

TRUST AND TRADE READINESS IN THE AGRIBUSINESS SECTOR THROUGH INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: INSIGHTS FROM A CONSULTANCY FIRM IN INDONESIA

Julia Anggraini¹, Dhita Widya Putri²

¹LSPR Institute of Communication & Business

²University of Debrecen, Faculty of Economics and Business, Institute of Economics

Corresponding author e-mail address: widya.putri.dhita@econ.unideb.hu

Abstract: *In the era of global agribusiness, intercultural communication has become increasingly essential for fostering trust and facilitating international trade. This study explores how an Indonesian international consulting firm strategically applies intercultural communication to enhance trade readiness and build trust with global clients in the agribusiness sector. Guided by Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), the research investigates convergence, divergence, and maintenance communication strategies across diverse cultural contexts, including East Asia, Australia, and the United States. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through key informant interviews and direct observations of client-consultant interactions. The findings reveal that tailored communication, adjusted to cultural norms, client expectations, and technological platforms, plays a significant role in reducing misunderstandings and strengthening client relationships. Convergence strategies, such as mirroring tone and interaction styles, help establish rapport, while strategic divergence reinforces ethical standards and professional identity. Maintenance ensures consistency in service branding. The study concludes that intercultural competence is not merely a soft skill, but a strategic asset that improves trade outcomes, client satisfaction, and long-term partnerships in agribusiness. These insights offer practical guidance for consultants, business developers, and agribusiness firms navigating global markets. Future research may extend this analysis to comparative studies between regions or sectors to broaden understanding of intercultural dynamics in international trade.*

Keywords: *Intercultural communication; trust; agribusiness; Communication Accommodation Theory; international consulting*
(JEL code: Q13, M16, F23)

INTRODUCTION

In global agribusiness, trust is a critical enabler of trade efficiency and cooperative engagement among diverse stakeholders. As agribusiness enterprises increasingly integrate into global markets, they encounter complex challenges related to cultural diversity, regulatory compliance, and consumer confidence. Within this context, effective intercultural communication emerges as a critical enabler for building and sustaining trust across borders (Fischer, 2009; de Vries et al., 2023). The firm exemplifies how intercultural communication strategies can be systematically applied to enhance trust and trade readiness among international clients. Operating in markets where trust is a prerequisite for successful partnerships, the firm supports foreign agribusiness investors in navigating Indonesia's diverse regulatory and cultural landscapes. Through tailored

communication approaches, the firm helps bridge linguistic, cultural, and institutional differences, often determining whether business negotiations succeed or fail.

In recent years, the significance of trust in international agribusiness transactions has been extensively recognized. Trust reduces transaction costs, mitigates uncertainties, and fosters long-term cooperation (Wilson, 2000). Fischer (2009) identifies effective communication as a critical factor in developing trust within agri-food chains, emphasizing the role of communication quality and frequency in enhancing collaborative partnerships. Similarly, de Vries et al. (2023) underscore trust as a central enabler of interaction and cooperation among agri-food value chain actors, noting its role in creating value and managing risks. The agricultural sector also plays a vital economic role in Indonesia, contributing approximately 12.61% to the country's GDP in 2024 (Statistics Indonesia, 2024). Fur-

thermore, Indonesia is a significant global player in agribusiness, particularly in plantation crops, with GDP from plantation crops reaching approximately 811.3 trillion Indonesian rupiah in 2023 (Statistics Indonesia, 2024). These economic indicators highlight the critical nature of effective intercultural communication for facilitating international trade and investment in the Indonesian agricultural sector.

