Third, because this research is set in the cross-border B2B marketing communication context, two secondary indices that influence international business were included. This research controlled regulatory quality distance of two countries (Kaufmann et al., 2011), which is calculated using the absolute value of the subtraction of regulatory quality indices of two countries. This research also controlled cultural distance of two countries

(Campbell et al. 2012). Cultural distance was computed using the formula proposed by Kogut and Singh (1988) (Equation 4-1). The calculation was based on Hofstede's six cultural dimensions, namely individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, indulgence, and masculinity. The variables Ida and Idb represent the values of the Hofstede index for dimension a in countries a and b, respectively. Vd represents the inter-country variance of the Hofstede index for dimension d.

$$\sum_{d=1}^{6}(I_{da} - I_{db})^2/6V_d \quad (4-1)$$

4.3. Brief Summary

This chapter reported the sample and data collection process, including the survey background and research context, questionnaire design, data collection process and the basic characteristics of data. This research also conducted T-test to exclude nonresponse bias in the sample and showed the reliability of the data. The definitions and measures of the variables in the theoretical framework were then introduced.

Chapter 5. Data Analysis

5.1. Reliability and Validity

The constructs, standard factor loading, Cronbach's α value, composite reliability value (CR) and average variance extracted value (AVE) have been presented in Table 5-1. Reliability reflects the internal consistency of the variable measurement index. Reliability is usually evaluated by Cronbach's α value, which is between 0 to 1. It is generally accepted that the value has to be larger than 0.7. As shown in Table 5-1, the Cronbach's α values for all variables were greater than 0.7. This indicates that the measurement used in the research exhibited good reliability.

The author conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the validity of the measures. The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory fit indices, including a significant Chi-square value (320) of 469.424 ($p < 0.001$), CFI of 0.972, an IFI of 0.972, and a RMSEA of 0.049. Each standardized factor loading was significant ($p < 0.001$). That means the measurements were good in convergent validity. The author further obtained CR and AVE values of the measurements. All CR values were larger than 0.8, and all AVE values are larger than 0.5, which indicated the measurements were good in convergent validity. Shared variance between all pairs of constructs were obtained to evaluate the measurements' discriminant validity. The findings showed that all shared variances were smaller than the square root of AVE for each individual construct AVE, which was from 0.832 to 0.925. That illustrated the measurements were good in discriminant validity. In sum, the author can conclude that the constructs in the research had satisfying reliability and validity.

Table 5-1. Reliability and Validity of Scales

Variable	Item	Std. Loading	Cronbach' s α	CR	AVE
Customer acquisition	Q1	0.882***	0.921	0.922	0.798
	Q2	0.910***			
	Q3	0.888***			
Communication relevance	Q1	0.861***	0.914	0.914	0.780
	Q2	0.872***			
	Q3	0.916***			
Communication novelty	Q1	0.832***	0.913	0.915	0.730
	Q2	0.825***			
	Q3	0.880***			
	Q4	0.878***			
Customer learning	Q1	0.798***	0.820	0.878	0.706
	Q2	0.933***			
	Q3	0.782***			
Risk evaluation	Q1	0.842***	0.946	0.946	0.855
	Q2	0.968***			
	Q3	0.958***			
Trade reference	Q1	0.802***	0.890	0.925	0.755
	Q2	0.834***			
	Q3	0.876***			
	Q4	0.955***			
Information authenticity	Q1	0.898***	0.923	0.922	0.798
	Q2	0.857***			
	Q3	0.923***			
Product differentiation	Q1	0.771***	0.867	0.871	0.693
	Q2	0.841***			
	Q3	0.882***			
Price attractiveness	Q1	0.898***	0.941	0.945	0.850
	Q2	0.940***			
	Q3	0.928***			
Model fit: $\chi 2(320) = 469.424$, CFI= 0.972, IFI= 0.972, RMSEA= 0.049					

Table 5-2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1	**0.893**	0.455**	0.567**	0.557**	0.099	-0.079	0.640**	-0.142*	-0.154*	0.196**	0.511**	-0.249**	0.604**	-0.057	0.024
2	0.467**	**0.883**	0.447**	0.505**	0.207**	-0.010	0.420**	0.017	-0.172*	0.189**	0.513**	-0.248**	0.415**	0.010	0.036
3	0.580**	0.459**	**0.854**	0.640**	0.350**	-0.108	0.715**	-0.077	-0.145*	0.246**	0.514**	-0.316**	0.650**	-0.031	0.052
4	0.569**	0.517**	0.653**	**0.840**	0.325**	-0.004	0.622**	-0.067	-0.146*	0.251**	0.557**	-0.428**	0.582**	0.010	0.085
5	0.108	0.217**	0.361**	0.336**	**0.925**	-0.022	0.298**	-0.054	-0.014	0.198**	0.219**	-0.710**	0.285**	-0.027	-0.025
6	-0.071	-0.002	-0.101	0.004	-0.015	**N/A**	-0.068	0.072	0.224**	-0.061	-0.029	0.001	-0.151*	0.724*	0.488**
7	0.653**	0.431**	0.729**	0.635**	0.308**	-0.061	**0.869**	-0.097	-0.179*	0.219**	0.589**	-0.318**	0.750**	-0.044	-0.042
8	-0.135	0.026	-0.070	-0.060	-0.046	0.081	-0.090	**N/A**	0.123	-0.002	-0.031	0.114	-0.149*	0.083	0.079
9	-0.147*	-0.165*	-0.138	-0.139	-0.007	0.234**	-0.172*	0.132	**N/A**	-0.059	-0.181*	0.087	-0.135*	0.134	0.120
10	0.206**	0.199**	0.256**	0.261**	0.208**	-0.054	0.229**	0.006	-0.052	**N/A**	0.185**	-0.333**	0.224**	-0.079	0.016
11	0.523**	0.525**	0.526**	0.569**	0.229**	-0.021	0.602**	-0.024	-0.174*	0.194**	**0.893**	-0.366**	0.554**	-0.015	0.018
12	-0.243**	-0.242**	-0.311**	-0.423**	-0.708**	0.009	-0.313**	0.123	0.096	-0.328**	-0.361**	**0.832**	-0.418**	0.060	0.002
13	0.617**	0.426**	0.663**	0.595**	0.295**	-0.144*	0.764**	-0.142*	-0.129	0.234**	0.566**	-0.413**	**0.922**	-0.112	-0.081
14	-0.049	0.018	-0.023	0.018	-0.019	0.738**	-0.036	0.091	0.143*	-0.072	-0.007	0.068	-0.105	**N/A**	0.595**
15	0.032	0.044	0.060	0.094	-0.017	0.500**	-0.035	0.087	0.129	0.025	0.026	0.010	-0.073	0.608**	**N/A**
16	0.361**	0.301**	0.308**	0.357**	0.328**	-0.053	0.265**	0.008	-0.013	0.348**	0.299**	-0.319**	0.289**	-0.073	0.113
M	5.038	5.032	4.632	4.870	4.332	0.629	4.879	2.324	2.942	4.826	5.198	3.391	4.925	0.758	1.386
SD	1.094	1.309	1.192	1.241	1.451	0.672	1.178	1.181	0.909	1.403	1.076	1.184	1.187	0.855	1.397

Note: N=195**: $p < 0.01$, *: $p < 0.05$

The diagonals of the matrix are the square roots of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for the latent variables shown in the bold type; the zero-order construct correlations are below the diagonal; the adjusted correlations for the potential common method variance (Lindell & Whitney, 2001) are above the diagonal. M = Mean values, SD = Standard deviation values, 1 = Customer acquisition, 2 = Communication relevance, 3 = Communication novelty, 4 = Customer learning, 5 = Risk evaluation, 6 = Government effectiveness distance, 7 = Trade reference, 8 = Firm revenue, 9 = Firm age, 10 = Communication frequency, 11 = Information authenticity, 12 = Product differentiation, 13 = Price attractiveness, 14 = Regulatory quality distance, 15 = Cultural distance, 16 = Online transaction satisfaction (Marker variable).

5.2. Common Method Bias

Common method bias exists widely in research using survey method, and can cause errors to the research results. In the questionnaire design and data collection stage, the author employed three methods to mitigate the potential impact of common method bias. First, the author used multi-informant method in data collection and invited two informants of each firm to fill out the questionnaire, which helps mitigate the common method bias caused by single data source. Second, following the recommendation of Rindfleisch et al. (2008), the author created measurement scales using various formats, such as seven-point Likert scale, interrogative questions, semantic differential questions, open-ended responses. The author also combined questionnaire data with secondary data from the World Bank and Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Using mixed formats is considered beneficial in mitigating common method bias and reducing the risk associated with relying solely on a single data source (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). Third, the author utilized established subjective scales that have been previously validated and shown to possess reliability and validity (Atuahene-Gima & Murray, 2007).

During the data analysis phase, the author employed three statistical methods to mitigate the potential influence of common method bias. Initially, Harmon's one-factor method was utilized to evaluate the potential bias across all items. As a result, six factors were extracted, explaining a total variance of 77.358%, surpassing the threshold of 50%. The first factor only accounted for 25.093%, which is significantly lower than the threshold of 40%. Based on these findings (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986), it can be concluded that there was no substantial evidence of common method variance present in this research.

Second, as suggested by Lindell and Whitney (2011), the author incorporated a marker variable (MV) into the model as a means to examine potential common method variance. Theoretically, the MV should exhibit no significant correlation with at least one variable in the regression model, and any nonnegative correlation coefficient should be minimized. In this research, the transaction satisfaction of the focal firm was chosen as the MV. It was found that the minimum nonnegative correlation coefficient between transaction satisfaction and other variables was 0.008. Consequently, the correlation coefficients between transaction satisfaction and other variables were adjusted using this value. Table 5-2 demonstrated that none of the correlation coefficients changed from being significant to insignificant. This finding suggests that common method bias did not pose a significant concern in this research.

Third, following the approach outlined by Liang et al. (2007), this research incorporated a common method factor that encompassed the indicators of all principal constructs. This factor enabled the calculation of each indicator's variance, which could be substantively explained by the principal construct as well as by the method. Table 5-3 displayed the results, indicating that the average substantively explained variance of the indicators (R1) is 0.839, while the average method-based variance (R2) is 0.220. The ratio between the square of R1 and the square of R2 was found to be 14.551. Drawing from previous literature utilizing this method (Gu et al., 2010; Liang et al., 2007), this ratio is considered large enough to indicate the negligible impact of common method variance on the research findings. In conclusion, based on the results obtained through these three methods, the author determined that common method variance did not pose a significant issue in this research.