The increasing reliance on digital communication due to globalized interactions adds another layer of complexity. While digital platforms expedite communication, they often eliminate essential non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and body language, significantly increasing the potential for misunderstandings. Hence, there is a heightened need for culturally sensitive digital communication strategies, such as using clear, unambiguous language and paraphrasing techniques to confirm mutual understanding (Chen & Starosta, 2005). Real-world examples vividly illustrate the consequences of failing to implement effective intercultural communication strategies. The cases of Walmart in Germany and KFC in China demonstrate how cultural insensitivity and inadequate communication approaches can lead to substantial business failures. Walmart's overly friendly, informal communication style, while effective in the United States, alienated German customers who preferred professional interactions. Similarly, KFC's inaccurate translation of their slogan in China caused significant confusion, highlighting the critical importance of culturally adapted communication. Beyond language and cultural nuances, timing is also crucial in international communication, particularly when dealing with different time zones. Mismanaged communication timing can signal insensitivity to client needs and negatively impact business relationships, emphasizing the importance of thoughtful scheduling and timing (Chen & Starosta, 2005). These insights align closely with the firm's practice of intercultural communication, which utilizes the theoretical framework provided by Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). CAT suggests that effective communication involves adapting speech and behavioral styles to match those of interlocutors, thereby fostering mutual understanding and trust (Gawron & Theuvsen, 2009). The study further underscores that cultural sensitivity, linguistic adjustments, appropriate timing, and tailored communication platforms significantly contribute to building and maintaining client trust. Adopting culturally sensitive communication strategies directly impacts client perceptions and satisfaction, crucial for successful international trade engagements (Ji, Chen, & Zhuo, 2019).

Furthermore, intercultural communication contributes positively to sustainable agribusiness and rural development projects. As Breilh (2004) argues, understanding local socio-economic dynamics and cultural contexts is essential, particularly when foreign investors engage in agribusiness ventures within rural communities. Effective intercultural communication strategies thus help manage community expectations, reduce conflicts, and ensure smoother project implementation. Drawing from empirical insights at the firm, this study elaborates on specific intercultural strategies employed to meet the diverse cultural expectations of international clients from markets such as Germany, Japan, and the United States. By utilizing qualitative methods such as key informant interviews and observa-

tional data, the study aims to highlight the economic benefits and competitive advantages of intercultural competence. Ultimately, the research findings will provide practical guidance for agribusiness enterprises on integrating structured intercultural communication strategies to enhance global trade readiness and competitive positioning. This introduction sets the stage for understanding the broader implications of intercultural communication as an essential component of successful international agribusiness relationships.

Although previous studies have examined trust in agrifood value chains and intercultural communication in multinational environments, little research has investigated how Communication Accommodation Theory operates within agribusiness consulting as a trust-building mechanism. Furthermore, no current study explores the intersection between intercultural communication strategies and trade readiness in emerging-market consultancy settings. This research addresses these gaps by offering empirical evidence from the firm working with global agribusiness clients.

Research Questions:

RQ1: How does the firm in Indonesia apply intercultural communication strategies to build trust with agribusiness clients?

RQ2: How does Communication Accommodation Theory manifest in real consulting interactions across different cultural backgrounds?

RQ3: In what ways do these communication strategies support trade readiness in global agribusiness operations?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the evolving landscape of international agribusiness, trust has become a cornerstone for enabling successful trade and cross-border collaboration. Rather than being a peripheral factor, trust now functions as a vital mechanism that underpins economic transactions and relational stability. Wilson (2000) emphasizes trust as an essential economic resource, highlighting its role in altering terms of trade, reducing transaction costs, and enhancing decision flexibility within agribusiness partnerships. This concept is further supported by Fischer (2009), who asserts that effective communication significantly mediates trust in agri-food value chains. Fischer's empirical findings underline the importance of communication quality, frequency, and transparency as central to developing trust among value chain actors. In alignment with these findings, de Vries et al. (2023) further explore the centrality of trust in agri-food value chains, identifying it as crucial for managing risks, facilitating cooperation, and creating additional value in transactions. These studies collectively underscore trust as a foundational element influencing both operational effectiveness and strategic relationships in international agricultural markets.

Building upon this foundation, recent research has illuminated the profound influence of intercultural communication on trust formation, particularly within international business contexts. Prior studies reveal that misalignments in cultural communication preferences can significantly erode trust between clients and service providers. Conversely, carefully adapted intercultural

strategies—such as the use of culturally appropriate language, message framing, and timing can enhance understanding and reinforce trust (Gregorius & Pramono, 2021). These insights are further nuanced by research emphasizing both internal and external communication dynamics within multinational firms. Surya et al. (2022) identify two key dimensions: internally, effective intercultural communication among employees mitigates information bottlenecks and fosters cohesion; externally, it supports strong, trust-based relationships with international clients. This dual focus is particularly relevant for consulting firms operating in agribusiness, where client relationships often span cultural and national boundaries.

Beyond organizational structures, intercultural communication also encompasses psychological dimensions. Mas'udah (2014) contributes to this understanding through the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory, which posits that effective intercultural interactions require conscious management of discomfort and ambiguity. When individuals approach communication with mindfulness and openness—balancing self-disclosure with cultural sensitivity—they are more likely to reduce misunderstandings and cultivate trust. Meanwhile, Fitria (2024) reframes intercultural challenges as opportunities for institutional learning. Her findings suggest that structured training in cultural awareness and conflict resolution equips employees with adaptive communication skills. These interventions not only enhance intercultural fluency but also strengthen client loyalty in diverse business settings.

A pivotal theoretical foundation for interpreting these dynamics is the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), originally formulated by Howard Giles. CAT explains how communicators adjust their verbal and non-verbal behaviors, either converging with or diverging from their interlocutors to align with social expectations and relational goals. In consulting scenarios, convergence strategies such as mirroring tone, speech patterns, and communication preferences can foster rapport and enhance trust (Gawron & Theuvsen, 2009). Griffin (2012) and Giles & Ogay (2007) elaborate further, noting that such adjustments are not only strategic but also relationally transformative. The relevance of CAT is further amplified in digital communication contexts, which are ubiquitous in international agribusiness consulting. As Gallois et al. emphasize, the absence of non-verbal cues in emails or video conferences makes it imperative to employ linguistically clear, empathetic, and culturally attuned communication strategies. Missteps in tone, timing, or word choice can be misinterpreted across cultures, leading to breakdowns in trust. Therefore, CAT-informed strategies are vital in bridging these gaps and maintaining client confidence across time zones and technological platforms.

Supporting this perspective, Ji, Chen, and Zhuo (2019) demonstrate that trust in food supply chains can be significantly enhanced through culturally resonant messaging and active stakeholder engagement. Their findings align with Gawron and Theuvsen's (2009) conclusions that context-specific adaptations in labeling and communication practices directly influence consumer trust in international markets. Breilh (2004) further situates intercultural competence within broader societal goals, arguing that effective communication is integral to sustainable rural development and equitable agribusiness practices. Ulti-

mately, this body of literature underscores the intricate interplay between trust and intercultural communication as both strategic tools and ethical imperatives in international agribusiness. For consulting firms operating in multicultural environments, these insights provide a roadmap for cultivating strong, trust-based client relationships. By systematically integrating CAT, AUM, and cultural dimensions theory into their practices, firms can elevate client experiences, enhance market adaptability, and sustain long-term trade success. This literature review establishes a comprehensive foundation for examining how one of The firms (anonymized) operationalizes these theories to enhance trade readiness and global engagement in the agribusiness sector.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research employs a qualitative methodology with a case study approach to explore the application of intercultural communication strategies at an anonymized international business consulting firm based in Indonesia. The qualitative method was selected for its exploratory nature, allowing for an in-depth understanding of complex, contextual, and dynamic aspects of intercultural communication within a real-world organizational setting. As intercultural interactions often involve symbolic, non-verbal, and situational elements that are difficult to quantify, a qualitative approach enables richer interpretations of these phenomena (Creswell, 2013).

The case study design centers on the consulting firm as a unique and information-rich unit of analysis, offering valuable insights into the real-world implementation of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) in diverse cultural encounters. As posited by Giles and Ogay (2007), CAT provides a framework for understanding how communicators adjust their language and behavior to foster mutual understanding across cultural differences. This approach was particularly useful in examining how firm employees strategically navigated interactions with clients from both high-context cultures, such as Japan, where indirectness and non-verbal cues are valued (Liu, 2016)—and low-context cultures like the United States, where direct communication is preferred.