Table 5-3. Common Method Variance Analysis

Variables	Items	Substantive factor loading (R1)	$R1^2$	Method factor loading (R2)	$R2^2$
Customer acquisition	Q1	0.839	0.704	0.256	0.066
	Q2	0.875	0.766	0.241	0.058
	Q3	0.856	0.733	0.246	0.061
Communication relevance	Q1	0.840	0.706	0.201	0.040
	Q2	0.846	0.716	0.209	0.044
	Q3	0.892	0.796	0.204	0.042
Communication novelty	Q1	0.812	0.659	0.207	0.043
	Q2	0.802	0.643	0.209	0.044
	Q3	0.839	0.704	0.233	0.054
	Q4	0.841	0.707	0.220	0.048
Customer learning	Q1	0.845	0.714	0.224	0.050
	Q2	0.856	0.733	0.244	0.060
	Q3	0.610	0.372	0.229	0.052
Risk evaluation	Q1	0.827	0.684	0.206	0.042
	Q2	0.947	0.897	0.206	0.042
	Q3	0.943	0.889	0.189	0.036
Trade reference	Q1	0.629	0.396	0.197	0.039
	Q2	0.811	0.658	0.188	0.035
	Q3	0.847	0.717	0.185	0.034
	Q4	0.914	0.835	0.192	0.037
Information authenticity	Q1	0.851	0.724	0.255	0.065
	Q2	0.821	0.674	0.263	0.069
	Q3	0.901	0.812	0.237	0.056
Product differentiation	Q1	0.812	0.659	0.231	0.053
	Q2	0.791	0.626	0.226	0.051
	Q3	0.810	0.656	0.218	0.048
Price attractiveness	Q1	0.864	0.746	0.200	0.040
	Q2	0.906	0.821	0.234	0.055

	Q3	0.895	0.801	0.219	0.048
Average		**0.839**	**0.709**	**0.220**	**0.049**
Ratio of $R1^2/R2^2$			**14.551: 1**		

5.3. Hypothesis Test

This research used structural equation modeling (SEM), hierarchical regression and bootstrapping approaches to test the hypotheses.

5.3.1. Main Effects

This research combined structural equation modeling (SEM) and regression analysis to test the main effects.

Initially, the author employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the main effects stated in hypotheses H1, H2, and H4-H7. In AMOS, to run path analysis, the author linked independent variables and dependent variables, independent variables and mediators, meditating variables and dependent variables. The author also included all control variables and two moderators into the model, and linked them with the meditating variables and dependent variable. As presented in Table 5-4, the author reported the results of path analysis of the main effects. The overall model fit is satisfactory ($\chi2(440) = 620.704$, CFI= 0.968, IFI= 0.969, RMSEA = 0.046) after controlling for the potential effects of all control variables. H1 predicts that communication relevance positively influences customer acquisition. Consistent with H1, as shown in Table 5-4, communication is positively related to customer acquisition ($\beta = 0.130$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H1. The result shows that communication novelty is insignificantly with customer acquisition ($\beta = 0.153$, $p > 0.1$), supporting H2. H4a and H4b predict that communication relevance (H4a) and communication novelty (H4b) both increase customer learning. In support of H4a and H4b, both communication relevance ($\beta = 0.141$, $p < 0.01$) and communication novelty ($\beta = 0.178$, $p < 0.05$) increase customer learning. H5a and H5b predict that communication relevance (H5a) decreases risk evaluation, whereas communication novelty (H5b) increases risk evaluation. As shown in Table 5-4, communication relevance has a no significant effect on risk evaluation ($\beta = 0.042$, $p > 0.1$), H5a was not supported. Communication novelty increases risk evaluation ($\beta = 0.380$, $p < 0.01$), which can support H5b. This research predicts that customer learning increases (H6), but risk evaluation decreases (H7), customer acquisition. In support of H6 and H7, customer learning is positively related to ($\beta = 0.083$, $p < 0.05$), but risk evaluation decreases ($\beta = -0.166$, $p < 0.01$), customer acquisition.

Table 5-4. Path Analysis of the Main Effects

Structural Paths	Std. Path Loading
Main effects	
Communication relevance → Customer acquisition	0.130*
Communication novelty → Customer acquisition	0.153
Communication relevance → Customer learning	0.141**
Communication novelty → Customer learning	0.178*
Communication relevance → Risk evaluation	0.042
Communication novelty → Risk evaluation	0.380**
Customer learning → Customer acquisition	0.083*
Risk evaluation → Customer acquisition	-0.166**
Control variables	
Government effectiveness distance → Customer learning	-0.037
Trade reference → Customer learning	0.309***
Firm revenue → Customer learning	0.009
Firm age → Customer learning	-0.011
Communication frequency → Customer learning	0.033
Information authenticity → Customer learning	-0.005
Product differentiation → Customer learning	-0.193**
Price attractiveness → Customer learning	0.046
Regulatory quality distance → Customer learning	0.029
Cultural distance → Customer learning	0.008
Government effectiveness distance → Risk evaluation	-0.150
Trade reference → Risk evaluation	-0.047
Firm revenue → Risk evaluation	0.049
Firm age → Risk evaluation	0.101
Communication frequency → Risk evaluation	-0.066
Information authenticity → Risk evaluation	-0.120
Product differentiation → Risk evaluation	-0.886***
Price attractiveness → Risk evaluation	-0.113
Regulatory quality distance → Risk evaluation	0.172
Cultural distance → Risk evaluation	-0.070
Government effectiveness distance → Customer acquisition	-0.007
Trade reference → Customer acquisition	0.187*
Firm revenue → Customer acquisition	-0.057
Firm age → Customer acquisition	0.019
Communication frequency → Customer acquisition	0.008
Information authenticity → Customer acquisition	0.065
Product differentiation → Customer acquisition	-0.074
Price attractiveness → Customer acquisition	0.176†
Regulatory quality distance → Customer acquisition	-0.067
Cultural distance → Customer acquisition	0.044
Model Fit:	$\chi 2(440) = 620.704$

	CFI=.968
	IFI=.969
	RMSEA=.046

Notes: † $p< 0.10$; * $p< 0.05$; ** $p< 0.01$; *** $p< 0.001$.

Furthermore, the author utilized hierarchical regression analyses to validate hypotheses H1-H7. The outcomes of the analysis were documented and presented in Table 5-5. Table 5-5, M1 to M4 showed the effects of communication relevance and communication novelty on customer acquisition. As shown in M1, the author put all control variables and two moderators, and communication relevance into the model. The result shows that communication relevance can increase customer acquisition ($\beta = 0.145$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H1. In M2, the author put communication novelty into the model. The result shows that communication novelty has an insignificant effect on customer acquisition ($\beta = 0.121$, $p > 0.1$), supporting H2. In M3, the author put communication relevance and communication novelty into the model simultaneously. The results also support H1 and H2. In H3, the author investigated the interaction effect of communication relevance and communication novelty and predict that it increases customer acquisition. In M4, an additional term representing the interaction between communication relevance and communication novelty was introduced. The findings revealed that this interaction positively impacts customer acquisition ($\beta = 0.125$, $p < 0.05$), providing support for H3.

Table 5-5, M5-M7 reported the effects of communication relevance and communication novelty on customer learning. The author put communication relevance in M5 and communication novelty in M6, and put both of them in M7. Consistent with H4a and H4b, both communication relevance ($\beta = 0.197$, $p < 0.01$) and communication novelty ($\beta = 0.322$, $p < 0.001$) increase customer learning. Table 5-5, M8-M10 reported the effects of communication relevance and communication novelty on risk evaluation. The author put communication relevance in M8 and communication novelty in M9, and put both of them in M10. The impact of communication relevance on risk evaluation was found to be statistically insignificant ($\beta = 0.087$, $p > 0.1$). Conversely, communication novelty was found to have a positive effect on risk evaluation ($\beta = 0.293$, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, hypothesis H5a is not supported, while hypothesis H5b is supported.

The author reported the regression results of the effects of customer learning and risk evaluation on customer acquisition in Table 5-6, to verify H6 and H7. As shown in M11, the author put all control variables, moderators and customer learning into the model. Customer learning increases customer acquisition ($\beta = 0.171$, $p < 0.05$), which can support H6. In M12, risk evaluation was put into the model. Risk evaluation decreases customer acquisition ($\beta = -0.136$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H7.

Table 5-5. The Regression Results of the Effects of Communication Relevance and Communication Novelty

Variables	**Customer acquisition**				**Customer learning**			**Risk evaluation**		
	M1	**M2**	**M3**	**M4**	**M5**	**M6**	**M7**	**M8**	**M9**	**M10**
Firm revenue	-0.077	-0.067	-0.077	-0.086†	-0.004	0.009	-0.003	0.041	0.046	0.042
Firm age	-0.007	-0.026	-0.009	0.011	-0.010	-0.035	-0.014	0.139	0.128	0.135
Communication frequency	0.025	0.029	0.021	0.013	0.032	0.028	0.019	-0.046	-0.056	-0.059
Information authenticity	0.108	0.161*	0.104	0.131†	0.149†	0.208**	0.138†	-0.172†	-0.160†	-0.183*
Product differentiation	0.058	0.061	0.060	0.087	-0.172**	-0.165**	-0.166**	-0.919***	-0.912***	-0.912***
Price attractiveness	0.203*	0.202*	0.186*	0.211*	0.125	0.091	0.071	-0.185†	-0.232*	-0.238*
Regulatory quality distance	-0.079	-0.083	-0.084	-0.108	-0.027	-0.042	-0.043	0.163	0.148	0.148
Cultural distance	0.078	0.068	0.068	0.058	0.099†	0.069	0.068	-0.036	-0.066	-0.066
Government effectiveness distance	-0.017	0.019	0.004	0.051	0.013	0.098	0.080	-0.208	-0.135	-0.141
Trade reference	0.326***	0.276**	0.281**	0.266**	0.335***	0.189*	0.195*	0.316**	0.175	0.177
Communication relevance (CR)	**0.145****		**0.134***	**0.122***	**0.197****		**0.163****	**0.087**		**0.054**
Communication novelty (CN)		**0.121**	**0.090**	**0.098**		**0.322*****	**0.284*****		**0.293****	**0.281****
CR x CN				**0.125***						
F	17.436***	16.542***	16.144***	15.897***	19.888***	20.734***	20.473***	19.620***	21.260***	19.504***
F change	7.648**	2.643	4.560*	5.398**	11.789**	16.296***	12.675***	1.666	10.018**	5.322**
R	0.715	0.706	0.718	0.730	0.738	0.745	0.758	0.736	0.749	0.750
R^2	0.512	0.499	0.516	0.533	0.545	0.555	0.574	0.541	0.561	0.563
Adjusted R^2	0.482	0.468	0.484	0.500	0.517	0.528	0.546	0.514	0.535	0.534

Notes: † p< 0.10; * p< 0.05; ** p< 0.01; *** p< 0.001.