Data were collected through six semi-structured interviews lasting 45–70 minutes with the Head of Operations, the Chief Revenue Officer, three project managers, and a long-term international client, all selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in cross-cultural client communication. Additional observational data from both in-person and digital interactions (Zoom, Google Meet, and WhatsApp) were incorporated to enrich contextual understanding. Interview questions explored communication adaptation, challenges in intercultural encounters, and trust-building practices. All data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which comprises data reduction, coding, thematic categorization, and conclusion drawing, with triangulation across interview transcripts and observational field notes to strengthen analytical validity. For example, in interactions with Korean clients, staff adjusted their tone, posture, and use of honorifics to align with cultural norms. In contrast, meetings with American clients tended to be more assertive and focused, with minimal pauses and a preference for real-time feedback, demonstrating

divergent strategies aligned with CAT's constructs of convergence and divergence.

Theoretical grounding for this study also draws from intercultural communication scholars such as Jandt (2018), who emphasized that adaptive communication is essential in meeting varied expectations in multicultural environments. Moreover, Samovar et al. (2017) highlight the importance of flexibility in style and tone to build culturally harmonious relationships—an aspect that was visibly practiced by the consulting firm's staff. The data were analyzed using the interactive model by Miles and Huberman (1994), comprising data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Throughout the research process, triangulation was employed by comparing data from multiple sources and methods to ensure credibility. The use of multiple informants, including internal staff and external clients, helped validate findings and reduce potential biases.

Limitations of the study include the restricted observation period and the diverse cultural backgrounds of the firm's international clients. While this diversity enriches the analysis, it also limits generalizability, as only a subset of cultural interactions could be examined within the given timeframe. In sum, the methodology integrates theoretical, practical, and reflective dimensions, offering a comprehensive view of how intercultural communication, anchored in CAT and supported by relevant cultural theories that enables trust-building and trade readiness in a global agribusiness consulting context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research confirm that intercultural communication strategies are essential for establishing trust and trade readiness within the agribusiness consultancy sector. Through in-depth interviews and document analysis at The firm, four core communication strategies were identified: convergence, divergence, maintenance, and the integration of digital platforms. These strategies were consistently applied in relation to the client's cultural background, communication preferences, and professional expectations. The empirical findings affirm the theoretical foundation of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), particularly in the way The firm aligns and diverges communication styles to meet intercultural demands. One of the most prominent findings is the use of convergence strategies to establish rapport with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. A project manager at The firm explained, "With our Australian clients, we avoid overly formal expressions. They appreciate directness and a tone that's friendly but efficient." This was echoed by the Head of Operations, who shared, "We train our staff to match the communication style of the client, especially in tone and structure of emails or calls. It's about building comfort and familiarity from the start." For East Asian clients, communication leaned toward more structured and indirect forms. "With Japanese clients, for example, we communicate using carefully framed emails and respect pauses in conversation," noted a senior operations executive. These convergence efforts are aligned with CAT's emphasis on similarity as a pathway to interpersonal trust.

Yet, not all situations warranted adaptation. Divergence was employed strategically to assert The firm's professional identity.

According to the Head of Operations, "When dealing with unreasonable demands, we are firm and consistent. Some clients may expect flexibility, but we maintain our ethical boundaries and local compliance standards." One client, a senior executive from a Southeast Asian tech firm, appreciated this honesty: "They don't bend the rules just to please us. That builds real trust in their professionalism." Divergence, therefore, is not resistance but a strategic assertion of core values and legal integrity. Maintenance emerged as a parallel strategy, ensuring consistency in professional branding and service quality. The firm regularly uses standardized templates for project proposals and client presentations. As described by the Chief Revenue Officer, "We use uniform language and structure in all our documents. This helps clients feel that they're engaging with a reliable and consistent partner." Such consistency reinforces identity while accommodating variation in delivery and interaction.

Digital communication platforms played a significant enabling role. Tools like Zoom, WhatsApp, and GoogleMeet were selected based on client preferences and context. "With European clients, we favor emails and structured calls. For Indonesian or Filipino clients, quick WhatsApp chats work best," remarked one business development officer. Importantly, communication was adjusted not only in format but in emotional tone. A client engagement officer noted, "With Americans, we smile more during video calls and keep the tone light. For German clients, we go straight to business and avoid small talk." The role of internal culture in shaping external communication was also emphasized. The firm's internal environment promotes intercultural awareness through regular team trainings, including role plays and culture briefings. A junior project officer reflected, "We did a simulation on Korean business etiquette. It helped me know when to speak and when to hold back during real meetings." This internal preparation translates into a client-facing communication style that is thoughtful, informed, and context-sensitive.

From the client's perspective, these strategies proved effective. One international client shared, "The firm feels like a cultural chameleon—they adjust without losing themselves." Another noted, "They're transparent when something can't be done, and that makes them more credible." In conclusion, the study found that intercultural communication at The firm is not only intentional but embedded into its operations, training, and strategy. By skillfully applying convergence, divergence, and maintenance within digital frameworks, The firm successfully builds long-term client trust and enables trade readiness. These strategies, grounded in CAT and enriched by real-world cultural intelligence, make The firm a model of effective global consultancy in the agribusiness sector.

The findings of this study substantiate the theoretical proposition that trust in international agribusiness is deeply influenced by the quality of communication and the degree of cultural adaptability exhibited during intercultural interactions. Drawing upon Fischer's (2009) framework, our research reaffirms that effective communication serves as a powerful mediator in building trust between agribusiness actors across borders. Fischer emphasized that trust levels among actors in agri-food chains can be significantly increased through timely, relevant,

and accurate communication—elements that were clearly reflected in how the firm customized its communication strategies to match the expectations of clients from various cultural backgrounds. This conclusion also echoes the findings of de Vries et al. (2023), who conceptualized trust as a dynamic and context-specific construct within agri-food value chains. They emphasize that trust not only initiates collaboration but also sustains it by reducing the perceived risks associated with opportunistic behavior among value chain actors. In our case study, The firm demonstrated this dynamic understanding by intentionally applying convergence and divergence strategies based on the cultural profiles of their clients. These practices enabled them to build credibility, maintain consistent service quality, and assert ethical boundaries when necessary—factors that are integral to fostering relational and rational trust as outlined by de Vries et al. (2023).

Additionally, our findings lend support to Chen and Starosta's (2005) argument that digital communication, although efficient, can compromise mutual understanding if not complemented by culturally sensitive adaptations. The elimination of non-verbal cues in emails or video calls increases the risk of misinterpretation. This was evident in the firm's practices where emotional tone, pacing, and platform selection were meticulously adjusted to suit client preferences. For instance, short and informal WhatsApp interactions were deemed appropriate for Southeast Asian clients, while structured video conferences were preferred for European stakeholders—illustrating the firm's agile response to the communicative context (Chen & Starosta, 2005). Further reinforcing the argument for culturally attuned communication is the application of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). As theorized by Giles and elaborated by Gawron and Theuvsen (2009), CAT posits that individuals adjust their communicative behaviors to either converge with or diverge from their interlocutors based on relational goals. This theory is highly applicable in the context of international consulting, where mirroring client expectations and speech patterns can significantly improve rapport and trust. The case study firm applied this theory not only in client interactions but also in internal team trainings, where simulations and cultural briefings equipped staff with the agility to navigate nuanced intercultural scenarios (Gawron & Theuvsen, 2009).