Table 5-6. The Regression Results of the Effects of Customer Learning and Risk Evaluation

Variables	Customer acquisition					
	M11	**M12**	**M13**	**M14**	**M15**	**M16**
Firm revenue	-0.068	-0.060	-0.061	-0.066	-0.077†	-0.080†
Firm age	-0.020	-0.008	-0.001	0.013	0.029	0.043
Communication frequency	0.027	0.030	0.021	0.027	0.020	0.029
Information authenticity	0.132†	0.154*	0.112	0.104	0.140*	0.135*
Product differentiation	0.087	-0.067	-0.041	-0.043	0.058	0.060
Price attractiveness	0.200*	0.204*	0.175*	0.172*	0.174*	0.170*
Regulatory quality distance	-0.072	-0.054	-0.049	-0.064	-0.064	-0.079
Cultural distance	0.064	0.077	0.058	0.059	0.045	0.045
Government effectiveness distance (GE)	-0.013	-0.037	-0.042	-0.044	0.017	0.018
Trade reference (TR)	0.277**	0.381***	0.321***	0.330***	0.360***	0.369***
Customer learning (CL)	**0.171***		**0.177****	**0.186****	**0.176****	**0.181****
Risk evaluation (PR)		**-0.136***	**-0.141***	**-0.155****	**-0.141***	**-0.154****
CL x GE				**-0.102†**		**-0.112***
PR x GE				**0.029**		**0.033**
CL x TR					**0.105***	**0.095***
PR x TR					**0.164****	**0.177****
F	17.289***	17.063***	16.818***	14.712***	18.268***	16.433***
F change	6.828*	5.564*	6.619**	4.083**	10.414***	7.715***
R	0.714	0.712	0.725	0.731	0.766	0.772
R^2	0.510	0.506	0.526	0.534	0.587	0.596
Adjusted R^2	0.480	0.477	0.495	0.497	0.555	0.560

Notes: † p< 0.10; * p< 0.05; ** p< 0.01; *** p< 0.001.

5.3.2. Mediating Effects

To verify mediating impacts of customer learning and risk evaluation in the link between communication relevance, communication novelty and customer acquisition, the author used the Bootstrapping method in Process to examine the relevant hypotheses, following Preacher and Hayes (2008) and Zhao et al. (2010). Bootstrapping method is suitable for the model with multiple mediators. Moreover, it also enables researchers to compare the different effects among various mediators. Hence, employing this method is suitable for simultaneously examining the mediating effects of customer learning and risk evaluation in this research. The author selected Model 4 in the Process, as shown in Figure 5-1. The author set customer acquisition as dependent variable, and set communication relevance and communication novelty as independent variables, respectively. The author set customer learning and risk evaluation as meditating variables and put them into the model. In Process, the author set the number of bootstrap samples as 5000, and set confidence intervals as 95%. the author reported the results of mediating effects in Table 5-7.

The findings obtained through the Bootstrapping method reveal that the mediating effect of customer learning between communication relevance and customer acquisition is estimated to be 0.207, with a confidence interval excluding 0 (0.119, 0.302). These results provide support for H8a. The mediating effect of risk evaluation between communication relevance and customer acquisition is 0.013 with a confidence interval that includes 0 (-0.046, 0.004), showing that risk evaluation does not have a mediating role in the link. H8b is not supported.

To contrast indirect effects in multiple mediator model, the author used multiple Delta approach suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2008). The author represented the multiple mediator model with mediator M1 and M2 in Figure 5-2. As shown in Figure 5-2, a1 indicates the effect of independent variable X on mediator M1, and b1 indicates the effect of mediator M1 on dependent variable Y. Similarly, a2 indicates the effect of X on M2, and b2 indicates the effect of M2 on Y. Equation 5-1, 5-2 and 5-3 are the calculation process of comparison function of the multiple Delta approach. Among them, σ represents the standard error of each coefficient. The comparison among multiple mediating effects does not require that each mediating effect must be significant. Although some mediating effect is not significant, it does not influence the comparison of mediating effects among multiple mediators (Liu & Ling, 2009; Preacher and Hayes, 2008). Therefore, the author can compare the different mediating effects of customer learning and risk evaluation in the link between communication relevance and customer acquisition. Through the comparison function, the author obtained the Z value, which is 4.431 ($p < 0.01$). The author also ran the pairwise contrasts of indirect effects in Process and reported the result in Table 5-7. C1 which refers to the contrast between the effect of customer learning and the effect of risk evaluation between the "communication relevance - customer acquisition" link. The confidence interval (0.129, 0.329) does not encompass 0. Consequently, the author determined that the mediating effect of customer learning is more substantial compared to risk evaluation, providing support for H8c.

As presented in Table 5-7, the mediating effect of customer learning between communication novelty and customer acquisition is 0.215 with a confidence interval without 0 (0.070, 0.356), in support of H9a. The mediating effect of risk evaluation between communication novelty and customer acquisition is -0.052, whose confidence interval does not include 0 (-0.101, -0.010), supporting H9b.

The author compared the mediating effect of customer learning and risk evaluation as shown in C2 of Table 5-7. The confidence interval of C2 does not encompass 0 (0.112, 0.420). Similarly, the author used the comparison function to calculate the Z value and obtained 3.423 ($p < 0.01$). Therefore, the mediating effect of customer learning was found to be stronger than that of risk evaluation, providing support for H9c.

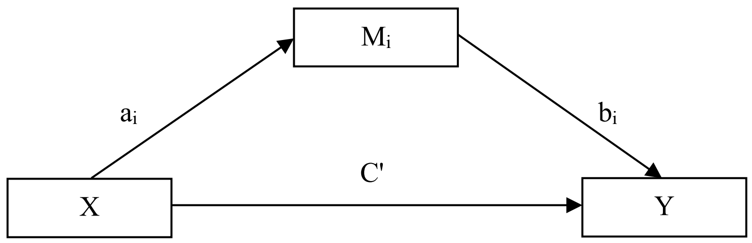


Figure 5-1. Statistical Diagram of Model 4

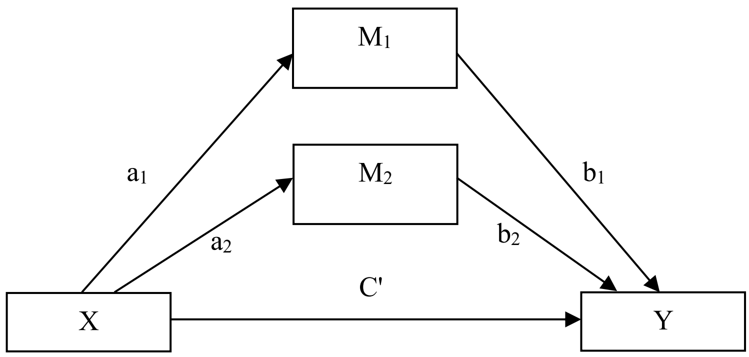


Figure 5-2. Statistical Diagram of the Multiple Mediator Model

$$f = a_1 b_1 - a_2 b_2 \quad (5\text{-}1)$$

$$\mathrm{var}[f] = b_1^2\sigma_{a_1}^2 + b_2^2\sigma_{a_2}^2 + a_1^2\sigma_{b_1}^2 + a_2^2\sigma_{b_2}^2 - 2a_1a_2\sigma_{b_1,b_2} \quad (5\text{-}2)$$

$$Z = \frac{f}{\sqrt{\mathrm{var}[f]}} \quad (5\text{-}3)$$

Table 5-7. The Results of Mediating Effects

Independent variables	Mediators	Effect	SE	Bootstrapping (95%)	
				LLCI	ULCI
Communication relevance	Customer learning	0.207	0.047	0.119	0.302
Communication relevance	Risk evaluation	-0.019	0.013	-0.046	0.004
C1		0.226	0.051	0.129	0.329
Communication novelty	Customer learning	0.215	0.074	0.070	0.356
Communication novelty	Risk evaluation	-0.052	0.023	-0.101	-0.010
C2		0.267	0.078	0.112	0.420

Note: C1 refers to the contrast between the effect of customer learning and the effect of risk evaluation between the "communication relevance - customer acquisition" link. C2 refers to the contrast between the effect of customer learning and the effect of risk evaluation between the "communication novelty - customer acquisition" link.

5.3.3. Moderating Effects

To verify the moderating effects of government effectiveness distance and trade reference, the author used hierarchical regression method. The author obtained the mean-centered values of all interacting terms, and found that VIFs are lower than 10. The results indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern.

As reported above, H3 predicts that the interaction between communication relevance and communication novelty increases customer acquisition. In Table 5-5, M4, consistent with the hypothesis, the interaction between communication relevance and communication novelty can increase customer acquisition ($\beta = 0.125$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H3.

H10a and H10b predict the moderating roles of government effectiveness distance on the relationship between customer learning, risk evaluation and customer acquisition. As shown in Table 5-6, M14, government effectiveness distance significantly moderates the effect of customer learning on customer acquisition ($\beta = -0.102$, $p < 0.1$), supporting H10a. However, government effectiveness distance fails to significantly moderate the relationship between risk evaluation and customer acquisition ($\beta = 0.029$, $p > 0.1$), not providing support for H10b.

H11a and H11b predict the moderating roles of trade reference on the relationship between customer learning, risk evaluation and customer acquisition. As shown in Table 5-6, M15, trade reference significantly moderates the relationship between customer learning and customer acquisition ($\beta = 0.105$, $p < 0.05$), and also significantly moderates the relationship between risk evaluation and customer acquisition ($\beta = 0.164$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H11a and H11b. The regression results in the full model, as shown in Table 5-6, M16, also support H10a, H11a and H11b.

To better illustrate the moderating effects, the author conducted a simple slope test (Aiken & West, 1991) and depicted the moderating effects from Figure 5-3 to Figure 5-6, utilizing unstandardized parameter estimates. In Figure 5-3, the effect of communication novelty on customer acquisition turns from insignificant ($b = -0.268$, $p > 0.1$) to significantly positive ($b = 0.305$, $p < 0.01$) when communication relevance turns from low to high, providing additional evidence for H3. In Figure 5-4, the positive effect of customer learning on customer acquisition is significant when government effectiveness distance is low ($b = 0.286$, $p < 0.001$), but not significant when it is high ($b = -0.093$, $p > 0.1$), again supporting the negative moderating role of government effectiveness distance and supporting H10a. In Figure 5-5, the effect of customer learning on customer acquisition turns from negative ($b = -0.356$, $p < 0.05$) to positive ($b = 0.545$, $p < 0.001$) when trade reference turns from low to high, supporting H11a. As shown in Figure 5-6, consistent with H11b, the effect of risk evaluation on customer acquisition turns from negative ($b = -0.856$, $p < 0.001$) to positive ($b = 0.284$, $p < 0.01$) when trade reference turns from low to high, indicating the trade reference attenuates the negative effect of risk evaluation on customer acquisition. In sum, the series of simple slope test again support H3, H10a, H11a and H11b.