The empirical evidence also aligns with Breilh's (2004) call for socio-cultural awareness in rural economic engagement. In Indonesia, agribusiness often intersects with traditional practices and heterogeneous local values. Consulting firms must not only address logistical and legal matters but also understand the cultural implications of projects, particularly in rural or community-based settings. As shown in this study, the firm's success in facilitating international investment was not merely technical—it was relational and socio-culturally informed. The ability to manage stakeholder expectations, minimize cultural friction, and align with community norms exemplifies the operationalization of intercultural competence as a strategic asset rather than a soft skill (Breilh, 2004). Moreover, the results affirm that the effectiveness of trust-building in digital contexts can be augmented through strategies aligned with CAT and AUM (Anxiety/Uncertainty Management) theories. According to Mas'udah (2014), managing uncertainty in intercultural

interactions involves both emotional regulation and mindful communication. This study observed that staff members, especially during negotiations or sensitive disclosures, employed paraphrasing and active listening techniques to reassure clients and reduce ambiguity. Such tactics resonate with Ji, Chen, and Zhuo's (2019) findings, which indicate that culturally resonant messaging, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive communication are positively correlated with consumer trust and satisfaction in food supply chains.

In synthesizing the literature and empirical findings, it becomes clear that the consulting firm's communication strategies are neither ad hoc nor superficial. They are informed by established communication theories, empirical best practices, and a deep understanding of value chain dynamics. Trust is not built merely by being responsive or polite—it is cultivated through a disciplined, research-based, and client-centered approach that recognizes the fluid interplay between communication style, cultural identity, and professional integrity. In conclusion, this study not only confirms that trust in international agribusiness is predicated on the twin pillars of effective communication and cultural adaptability, but also illustrates how these principles can be pragmatically implemented in organizational settings. The firm emerges as a compelling model for how trust-building can be institutionalized through intercultural communication training, strategic convergence/divergence techniques, and platform-specific communication planning. In doing so, the firm not only strengthens its client relationships but also contributes to the broader objective of enhancing global trade readiness in Indonesia's agribusiness sector. The findings of this study align with recent evidence from other emerging-market contexts. For instance, Sasne Grosz et al. (2024) demonstrated in Laos how institutional and cultural factors critically shape cross-cultural business negotiations, highlighting the need for cultural knowledge and negotiation strategies when Western and Southeast Asian actors engage in business relations. Moreover, research on Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) among Indonesian start-ups shows that ICC helps firms manage value differences, reduce ethnocentrism, and facilitate smoother collaboration with domestic and foreign partners (Nurbaity et al., 2023). On a broader level, systematic reviews of intercultural negotiations confirm that trust building across cultures depends heavily on communicative adaptability and cultural accommodation (Sikorski & Albrecht, 2025). These converge with our findings, indicating that the strategic communication and trust-building mechanisms identified in this study could be transferable to other culturally heterogeneous emerging markets in Asia. Beyond confirming the relevance of CAT in intercultural consulting, this study extends the theory by demonstrating how digital communication environments introduce new forms of convergence and divergence, such as adjustments in screen presence, asynchronous response timing, and platform-specific tone modulation. These digital cues, absent in earlier formulations of CAT, highlight the need to expand the theory to accommodate multimodal and technologically mediated communication patterns that shape trust-building in contemporary global consulting.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that intercultural communication stands as a foundational pillar in cultivating trust and trade readiness within international agribusiness consulting. The case of the firm demonstrates that trust is neither incidental nor spontaneous; it is a strategically cultivated outcome that hinges on cultural sensitivity, communication adaptability, and institutional learning. Drawing upon Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), the firm operationalizes communication strategies that not only align with client expectations but also preserve organizational integrity, enabling the firm to operate successfully in a diverse and globalized environment. As demonstrated through empirical observations and client feedback, the firm's consistent use of convergence, divergence, and maintenance strategies across digital and interpersonal communication platforms enables effective relationship-building and reinforces their reputation as a culturally agile actor in the international agribusiness landscape.

The findings emphasize that communication in international consulting must transcend transactional efficiency and embody relational depth. Trust becomes both an input and an outcome: it is required to initiate cooperation, and it is reinforced through every culturally aligned interaction. Effective intercultural communication, therefore, does not merely supplement technical expertise, it is the vehicle through which credibility, reliability, and long-term cooperation are established (Fischer, 2009; de Vries et al., 2023). The firm's ability to deploy culturally resonant messaging (Ji, Chen, & Zhuo, 2019), adjust linguistic tone and channel use (Chen & Starosta, 2005), and embed relational cues within digital interactions (Gallois et al., 2005) further supports the assertion that communication is inseparable from strategic business practice in global agribusiness. Beyond the professional-client dynamic, the study also illustrates the importance of internal capacity-building. Through structured training, role plays, and intercultural briefings, the firm has institutionalized cultural intelligence (Ang et al., 2007), thus ensuring that its staff not only reactively manage cross-cultural differences but proactively anticipate and navigate them. This organizational infrastructure, aligned with Breilh's (2004) socio-cultural approach to sustainable development, enables the firm to engage sensitively with rural and traditional stakeholders, thereby avoiding cultural missteps and enhancing community trust.

The implications of this study extend to policymakers, agribusiness investors, and consulting professionals. For policymakers, the findings advocate for the integration of intercultural communication competencies in regulatory and trade facilitation frameworks. Government institutions involved in trade promotion can collaborate with consulting firms to disseminate best practices, particularly in emerging economies where trust deficits may hinder foreign investment. For agribusiness stakeholders, the study presents a model of best practice in client engagement, one that combines cultural adaptability with professional rigor. This research also offers key academic contributions. First, it advances Communication Accommodation Theory by contextualizing it in the high-stakes world of global agribusiness consulting. Second, it bridges CAT with

complementary frameworks such as AUM (Mas'udah, 2014) and cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010), demonstrating that intercultural communication strategies can be synthesized into practical consulting protocols. Lastly, it introduces a relational view of communication that positions trust not as a byproduct, but as a central metric of consulting success.

Practical Recommendations and Future Research Directions

From a practical standpoint, future studies should consider cross-firm comparisons across multiple consulting firms with different cultural scopes and service portfolios. This would offer deeper insights into how firm-level variations shape intercultural communication strategies. Similarly, longitudinal research could explore how firms adapt their communication approaches over time in response to geopolitical changes, digital transformation, or shifting client expectations. Furthermore, there is a growing need to examine the role of non-verbal and visual communication in digital intercultural contexts. As video conferencing and online collaboration tools become central to global consulting, future research could delve into how gesture, visual layout, background aesthetics, and on-screen presence influence trust formation. A multimodal analysis could provide a richer understanding of communication effectiveness beyond verbal content alone.

Academically, future research should explore the critical discourse surrounding intercultural power dynamics. Questions around cultural dominance, tokenism, and assimilation may reveal underlying biases in current communication practices. Investigating these aspects will allow scholars to advocate for more equitable communication standards that celebrate diversity without enforcing conformity. The inclusion of postcolonial communication theories may offer valuable critiques and pave the way for a more ethical, inclusive approach to global consulting. In conclusion, this research reaffirms that effective intercultural communication is not a mere accessory to global business, it is its lifeblood. The firm case illustrates how communication, when grounded in theory, enriched by practice, and oriented toward mutual respect, can serve as a bridge to trust, a catalyst for collaboration, and a driver of economic development in international agribusiness.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF GEN AI

Generative AI tools, such as Grammarly and ChatGPT, were employed exclusively for language refinement. All conceptual insights, theoretical interpretations, and arguments presented in this work are entirely the author's original and independent contributions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the international consulting firm in Indonesia that served as the research subject, as well as to all participating informants for their willingness to share valuable insights and experiences. In accordance with ethical research standards, the name of the company and the identities of the informants have been anonymized to ensure confidentiality and to protect the integrity

of the data. We also appreciate the academic and institutional support provided by the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Debrecen and the LSPR Institute of Communication and Business.