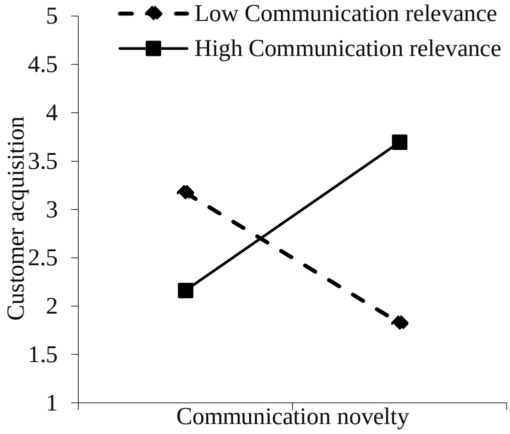


Figure 5-3. The Interaction between Communication Relevance and Communication Novelty

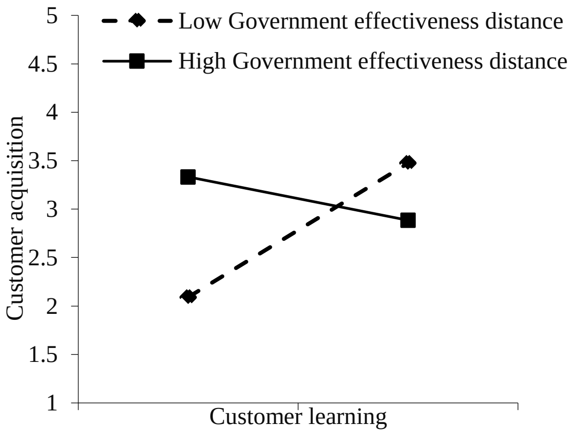


Figure 5-4. The Moderating role of Government Effectiveness Distance on Customer Learning and Customer Acquisition

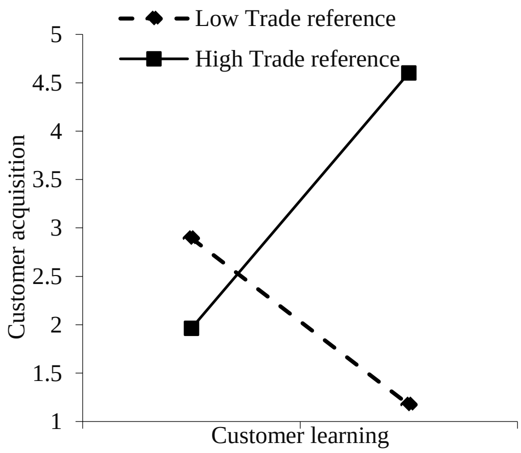


Figure 5-5. The Moderating role of Trade Reference on Customer Learning and Customer Acquisition

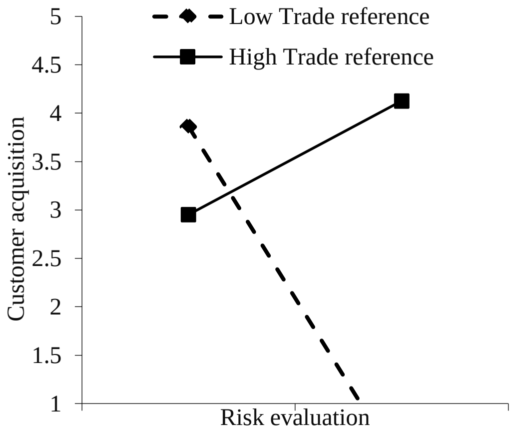


Figure 5-6. The Moderating role of Trade Reference on Risk Evaluation and Customer Acquisition

5.4. Supplementary Analysis

In the preceding sections, the hypotheses were examined through various methods, including structural equation modeling (SEM), hierarchical regression, bootstrapping, and the use of simple slope tests to illustrate moderating effects. To enhance the robustness of the findings, two supplementary analyses were conducted. First, the author employed a two-stage least squares (2SLS) approach to obtain residuals of the key variables and re-ran the regression model. Second, a common method variance (CMV) factor was introduced into the structural model to reassess the main effects.

5.4.1. 2SLS Method

To mitigate the potential influence of endogeneity on the model results, the author performed a two-stage least squares (2SLS) test. In the model, some control variables and moderators may have direct effect on the independent variables and mediators. For example, the supplier's product differentiation and price attractiveness may influence the customer's judgement on its communication relevance and communication novelty. Government effectiveness distance and trade reference may directly influence the customer's risk evaluation and customer learning. These may cause endogeneity and bias the results. To exclude the endogeneity, the author followed Hamilton and Nickerson (2003) to conducted 2SLS approach to rerun the regression model, which is a commonly used way in survey research to test and exclude endogeneity (Tse et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2018).

In stage one, the author regressed all control variables and two moderators on communication relevance, communication novelty, customer learning and risk evaluation, respectively. As evidenced in Table 5-8, the author identified significant relationships between the control variables, moderators, independent variables, and mediators. This demonstrates the suitability of utilizing the two-stage least square analysis. The author then regressed the variables that are significantly related to communication relevance on it to obtain the residual. Similarly, the author obtained the residuals of communication novelty, customer learning and risk evaluation.

During the second stage of the analysis, the author employed the residuals obtained from the stage one regressions as indicators for the independent variables and mediators. These residuals captured the portion of the four key variables that remained unexplained by the control variables and moderators. Using the residuals, the author reran the regression model to test the hypotheses again. In Table 5-8, the author reported the process of obtaining residuals. The outcomes of the second-stage regression analysis are presented in Table 5-9 and Table 5-10. According to Table 5-9, it was observed that communication relevance increases customer acquisition ($\beta = 0.145$, $p < 0.01$). However, communication novelty does not demonstrate a statistically significant influence on customer acquisition ($\beta = 0.121$, $p > 0.1$). The interaction of communication relevance and communication novelty does not significantly influence customer acquisition. Therefore, H1 and H2 are supported, but H3 is not supported. Moreover, in Table 5-9, the findings regarding the effects of communication relevance and communication novelty on customer learning and risk evaluation remain consistent with the results presented in Table 5-5. These results once again provide support for H4a, H4b, and H5b.

As shown in Table 5-10, customer learning increases customer acquisition ($\beta = 0.171$, $p < 0.05$), and risk evaluation is negatively related to customer acquisition ($\beta = -0.136$, $p < 0.05$), that can support H6 and H7. The moderating effects of government effectiveness distance and trade reference stay consistent with the results in Table 5-6, supporting H10a, H11a and H11b.

In conclusion, with the exception of H3, all other hypotheses in the regression model are supported when employing the 2SLS method. This additional validation further strengthens the robustness of the obtained results.

Table 5-8. The Process of Obtaining Residuals

Variables	Communication relevance	Communication novelty	Customer learning	Risk evaluation
Firm revenue	0.075	0.004	0.011	0.047
Firm age	-0.125	0.002	-0.034	0.129
Communication frequency	0.068	0.054	0.045	-0.041
Information authenticity	0.447***	0.092	0.237**	-0.133
Product differentiation	-0.002	-0.023	-0.173**	-0.919***
Price attractiveness	0.168	0.209**	0.158†	-0.170†
Regulatory quality distance	0.017	0.056	-0.024	0.165
Cultural distance	0.029	0.110*	0.104†	-0.034
Government effectiveness distance	0.054	-0.231†	0.024	-0.203
Trade reference	0.078	0.503***	0.351***	0.323**
F	8.691***	26.101***	19.552***	21.338***
F change	8.691***	26.101***	19.552***	21.338***
R	0.566	0.766	0.718	0.733
R^2	0.321	0.587	0.515	0.537
Adjusted R^2	0.284	0.564	0.489	0.512

Notes: † $p< 0.10$; * $p< 0.05$; ** $p< 0.01$; *** $p< 0.001$.

Table 5-9. The Effects of the Residuals of Communication Relevance and Communication Novelty

Variables	Customer acquisition				Customer learning			Risk evaluation		
	M1	**M2**	**M3**	**M4**	**M5**	**M6**	**M7**	**M8**	**M9**	**M10**
Firm revenue	-0.077	-0.067	-0.077	-0.078	-0.004	0.009	-0.003	0.041	0.046	0.042
Firm age	-0.007	-0.026	-0.009	-0.006	-0.010	-0.035	-0.014	0.139	0.128	0.135
Communication frequency	0.025	0.029	0.021	0.019	0.032	0.028	0.019	-0.046	-0.056	-0.059
Information authenticity	0.200**	0.161*	0.190**	0.184*	0.275***	0.208**	0.243**	-0.117	-0.160†	-0.149†
Product differentiation	0.058	0.061	0.060	0.070	-0.172**	-0.165**	-0.166**	-0.919***	-0.912***	-0.912***
Price attractiveness	0.203*	0.202*	0.186*	0.197*	0.125	0.091	0.071	-0.185†	-0.232*	-0.238*
Regulatory quality distance	-0.079	-0.083	-0.084	-0.091	-0.027	-0.042	-0.043	0.163	0.148	0.148
Cultural distance	0.078	0.068	0.068	0.064	0.099†	0.069	0.068	-0.036	-0.066	-0.066
Government effectiveness distance	-0.017	-0.003	-0.012	0.005	0.013	0.041	0.030	-0.208	-0.187	-0.191
Trade reference	0.326***	0.276**	0.281**	0.272**	0.335***	0.189*	0.195*	0.316**	0.175	0.177
Communication relevance (CR)	**0.145****		**0.134***	**0.126***	**0.197****		**0.163****	**0.087**		**0.054**
Communication novelty (CN)		**0.121**	**0.090**	**0.106**		**0.322*****	**0.284*****		**0.293****	**0.281****
CR x CN				**0.059**						
F	17.436***	16.542***	16.144***	14.989***	19.888***	20.734***	20.473***	19.620***	21.260***	19.504***
F change	7.648**	2.643	4.560*	3.395*	11.789**	16.296***	12.675***	1.666	10.018**	5.322**
R	0.715	0.706	0.718	0.720	0.738	0.745	0.758	0.736	0.749	0.750
R^2	0.512	0.499	0.516	0.518	0.545	0.555	0.574	0.541	0.561	0.563
Adjusted R^2	0.482	0.468	0.484	0.484	0.517	0.528	0.546	0.514	0.535	0.534

Notes: † p< 0.10; * p< 0.05; ** p< 0.01; *** p< 0.001.