REFERENCES

- Ang, S., Van Dyne, L., & Koh, C. (2007). Cultural intelligence: Its measurement and effects on cultural judgment and decision making, cultural adaptation and task performance. *Management and Organization Review*, 3(3), 335–371. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1740-8784.2007.00082.x>
- Breilh, J. (2004, November 18). Methodological innovation, intercultural knowledge building and empowerment: The case of participatory research in an agro-industrial region. Paper presented at the Global Forum for Health Research: Health Research to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals, Mexico City. Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar. <https://repositorio.uasb.edu.ec/bitstream/10644/426/1/BreilhJ-Methodological-Innovation.pdf>
- Chen, G. M., & Starosta, W. J. (2005). *Foundations of intercultural communication*. University Press of America. <https://www.asau.ru/files/pdf/intercultural.pdf>
- de Vries, J. R., Groot Koerkamp, P. W. G., & Arts, B. (2023). Trust in agrifood value chains: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 95, 101–112. <https://doi.org/10.22434/IFAMR2022.0032>
- Fischer, C. (2009). Food quality and safety standards as required by EU law and the private industry. In C. Fischer & M. Hartmann (Eds.), *Agri-food chain relationships* (pp. 135–147). CABI. <https://doi.org/10.1079/9781845936426.0135>
- Fitria, M. (2024). Enhancing institutional learning through intercultural communication training: Evidence from Southeast Asian firms. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Management Studies*, 13(1), 22–36.
- Gallois, C., Ogay, T., & Giles, H. (2005). *Communication accommodation theory: A look back and a look ahead*. Sage Publications
- Gawron, J. C., & Theuvsen, L. (2009). Certification schemes in the European agrifood sector: Evidence from the beef chain. *Journal on Chain and Network Science*, 9(2), 115–127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16507541.2010.531944>
- Giles, H., & Ogay, T. (2007). Communication accommodation theory. In B. B. Whaley & W. Samter (Eds.), *Explaining communication: Contemporary theories and exemplars* (pp. 293–310). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Gregorius, S., & Pramono, B. (2021). Communicating trust in a multicultural business environment: A study of Indonesian consultants. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 18(1), 1–15.
- Griffin, E. (2012). *A first look at communication theory* (8th ed.). McGraw-Hill
- Hofstede, G., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Jandt, F. E. (2018). *An introduction to intercultural communication: Identities in a global community* (9th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Ji, Q., Chen, Y., & Zhuo, W. (2019). Consumer trust in food supply chains: Empirical evidence from China. *Sustainability*, 11(2), 410
- Liu, S. (2016). Intercultural communication competence in high-context and low-context cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 54, 12–23.
- Mas'udah, D. (2014). Mindfulness dalam komunikasi antarbudaya (Studi deskriptif pada peserta Indonesia – Poland Cross-cultural Program). *Jurnal Profetik*, 7(2). <https://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/isoshum/profetik/article/view/1108/1021>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Nurbaity, S., Marasigan, J. B. V., & Nadarajan, R. V. (2023). The role of intercultural communication competence in business collaboration to develop start ups in the global era. *Ilomata International Journal of Social Science*, 4(1), 105–118. <https://doi.org/10.52728/ijss.v4i1.649>
- Samovar, L. A., Porter, R. E., & McDaniel, E. R. (2017). *Intercultural communication: A reader* (14th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Sasne Grosz, A., Jozsa, L., & Sengsouly, H. (2024). Cross-cultural business negotiations in developing markets: Comprehending the impact of institutional and cultural elements. *International Review of Management and Marketing*, 14(5), 82–87. <https://doi.org/10.32479/irmm.16383>
- Sikorski, M. T., & Albrecht, A. (2025). Trust in the context of intercultural negotiations - A systematic review. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, 18(1), 1–41. <https://doi.org/10.34891/a0mc-jx98>
- Statistics Indonesia. (2024). Contribution of the agricultural sector to GDP Indonesia 2019–2024. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1488997/indonesia-contribution-of-agriculture-sector-to-gdp/>
- Surya, D., Lestari, I., & Adiwijaya, Y. (2022). Organizational communication in global agribusiness consulting: An Indonesian case. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 59(4), 423–439
- Wilson, D. T. (2000). An integrated model of buyer-seller relationships. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 23(4), 335–345. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009207039502300414>