Table 5-10. The Effects of the Residuals of Customer Learning and Risk Evaluation

Variables	Customer acquisition					
	M11	**M12**	**M13**	**M14**	**M15**	**M16**
Firm revenue	-0.068	-0.060	-0.061	-0.075	-0.072	-0.082†
Firm age	-0.020	-0.008	-0.001	0.031	0.002	0.024
Communication frequency	0.027	0.030	0.021	0.022	0.017	0.015
Information authenticity	0.173*	0.154*	0.154*	0.148*	0.188**	0.178**
Product differentiation	0.055	0.051	0.048	0.051	0.088†	0.086†
Price attractiveness	0.227**	0.229**	0.229**	0.232**	0.238**	0.238**
Regulatory quality distance	-0.072	-0.054	-0.049	-0.077	-0.019	-0.055
Cultural distance	0.081	0.077	0.076	0.086†	0.063	0.078
Government effectiveness distance (GE)	-0.013	-0.037	-0.042	-0.056	-0.043	-0.046
Trade reference (TR)	0.339***	0.347***	0.350***	0.370***	0.348***	0.371***
Customer learning (CL)	**0.171***		**0.177****	**0.188****	**0.181****	**0.196****
Risk evaluation (PR)		**-0.136***	**-0.141***	**-0.163****	**-0.118***	**-0.134***
CL x GE				**-0.171****		**-0.123***
PR x GE				**0.056**		**0.095†**
CL x TR					**0.143****	**0.136****
PR x TR					**0.189*****	**0.184*****
F	17.289***	17.063***	16.818***	15.999***	18.076***	17.100***
F change	6.828*	5.564*	6.619**	6.374***	10.071***	8.619***
R	0.714	0.712	0.725	0.745	0.764	0.778
R2	0.510	0.506	0.526	0.554	0.584	0.606
Adjusted R2	0.480	0.477	0.495	0.520	0.552	0.570

Notes: † $p< 0.10$; * $p< 0.05$; ** $p< 0.01$; *** $p< 0.001$.

5.4.2. CMV Method

After utilizing three methods to evaluate common method variance, the author took additional approach to control for its potential influence in hypothesis testing, following the approaches suggested by Richardson et al. (2009) and Homburg et al. (2011). In the structural equation model, a common method factor was included, which was specified to be uncorrelated with other constructs. This factor was loaded onto all items with equal loadings, reflecting the assumption that common method variance affects all items uniformly. The results of the path analysis, including the incorporation of common method variance, are reported in Table 5-11.

As shown in Table 5-11, the model fit is satisfactory ($\chi2(438) = 613.603$, CFI= 0.969, IFI= 0.970, RMSEA = 0.045). Communication relevance is positively related to customer acquisition ($\beta = 0.140$, $p < 0.05$). There is no statistically significant relationship found between communication novelty and customer acquisition ($\beta = 0.081$, $p > 0.1$). H1 and H2 are supported again. Both communication relevance ($\beta = 0.138$, $p < 0.01$) and communication novelty ($\beta = 0.188$, $p < 0.05$) increase customer learning, supporting H4a and H4b. Communication relevance is not significantly related to, whereas communication novelty increases, risk evaluation, supporting H5b but not supporting H5a. Customer learning increases, while risk evaluation decreases, customer acquisition, supporting H6 and H7. Overall, the outcomes obtained after accounting for the potential impact of common method factors align with those presented in Table 5-4, thus affirming the reliability and stability of the findings.

Table 5-11. Path Analysis of the Main Effects After Controlling CMV

Structural Paths	**Std. Path Loading**
Main effects	
Communication relevance → Customer acquisition	0.140*
Communication novelty → Customer acquisition	0.081
Communication relevance → Customer learning	0.138**
Communication novelty → Customer learning	0.188*
Communication relevance → Risk evaluation	0.042
Communication novelty → Risk evaluation	0.379**
Customer learning → Customer acquisition	0.083*
Risk evaluation → Customer acquisition	-0.165*
Control variables	
Government effectiveness distance → Customer learning	-0.034
Trade reference → Customer learning	0.301***
Firm revenue → Customer learning	0.009
Firm age → Customer learning	-0.011
Communication frequency → Customer learning	0.033
Information authenticity → Customer learning	-0.003
Product differentiation → Customer learning	-0.192**
Price attractiveness → Customer learning	0.045
Regulatory quality distance → Customer learning	0.028
Cultural distance → Customer learning	0.008
Government effectiveness distance → Risk evaluation	-0.151
Trade reference → Risk evaluation	-0.046
Firm revenue → Risk evaluation	0.049
Firm age → Risk evaluation	0.101
Communication frequency → Risk evaluation	-0.067
Information authenticity → Risk evaluation	-0.118
Product differentiation → Risk evaluation	-0.886***
Price attractiveness → Risk evaluation	-0.114

Regulatory quality distance → Risk evaluation	0.172
Cultural distance → Risk evaluation	-0.071
Government effectiveness distance → Customer acquisition	-0.024
Trade reference → Customer acquisition	0.215*
Firm revenue → Customer acquisition	-0.056
Firm age → Customer acquisition	0.021
Communication frequency → Customer acquisition	0.012
Information authenticity → Customer acquisition	0.063
Product differentiation → Customer acquisition	-0.077
Price attractiveness → Customer acquisition	0.191*
Regulatory quality distance → Customer acquisition	-0.063
Cultural distance → Customer acquisition	0.051
Model Fit:	$\chi2(438) = 613.603$ CFI=.969 IFI=.970 RMSEA=.045

Notes: † p< 0.10; * p< 0.05; ** p< 0.01; *** p< 0.001.

5.5. Brief Summary

Based on 195 questionnaire data and secondary data, this research tested the hypotheses using SEM, hierarchical regression and Bootstrapping methods. In addition, this research verified the robustness of the findings using 2SLS method and controlling CMV in the path analysis. As summarized in Table 5-12, there are 19 hypotheses in this research. Among them, 16 hypotheses are supported, and 3 of them are not supported.

Table 5-12. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

No	Statement	Result
The relationship between communication creativity and customer acquisition		
H1	The supplier’s communication relevance is positively related to its customer acquisition.	√
H2	The supplier’s communication novelty does not significantly influence its customer acquisition.	√
H3	When the supplier’s communication is both relevant and novel, its customer acquisition will be increased.	√
The relationship between communication creativity and customer cognitive response		
H4a	The supplier’s communication relevance is positively related to customer learning.	√
H4b	The supplier’s communication novelty is positively related to customer learning.	√
H5a	The supplier’s communication relevance is negatively related to the customer’s risk evaluation.	×
H5b	The supplier’s communication novelty is positively related to the customer’s risk evaluation.	√
The relationship between customer cognitive response and customer acquisition		
H6	The customer’s customer learning is positively related to the supplier’s customer acquisition.	√
H7	The customer’s risk evaluation is negatively related to the supplier’s customer acquisition.	√
The meditating roles of customer cognitive response		
H8a	Customer learning mediates the effect of communication relevance on customer acquisition.	√
H8b	Risk evaluation mediates the effect of communication relevance on customer acquisition.	×
H8c	In the link between communication relevance and customer acquisition, customer learning has a stronger mediating effect than risk evaluation.	√
H9a	Customer learning mediates the effect of communication novelty on customer acquisition.	√
H9b	Risk evaluation mediates the effect of communication novelty on customer acquisition.	√
H9c	In the link between communication novelty and customer acquisition, customer learning has a stronger mediating effect than risk evaluation.	√
The moderating roles of formal and informal institutional constraints		
H10a	When government effectiveness distance is at a high level, the positive effect of customer learning on customer acquisition will be weakened.	√
H10b	When government effectiveness distance is at a high level, the negative effect of risk evaluation on customer acquisition will be strengthened.	×
H11a	When trade reference is at a high level, the positive effect of customer learning on customer acquisition will be strengthened.	√
H11b	When trade reference is at a high level, the negative effect of risk evaluation on customer acquisition will be weakened.	√

Note: “√” represents that the hypothesis is supported. “×” represents that the hypothesis is not supported.

Chapter 6. Discussion

6.1. Result Discussion

6.1.1. The Effects of Communication Creativity on Customer Acquisition

In H1, H2 and H3, based on communication creativity research and signaling theory, the author finds that two dimensions of communication creativity (communication relevance and communication novelty) have different effects on customer acquisition in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context. The supplier's communication relevance increases the customer acquisition. However, supplier's communication novelty does not significantly influence the customer acquisition. Moreover, when the supplier uses communication relevance and communication novelty simultaneously, its customer acquisition can be increased.

Communication creativity is increasingly important to help suppliers stand out from competitors and attract customers' interests in the current cross-border B2B market (Fiore & Schneider, 2016; Rose et al., 2021). However, previous research has not effectively uncovered the distinct roles of the two dimensions of communication creativity, leading to inconsistent findings regarding its impact. Communication relevance refers to the message that is closely related to the customer's business scope and the expressed needs (Mishra et al. 1993). To illustrate, when a customer requires product A and the supplier provides information specifically about product A, the supplier's communication message is considered relevant to the customer's needs. First, as the relevant communication message is closely aligned with the customer's business scope, the customer has enough knowledge and experience to identify the value of the message. Thus, the customer has less uncertainty and trust more on the supplier. Second, relevant communication message directly targets on the customer's expressed needs, which saves the customer's cost of judging the usefulness of the information. Therefore, the relevant communication message satisfies the customer's requirements on high efficiency and task-oriented interaction in the cross-border B2B marketing communication. The findings validate the significance of communication relevance, as previously emphasized in the existing literature on communication creativity (Ang et al., 2007; Ang et al., 2014).

Communication novelty is defined as the communication message that in not closely related to the customer's business needs, but is novel (Sethi et al. 2012; Wang et al., 2020). For instance, if the customer needs product A, and the supplier does not send message about product A but send message about the industrial and technological trends and downstream customer needs related to product A, then the communication message is regarded as novel, but not relevant. In the customer acquisition in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, communication novelty does not significantly influence customer acquisition. On the positive side, novel communication message is supposed to stand out off numerous ordinary information because it contains the supplier's novel insights and knowledge on the market and downstream customers (Wang et al., 2021). The supplier's novel communication message can arouse the customer's interests and latent needs, thus may lead to customer purchase. On the negative, however, as the communication message is novel, the customer is not able to quickly identify the value and usefulness of the message. Moreover, the customer may generate uncertainty when it is unfamiliar with the novel information. Communication novelty is not consistent with the customer's expectation in the cross-border B2B marketing communication, as it is time and effort consuming and is related to high uncertainty. Moreover, when the supplier uses communication relevance and communication novelty concurrently, customer acquisition can be increased. The findings indicate that the customer is interested in communication message that is both relevant and novel. The research reconciles the mixed findings regarding the relationship between communication creativity and customer acquisition by investigating communication relevance and communication novelty separately. The distinct roles of communication relevance and communication novelty also confirm the necessity and significance of the approach.

6.1.2. The Effects of Communication Creativity on Customer Cognitive Response

In H4a, H4b, H5a and H5b, the author introduces two types of customer cognitive response (customer learning and risk evaluation) based on information processing theory into the model as mediators. The results show that both communication relevance and communication novelty increase the customer learning. Communication relevance does not significantly lead to, while communication novelty increase, the customer's risk evaluation. These findings indicate that in the customer acquisition in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, communication relevance is a safer choice for the supplier, but communication novelty also has its advantages.

Communication relevance encourages customer learning in several aspects. First, relevant communication message saves the customer's time to choose and verify, because the message is related to the customer's knowledge and experience (Chiu et al. 2012). Therefore, the customer can quickly grasp the key point of the supplier's communication, and directly communicate with the supplier about its targeted products and services. By concentrating on the products and services rather than wasting time on information verification and selecting, the customer can focus more on learning from the supplier. Second, through communication relevance, the supplier directly targets on the customer’s current needs. The customer can be more willing to respond to the supplier continuously, so as to learn deeply about the supplier. Third, the supplier who sends relevant communication message is more likely to attract more attention and consideration from the customer’s whole purchase team internally. Such a supplier can often get the opportunity to be further considered, so as not to be ignored at the beginning. To enhance the supplier’s credibility, the purchasing team will engage in additional research and gather more information about the supplier’s reputation, product quality, and other relevant factors (Jaakkola & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2019). Moreover, because the communication message is relevant, the customer can compare the supplier with other suppliers who provide similar information, thus would not worry about risk. In sum, using communication relevance is a safer choice, because it increases customer learning and does not lead to the customer’s risk evaluation.

Compared to communication relevance, communication novelty is a high-risk and high-reward option. On the one hand, because the communication message is novel, it can attract the customer’s interests. In the B2B market, homogeneous competition among suppliers is fierce, and many suppliers can only provide similar products or services (Wang et al., 2023). If the message provided by the supplier is relatively new, it will be able to attract the attention of the customer’s purchasing specialists in the first place. From the perspective of the customer, the market in which it operates is characterized by fierce competition, necessitating the adoption of strategies to distinguish itself and attain a competitive edge (Wang et al., 2021). Choosing the supplier who can bring new market-related and product-related knowledge will help the customer increase and update their knowledge of the market and downstream customers, thereby helping it improve competitiveness. Therefore, the customer is likely to learn more from the supplier. On the other hand, novel message means that the customer is not familiar with it. The customer has to spend time comparing and verifying the novel message. Moreover, it is difficult for the customer to judge whether the novel message is valuable and useful for the customer firm. Compared with other suppliers, it is also difficult to draw a conclusion whether novel communication must be useful. Therefore, when the supplier chooses to use communication novelty in the communication, they have to consider how high the customer’s risk evaluation is.

6.1.3. The Effects of Customer Cognitive Response on Customer Acquisition

In H6 and H7, the author finds that customer learning increases customer acquisition, while risk evaluation decreases customer acquisition.

Customer learning and risk evaluation correspond to two aims of customer’s information processing: to assess whether the supplier fits the customer's needs, and to assess the risk associated with the purchase. Customer learning represents the customer's proactive searching and learning towards the supplier, and indicates the customer's interests in the purchase and cooperation with the supplier (Murray, 1991; Zhou et al. 2005). First, the more the customer searches and learns, the more familiar the customer is with the supplier. The increased familiarity leads to more trust and less uncertainty (Connelly et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2008). Consequently, the likelihood of the customer making a purchase from the supplier is greater. Second, when the customer spends more in familiarizing itself with a particular supplier, it will allocate less attention to other suppliers. If the customer devotes considerable inputs getting acquainted with the supplier, it serves as a type of specific investment. The tie between the customer and the supplier can be closer. In line with the principle of efficiency, the customer is very likely to purchase. Third, customer learning itself represents the customer's high interest, and willingness to enhance communication, and therefore is more inclined to make a purchase.

It is not difficult to understand why the customer's risk evaluation reduces customer acquisition. First, the high risk means that if they cooperate, the customer needs to pay extra effort on design and implement the contract to protect its rights and interests. However, the design and implementation of the contract requires huge costs (Zhao et al., 2022). Under cross-border context when legal regimes different among countries (Chao & Kumar, 2010), even if the supplier violates the contract, it may not handle the issue well through legal means. Especially when there is a lack of third-party regulation, it is often more difficult for the customer to judge the prospects of cooperation between the two parties. Second, If the customer chooses the supplier with high risk evaluation, it means that the customer has to give up other suppliers. Once the choice fails, the customer's sunk cost will be large. Third, if the customer perceives high risk from the beginning, then the possibility of continuing to communicate is very low, and it is not likely to purchase. The findings suggest that in the cross-border B2B marketing communication, the supplier should encourage the customer to learn about it. Even there is risk, if the customer is interested in the supplier and spends time and effort to learn about the supplier, it is still likely to purchase from the supplier.

6.1.4. The Mediating Effects of Customer Cognitive Response

In H8a, H8b, H8c, H9a, H9b and H9c, the author evaluates the mediating effects of customer cognitive response (customer learning and risk evaluation) and compare their mediating effects. Customer learning serves as a mediator in the relationship between communication relevance, communication novelty and customer acquisition. Risk evaluation serves as a mediator the relationship between communication novelty and customer acquisition. However, risk evaluation fails to mediate the relationship between communication relevance and customer acquisition.

In H8a, the author proposes that customer learning mediates the effect of communication relevance on customer acquisition. Through customer learning, the customer can make sure the relevant information sent by the supplier is useful for its operations and can fulfill its needs. Moreover, customer learning enables the customer trust more on the supplier's communication message, which can enhance its communication intention with the supplier, and thus increases its purchase intention. In H8b, the author proposes that risk evaluation mediates the impact of communication relevance on customer acquisition. Communication relevance can reduce customer's uncertainty, and can compare with other suppliers. Then the customer gets more familiar with the supplier, thus its risk evaluation is lowered down and its purchase intention is increased, so that the supplier's customer acquisition is increased. However, this hypothesis is not supported. The reason may be that communication relevance is not significantly related to the customer's risk evaluation. This finding further confirms the effectiveness of communication relevance in the customer acquisition in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context. The author further compares the mediating effects of customer learning and risk evaluation in H8c. In the link between communication relevance and customer acquisition, customer learning has a stronger mediating role. It indicates that in the communication process, the supplier should let the customer learn more about itself and invest more time and effort, then the customer will have a stronger relational embeddedness in the relationship, and is more likely to purchase from the supplier.

In H9a, the author proposes that customer learning mediates the relationship between communication novelty and customer acquisition. Although novel communication message is interesting and attractive, the customer may not find it useful because it is not closely related to the customer's business needs, at least the current needs. Through customer learning, the customer can identify the value of the novel knowledge and gets to know how to integrate the knowledge with its own knowledge. Moreover, through customer learning, the customer generates detailed cooperation needs and questions towards the supplier, thus its purchase intention can be increased. In H9b, the author proposes the customer's risk evaluation mediates the relationship between communication novelty and customer acquisition. Because the knowledge is new, the customer cannot verify the value of the communication message, and cannot compare with information of other suppliers. Therefore, communication novelty increases the customer's risk evaluation and thus decreases the supplier's customer acquisition. The findings indicate that communication novelty is a high-benefit and high-risk option for both the supplier and the customer. In H9c, the author finds that in the link between communication novelty and customer acquisition, customer learning has a stronger mediating effect than that of risk evaluation. It indicates that compared to risk evaluation, the customer cares more about the benefit and knowledge it can obtain from the supplier.

Overall, customer learning has stronger mediating roles that that of risk evaluation in the relationship between communication relevance, communication novelty and customer acquisition. The findings are consistent with market orientation research and practice that the customer tends to select the supplier that provides novel knowledge and benefit (Tse et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021). Moreover, the conclusions indicate that no matter which communication creativity the supplier chooses, its first priority is to encourage the customer to proactively search and learn more about it. As it is difficult for the customer to find a suitable supplier in the B2B market, if the customer spends lots of time and effort on the supplier, then it is likely to have a try and purchase from the supplier. By revealing the mediating roles of customer learning and risk evaluation, this research can illustrate the influence of communication creativity on customer acquisition more thoroughly.

6.1.5. The Moderating Effects of Institutional Constraints

In H10a, H10b, H11a and H11b, the author investigates the moderating effects of institutional constraints in the cross-border B2B marketing communication. Based on institutional theory and characteristics of cross-border B2B transaction, the author identifies government effectiveness distance as the formal institutional constraint, and identify trade reference as the informal institutional constraint. The results show that when the government effectiveness distance between countries of the supplier and the customer is high, the positive effect of customer learning on the supplier's customer acquisition can be weakened. In contrast, when the trade reference is high, the positive effect of customer learning on customer acquisition can be strengthened, and the negative effect of risk evaluation on customer acquisition is weakened.

In H10a, the author posits that government effectiveness distance negatively moderates the positive influence of customer learning on customer acquisition. A high level of government effectiveness distance refers to that the formal institutional environment in the supplier's and the customer's countries are largely different. The huge difference leads to different legal systems, different regulations. Although through customer learning, the customer is interested in the supplier, but cooperating with the supplier is risky because the customer does not sure whether there are laws to protect its rights and interests. If they encounter barriers in the import and export regulations, the transaction can be delayed, which is intolerable in the cross-border B2B transaction. The increased unfamiliarity and uncertainty inhibit the customer's purchase intention. In H10b, the author proposes that when the government effectiveness distance is high, the negative effect of risk evaluation on the supplier's customer acquisition can be strengthened. However, the hypothesis is not supported, which is surprising. Due the concerns on the different formal institutional environment, the customer will spend higher costs on the cooperation governance, in terms of contract design and implementation. Even though, it is still difficult to guarantee the customer's profits can be protected due to different legal systems. Moreover, firms in different formal institutional environments may have different attitudes towards using legal tools. However, the argument is not supported in this research. The author calls for future research to use larger data set to test the hypothesis again. Moreover, future research can use other indicators to measure the formal institutional constraint among countries.

In H11a and H11b, the author proposes that when trade reference is high, the positive effect of customer learning on customer acquisition can be strengthened, and the negative effect of risk evaluation on acquisition can be weakened. The results indicate the positive influence of trade reference, as an informal institutional constraint, on the cross-border B2B market. A high level of trade reference refers to that the customer can learn about the supplier's business reputation and capabilities from various sources, such as the supplier's previous customers, its peer customers, the industrial association and other channels. Therefore, the customer has less uncertainty on the supplier. Moreover, trade reference provides the customer with an informal institutional guarantee. If the supplier behaves opportunistically, the customer has various ways to spread the negative evaluation to other customers and suppliers within the industry, which harms the supplier's business reputation and future business opportunities. In sum, the underlying mechanism of trade reference is the governance of reputation, which is an important source of informal institutional constraint stated in the institutional theory (Peng, 2002).

The findings indicate that in the cross-border B2B market, informal institutional constraint plays a more important role than formal institutional constraint. By investigating formal and informal institutional constraints simultaneously in one framework, this research adds new empirical evidence on how the supplier acquires new B2B customers from different institutional backgrounds.

6.2. Theoretical Contributions

Based on communication creativity research and signaling theory, this research examines how the supplier's two dimensions of communication creativity (communication relevance and communication novelty) influences its cross-border B2B customer acquisition. Moreover, to reveal the underlying mechanisms in the link between communication creativity and customer acquisition, this research introduces two types of customer cognitive response based on information processing theory (customer learning and risk evaluation), and examine their mediating effects. Based on institutional theory, this research considers a formal institutional constraint (government effectiveness distance) and an informal institutional constraint (trade reference), and investigate their moderating roles in the cross-border customer acquisition. In sum, this research provides three major theoretical contributions that would benefit suppliers in customer acquisition in the cross-border B2B marketing communication.

First, based on signaling theory, by revealing the differentiated effects of two dimensions of communication creativity on customer acquisition, this research reconciles the inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between communication creativity and customer acquisition.

Although scholars argued that communication creativity of the communication message is important in attracting customers and earning their purchase (Cortez et al., 2020), previous research drew contradictory conclusions on how communication creativity influences customer acquisition (Ang et al., 2014; Baack et al., 2016; Billore et al., 2020; Reinartz & Saffert, 2013). One possible reason for the inconsistent findings can be the lack of separate examination of the impacts of the two dimensions of communication creativity. Communication relevance and communication novelty, as two dimensions of communication creativity, have different definitions and characteristics (Ang et al., 2007; Smith & Yang, 2004). According to signaling theory (Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973), these two dimensions of communication creativity can serve as distinct signals sent by the supplier, potentially affecting the information asymmetry between the supplier and the customer in varying ways. Therefore, this research grounds in the customer acquisition in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, and utilizes signaling theory to reveal and explain the distinct effects of communication relevance and communication novelty on customer acquisition.

By doing so, this research contributes to communication creativity research by deepening the understanding of the effect of communication creativity on customer acquisition, and reconciling contradictory findings in previous research. Additionally, the different effects of communication relevance and communication novelty further validate the rationale and necessity of separately examining them. The findings indicate that in the complex cross-border customer acquisition context (Grewal et al., 2015; Yoon et al., 2021), communication relevance is more effective for the supplier to attract and obtain new B2B customers. Moreover, by integrating signaling theory into communication creativity research, this research broadens the theoretical foundation of communication creativity research, and extends the theoretical application of signaling theory. The findings also offer practical guidance to suppliers in the customer acquisition stage.

Second, by constructing the path of "communication creativity → customer cognitive response → customer acquisition" based on information processing theory, this research enriches the understanding of the underlying mechanisms between communication creativity and customer acquisition. By integrating information processing theory and signaling theory, this research makes up for the shortcomings of signaling theory in explaining the customer information processing.

Previous communication creativity research failed to uncover the mediating mechanisms between communication creativity and customer acquisition, which may be another reason for the contradictory findings in previous studies. Signaling theory focuses on the signal sender and the characteristics of the signal itself, to examine the role of signal in reducing information asymmetry. However, scholars have criticized signaling theory for its limited capability to effectively illustrate the reactions of signal receivers (Connelly et al., 2011). Theoretical lens from the signal receiver side is needed to make up for the lack of signaling theory and further explain the underlying mechanisms between communication creativity and customer acquisition. According to information processing theory, the customer is motivated to reduce information asymmetry and uncertainty when receiving external information (Galbraith, 1973; Lindsay & Norman, 2013). Customer cognitive response generated in the information processing can finally influence its purchase intention. According to information processing theory and the characteristics of B2B transaction (Grewal et al., 2015), this research introduces and examines two types of customer cognitive response, namely, customer learning and risk evaluation, as the underlying mechanisms between communication creativity and customer acquisition.

This research reveals the distinct effects of communication relevance and communication novelty on customer cognitive responses, thus on the supplier's customer acquisition, and reveals the stronger mediating role of customer learning than that of risk evaluation. The findings enrich the understandings on the effect of communication creativity on customer cognitive response, which is insufficient in previous communication creativity research (Ang et al., 2014; Smith & Yang, 2004; Billore et al., 2020). This research does not aim to promote or disprove one dimension of communication creativity over the other, but rather provide a comprehensive understanding of how communication relevance and communication novelty contribute to customer acquisition. By investigating two types of customer cognitive response as underlying mechanisms, this research contributes to communication creativity research by further clarifying the relationship between communication creativity and customer acquisition. By providing a more comprehensive understanding on the customer acquisition in B2B marketing communication from the perspectives of both supplier's signal sending and customer's information processing, this research also contributes to the integration of signaling theory and information processing theory.

Third, based on institutional theory, this research examines the moderating roles of formal and informal institutional constraints in the relationship between customer cognitive response and customer acquisition, thus identifying the boundary conditions under which customer cognitive response operates. The findings also echo scholars' call on investigating formal and informal institutional constraints simultaneously in the cross-border B2B transaction context (Boddewyn & Peng, 2021).

In the cross-border B2B marketing communication where the supplier and customer are from different countries and regions, institutional constraints can influence how the customer processes the information and respond to the supplier's communication creativity (Campbell et al., 2012). Institutional theory states that, institutional constraints that firms are embedded in can be categorized as formal institutional constraints and informal institutional constraints (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Peng, 2002; Scott, 1955). Most of the current cross-border B2B transaction research focused on formal institutional constraints such as institutional distance and investigated how it influences MNE's financial performance, new market entry strategy, cross-border mergers and acquisitions (Chao & Kumar, 2010; Golesorkhi et al., 2019; Zhang & Yang, 2022). However, empirical evidence on how formal and informal institutional constraints influence cross-border B2B marketing communication and transactions is inadequate, especially for informal institutional constraints.

Based on institutional theory and characteristics of cross-border B2B transaction, this research identifies government effectiveness distance between countries of the supplier and the customer as the formal institutional constraint, and identifies trade reference as the informal institutional constraint. Government effectiveness distance reflects the differences between the supplier's and the customer's governments in terms of designing and implementing policies (Kaufmann et al., 2011), which can directly influence the transaction efficiency of cross-border B2B transaction. Trade reference, which is a prevalent phenomenon in B2B transaction, indicates a reputation constraint provided by the business network (Boyd et al., 2023; Jaakkola & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2019). By revealing the distinct moderating effects of government effectiveness distance and trade reference on the effect of customer cognitive response on customer acquisition, the findings indicate that trade reference, as an informal institutional constraint, is beneficial for the cross-border B2B marketing communication process and outcome. Under such context, informal institutional constraint is more important than formal institutional constraint for the supplier to acquire new B2B customer. By introducing institutional theory into the theoretical framework, the research is able to provide a more comprehensive and sophisticated analysis on the effectiveness of communication creativity and customer cognitive response on customer acquisition. The findings also enrich institutional theory by simultaneously investigating formal and informal institutional constraints in the cross-border B2B transaction (Boddewyn & Peng, 2021).

6.3. Practical Implications

According to the survey on cross-border B2B customer, secondary data and the empirical results, this research provides three managerial implications to suppliers in the cross-border B2B marketing communication context.

First, in the customer acquisition stage in B2B marketing communication under cross-border context, suppliers should notice that different dimensions of communication creativity of communication message play distinct roles.

In the cross-border customer acquisition, communication relevance is the most important feature of the creative communication message. Suppliers need to convey information that is most related to the customers to catch their attention and interests in the first place. As discussed above, B2B purchase specialists and managers can receive plenty of communication message from suppliers. The supplier should try its best to make the customer's purchase specialists quickly grasp the key point of the communication message and leave a deep impression. In this case, the supplier can help the customer to save time and effort in the supplier selection process. Relevant communication message is easier for the customer to identify, analyze and understand, and can directly show the benefits the supplier can bring to the customer. The supplier should also notice the advantages and disadvantages of communication novelty. Novel communication message can show the supplier's novel insights on the market, technological and industrial trends and the forecast of downstream customers' needs, which can arouse the customer's learning and searching. However, novel communication message can also increase the customer's risk evaluation because the customer may not have enough time and effort and capability to verify and analyze the novel communication message. The novel communication message also makes the customer feel difficult to judge whether the information is useful and valuable to its firm. Moreover, according to the empirical results, the author suggests that when the supplier uses both communication relevance and communication novelty, its customer acquisition can be increased. The communication message that is both relevant and novel can attract the customer's interests, and differentiates the supplier from other competitors. The customer can also analyze and understand the supplier's communication message better because the message is within its knowledge scope.

Second, suppliers also have to notice the role of customer cognitive response in the cross-border customer acquisition process, especially the role of customer learning.

B2B transaction and supplier selection are complex because it involves more decision-makers, larger transaction amount and usually take a long time to communicate with the supplier before the first purchase. Due to the purchase decision-making complexity, the B2B customer is very careful when choosing which supplier to communicate with in depth, because its cost on time and effort is large. In other word, if a B2B customer has already spent much time and effort on communicating with a supplier for a long time, it is very likely to have a try and make a purchase from the supplier, otherwise its costs will be wasted. Therefore, the supplier should try to encourage the customer to spend more time and effort on it, such as learning about its information, searching for its firm, and discussing about it within internal purchase team. To achieve it, the supplier can optimize its firm website to show more key information about its firm and guide the customer to learn about it. When the customer pays more time and effort to the supplier, it pays less time and effort to other suppliers. In this case, the customer will have a deeper impression on the supplier. Meanwhile, the supplier will face less competition from other suppliers because the customer does not have extra time and effort to consider them to a large extent. The empirical results show that both communication relevance and communication novelty can encourage the customer learning. However, communication novelty can increase the customer's risk evaluation as well. Therefore, the supplier should use different types of communication creativity to encourage customer learning, and should also caution and control the customer's risk evaluation.

Third, under cross-border context, suppliers should understand the impacts of formal and informal institutional constraints on the customer acquisition stage.

In the cross-border B2B marketing communication, government effectiveness distance and trade reference are the most prominent formal and informal institutional constraints that influence the customer's concerns on interfirm cooperation governance and the communication process. The supplier should understand that when communicating with customer from a country with high government effectiveness distance from its own country, the customer may perceive more risk in issues such as cross-border transaction barrier, implementations of contractual clauses, and import and export policies governed by the government. When facing this type of customer, the supplier should try to mitigate the customer's concerns on cooperation governance. For example, the supplier can promise to design a complete contract to protect the customer's rights and interests. Moreover, the empirical results illustrate with a high trade reference, the positive influence of customer learning can be enlarged, and the negative role of its risk evaluation can be weakened. Therefore, this research suggests the supplier proactively provide trade reference to the customer. The trade reference can include the supplier's previous customers' evaluation, contact information, the comment from industrial associations. The trade reference helps the customer to learn more about the supplier, generate more trust on the supplier, and embedded deeper in the supplier's business network. For the supplier, the customer has a higher possibility to purchase from it because the customer invests much time and effort on it. For the customer, it can verify the supplier's experience, capabilities and reputation, to make the transaction more reliable. Moreover, the customer can spread the supplier's negative word-of-mouth if the supplier behaves opportunistically. In such cases, providing trade reference can lead to a double win situation for the supplier and the customer.

6.4. Limitations and Future Research

This research summarizes some limitations and call for future investigations.

First, this research only focused on communication creativity of the B2B marketing communication message. However, scholars have also identified other characteristics and classifications of communication message, such as instrumental and social, promotion-based and prevention-based, economic and social, resolving and relating, defensive and offensive, and self-focus and customer-focus (Berger & Iyengar, 2013; Han et al., 2022; Petersen et al., 2015; Srivastava & Chakravarti, 2009; Williams & Spiro, 1985). How these various types of communication message influence customer acquisition in the cross-border B2B marketing communication are unclear and requires further investigation. Additionally, it would be interesting to explore how communication messages interact with different communication channels. For example, which communication message type is most effective in a particular communication channel? Is there a match between particular communication message and communication channel? It would also be valuable for suppliers to communicate with customers across different channels in a more adaptable and targeted manner. Therefore, the author suggests future research explore the above-mentioned questions.

Second, this research only focused on customer learning and risk evaluation as mediating factors between communication creativity and customer acquisition. However, there may be other mediating factors, such as perceived benefit, perceived authenticity of information, communication effectiveness, capability trust, and benevolent trust to the supplier. These factors are frequently examined in literature on interfirm relationship, and they also reflect how customers perceive the value of the supplier's communication message. Therefore, this research recommends that future research test this framework using different mediators to investigate the various underlying mechanisms in the customer acquisition process.

Third, this research identified government effectiveness distance and trade reference as formal and informal institutional constraints based on institutional theory. While this research tried to be systematic when considering the factors that influence the cross-border B2B marketing communication process, it should be noticed that there are other important contextual factors worth investigation. For example, the supplier and the customer's transaction-specific assets, the customer's previous cross-border B2B transaction experience, the customer's purchase decision making complexity, the customer's information verification capability, the characteristics of the supplier's salespeople, the supplier firm, and external market uncertainty, and supplier heterogeneity in the market. All these factors deserve further investigation. Future research can consider more contextual factors that influence the cross-border B2B marketing communication process and outcome. Moreover, there can be other ways to measure formal and informal institutional distance. For example, some studies used questionnaire developed from Global Competitiveness Report published annually by the World Economic Forum to measure institutional distance (Chao & Kumar, 2010). Some studies used Hofstede's cultural distance to measure informal institutional distance (Fuentelsaz et al., 2020; Golesorkhi et al., 2019; Keig et al., 2019). Future research can test the framework using different measures of formal and informal institutional distance.

Fourth, the data was obtained only from the customer's side. This research suggests future research validate the findings by obtaining data from both the supplier's side and the customer’s side. By doing so, the future research can better avoid common method bias.

Fifth, future research is encouraged to gather objective data for construct measurement and framework testing. This research relied on the customer’s evaluation to measure the supplier’s communication relevance and communication novelty. Future research can try to collect objective communication message and conduct content analysis to validate the types of communication creativity the supplier used and the customer perceived. Moreover, this research relied on the customer’s evaluation on its purchase intention towards the supplier to measure the supplier’s customer acquisition. Future research can validate the empirical findings by collecting objective sales data from both the supplier and the customer to measure customer acquisition.

Finally, this research used cross-sectional data to examine the theoretical framework. The cross-sectional nature of the survey data limits its ability to infer causal relationship between communication creativity and the customer acquisition. Moreover, the sample size could be enlarged. Although the author performed some supplementary analyses to confirm the robustness of the results, the author still calls for future research to collect a larger size of longitudinal data to examine the dynamic effect of communication creativity on customer acquisition.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire Used in this Research

Survey on Marketing Communication Strategy (Customer Acquisition)

Dear Sir or Madam,

Thank you for participating in this research. The purpose of this study is to understand the B2B marketing communication strategy under cross-border context. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers. Please choose the answers that best reflect the actual situations. Any information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used for statistical purposes for academic research. The study will take around 20 minutes to complete. Thank you very much for your time and effort!

Please fill in the Reference No. provided in the Email invitation.

____

A. Basic Information

A01. Firm age

When was your firm founded? __________ (Year)

A02. Firm location

Where is your company located? ______________ (Country/ Region)

A03. Firm size

How many employees does your firm currently have? ______________________

A04. Firm revenue

In the last three years, what is the average revenue of your firm? (Million USD)

____

A05. Number of suppliers

How many suppliers is your firm currently working with? ______________________

A06. Firm industry

What industry does your firm belong to?

1. Automotive electronics	5. Defense industry
2. Electronic communication device	6. Telecommunications
3. Home appliance	7. Industrial and automatic control
4. Medical electronic equipment	8. Power electronics
9. Other, please specify	

B. Online Communication with Supplier A

Please identify a **NEW** potential international supplier (**Supplier A** hereinafter) that has recently contacted you, with whom you did NOT meet face to face and only communicated using online tools. Please note that the communication does not have to lead to real transactions.

Please focus on Supplier A's communication with your firm to answer the following questions.

B01. Supplier A location

Which country/ region is Supplier A located: ___________________________

B02. Relationship length

How long has it been since Supplier A first contacted you? _______ Month (s)

B03. Communication frequency (Not frequently at all – Very frequently)

In general, how frequently has Supplier A been communicating with you?

Not frequently at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very frequently

B04. Communication channel

Please tick the channel(s) through which Supplier A contacts you. (Multiple choices)

1. Email	7. Online meeting/ Seminar
2. Facebook	8. Skype
3. LinkedIn	9. Third part online B2B platform
4. Twitter	10. WeChat
5. Tik Tok	11. WhatsApp
6. Online call	12. Others, please specify (the channel name)

B05. Communication format

Please tick the types of content Supplier A has utilized in the messages. (Multiple choices)

1. Text message	4. Live streaming
2. Pictures	5. Animations and emoji
3. Video content	

B06. Communication relevance (Strongly disagree – Strong agree)

This set of questions focus on the relevance of communication message provided by Supplier A.

The information:

1. was relevant to our business scope and business need.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. was useful for our business decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. was helpful for us to keep updated on market development.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

B07. Communication novelty (Strongly disagree – Strong agree)

This set of questions focus on the novelty of communication message provided by Supplier A.

The information:

1. was new to us.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. was different compared to information provided by other suppliers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. involved new ideas about the products and market.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. was presented in an innovate style.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

B08. Customer learning (Strongly disagree – Strong agree)

Please indicate to what extent the following statements are true, since Supplier A initially contacted you.

1. We search extensively to get more information about Supplier A.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. We learn from other sources to know more about Supplier A.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. We learn and process the information from Supplier A.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

B09. Information authenticity (Strongly disagree – Strong agree)

Please evaluate the authenticity of the information provided by Supplier A.

1. The information is authentic.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. The information seems in line with the real industry situation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. There is an abundance of facts so that we believe the	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

information is authentic.	

B10. Trade reference (Strongly disagree – Strong agree)

This set of questions focus on the references you may have used to know more about Supplier A.

1. Supplier A provided us with the contract information of its previous customers for us to learn more about its business reputation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. We are able to know the business reputation of Supplier A from other peers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. We are able to know the business reputation of Supplier A from our industrial associations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. We are able to know the business reputation of Supplier A from other suppliers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

B11. Risk evaluation (Strongly disagree – Strong agree)

During the communication with Supplier A, you evaluate that:

1. The level of overall risk in cooperating with Supplier A is very high compared to cooperating with other suppliers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. We worry about the quality of the product/ service provided by Supplier A.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. We worry about the potential risk if we make transactions with Supplier A.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

B12. Product differentiation (Strongly disagree – Strong agree)

This set of questions focus on the product differentiation between Supplier A and other suppliers.

1. It is difficult for us to differentiate Supplier A from other suppliers in the same product categories based on technical product specifications. (R)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. With regard to functionality, Supplier A's products are similar to other suppliers' products. (R)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Supplier A's products and other suppliers' products provide similar benefits for us. (R)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

B13. Price attractiveness (Strongly disagree – Strong agree)

The price/ promotion offered by Supplier A:

1. was very attractive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. indicated a good buy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. was very appealing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

C. The Characteristics of Your firm

C01. B2B transaction experience

How experienced is your firm in conducting cross-border B2B transactions?

Less experienced	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very experienced

C02. Online transaction satisfaction

Has the online transaction experience been satisfying to your firm?

Not satisfying at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very satisfying

D. Feedback on the Communication with Supplier A

D01. Purchase intention (Strongly disagree – Strong agree)

This set of questions focus on your firm's purchase intention about Supplier A's products.

Please indicate your agreement regarding the following statements.

1. We are very likely to purchase from Supplier A.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. If we were going to buy one product, we would give priority to buying from Supplier A.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. The probability that we would consider buying from Supplier A is very high.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

E. External Environment

E01. Market turbulence (Strongly disagree – Strong agree)

This set of questions focus on the market turbulence in your industry.

1. In our kind of business, customers' product preferences change quite a bit over time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Our customers tend to look for new products all the time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. We have demand for our products from customers who never bought them before.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. New customers have product needs that are different from our existing customers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. We continuously cater to many new customers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

E02. Competitive intensity (Strongly disagree – Strong agree)

This set of questions focus on the competitive intensity in your industry.

1. Competition in our industry is cutthroat.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. One hears of a new competitive move very frequently.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Price competition is a hall mark of our industry.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

E03. Legal enforceability (Strongly disagree – Strong agree)

This set of questions focus on the legal enforceability of the country or region your firm is located in.

In our business operations, the legal system:

1. protects our interests.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. ensures customers pay.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. ensures we can get our money back.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. prevents us from being cheated.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

F. Respondent Information

F01. Respondent age

Please indicate your age.

1. 18-24	2. 25-34	3. 35-44	4. 45-54	5. 55-64	6. 65 and above

F02. Respondent position

Please indicate your position in your firm.

1. CEO	5. R&D manager
2. Associate CEO	6. Purchasing specialist
3. Marketing manager	7. Others, please specify
4. Purchasing manager	

F03. Working years in the firm

How many years have you worked in this firm? ______________________

F04. Industrial experience

How many years have you worked in this industry? ______________________

F05. Respondent knowledgeability (Very low – Very high)

Please indicate your knowledgeability of your firm.

1. Your knowledge about your firm.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Your knowledge about the relationship between the supplier and your firm.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Your knowledge about the relationship between your firm and downstream customers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Your knowledge about other firms in your industry.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix B: Secondary Data Used in this Research

World Governance Indicator

1) Governance effectiveness
2) Regulatory Quality

Cultural Distance Dimensions

1) Power distance
2) Individualism
3) Masculinity
4) Uncertainty avoidance
5) Long term orientation
6) Indulgence