Bachelor's thesis

The effect of cultural information about China and people's age on accommodation of Americans to Chinese people in business communication settings.

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Abstract

The research topic of this study was the effect of cultural information about China and people's age on accommodation of Americans to Chinese people in business communication settings. The meaning of cultural information implied information about the way of communication in the Chinese culture. The relevance of the study is the increasing importance of cultural adaptation in the globalizing business world.

In order to study this, a survey involving 59 US-American participants was conducted. The participants were each shown 6 business-related messages from a Chinese person to which they had to respond. All participants were assigned to one of the two conditions: without cultural information and with cultural information. Participants who did not receive cultural information had to respond to the messages without information about the Chinese culture, and participants with cultural information received information about the Chinese culture prior to the messages. In the end, the number of accommodated answers was assessed for each participant, after which the results of both conditions were compared. An answer was considered accommodated when the given answer was adapted to the communication style of the Chinese culture. Furthermore, the age of the participants was asked at the beginning of the survey and was collected in age categories.

The test results showed that Americans who obtained cultural information about China showed more accommodation to Chinese people in business communication settings than Americans who did not obtain cultural information about China. However, there was no difference in the extent of accommodation to Chinese people in business communication settings between Americans of different ages. Additionally, cultural information and age together did show some effect on accommodation. All in all, from the results, the conclusion can be drawn that obtaining more cultural information will lead to more understanding, and therefore better accommodation to the other culture.

Introduction

Communication in dialogues

Communication has been present throughout history. It is used by people all over the world to make contact with each other. However, the concept of communication is quite complex, causing that people do not understand everything about what exactly happens in communication processes. Therefore, it is difficult to determine what communication entails.

Though, what is known about communication is that people tend to communicate in dialogues, which can be perceived as the most natural and basic form of language use (Pickering & Garrod, 2004). In dialogues, there is made use of language production and comprehension. Interlocutors produce utterances and simultaneously try to predict what the other interlocutor is going to express (Pickering & Garrod, 2004, 2006).

Shannon and Weaver (1949) attempted to conceptualize these communication processes with the Linear Model of Communication. The model considers communication as a one-way process in which there are a sender and a receiver. The sender sends an encoded message through a certain channel in presence of noise. The encoded message arrives at the receiver who has to decode the message to be able to understand it.

However, the Linear Model of Communication is used in many different ways. For instance, the existence of all different languages causes that not everyone around the world can understand each other. Furthermore, one could think of the differences in language systems such as spoken and signed languages, but also the many different dialects in languages. All these different forms in which language is used, pose a challenge to the Linear Model of Communication (Shannon & Weaver, 1949).

Different languages and adaptation

As a result of the existence of many different languages, people automatically tend to adapt a little to each other in their language use to be able to understand each other better (Chang, Janciauskas, & Fitz, 2012). These adaptations happen during communication in dialogues in which a way of mutual adjustment or alignment is sought (Pickering & Garrod, 2004). Alignment is achieved by adapting the linguistic representations that are operated by the interlocutors at many levels. According to Pickering and Garrod (2004, 2006), alignment is the basis for successful communication in dialogues.

The concept of alignment, or in other words accommodation, is explained by the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) of Giles and Powesland (1997). The theory provides a framework that predicts and illustrates adjustments individuals make in conversations to generate, maintain, and/or reduce social distance with the interlocutor. The CAT proposes the different ways of accommodation

which are distinguished in two different patterns of communication, convergence and divergence (Giles & Ogay, 2007). A convergence communication pattern entails strategies to accommodate to each other's communication styles with the aim of similarity attraction. A divergence communication pattern entails occasions in which communication style differences are accentuated to emphasize distinctiveness, usually based on group membership (Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991). In this study, the focus will be on the convergence communication pattern.

Due to the strongly globalizing world, convergence communication styles have been increasingly important. People all over the world can come into contact with each other more easily, which means that they also have to deal with increasingly more cross-national communication, which involves other cultures. Various cultures entail different communication rules and norms that are based on the values, perceptions, etc. of that particular culture (Ablonczy-Mihályka, 2009). Samovar and Porter (1991) claim that in intercultural communication, it is crucial to take into account the different cultural values of distinct cultures.

In addition, as a result of the enormous expansion of trade and financial flows, gradually more diverse companies around the world are collaborating. The diversity of companies entails more organisations with employees with different languages, cultures, and different levels of knowledge. Consequently, companies should accommodate in conversations in business settings to establish a favourable relationship with other international organisations. Organisations could adjust their communication ways to more multidisciplinary, globalized, and complex communication environments to stay relevant. Companies and their employees should reckon with the diverse communication environments and adapt not only to the linguistic differences and competencies, but also to the cultural ones (Du-Babcock, 2006).

Indirectly, people tend to apply the norms and values of their culture to communication processes in business (Ablonczy-Mihályka, 2009). Therefore, alignment between individuals also plays a significant role in business communication (Kercher, 2006). According to FitzGerald (2003), the intercultural skills of a person should be well developed to be able to communicate efficiently in a multicultural business environment. The importance of intercultural skills also emerges from Rivera's (2012) research, which found that job candidates who have a cultural fit with the dominant culture of the company were more likely to be hired than job candidates who had a less cultural fit. For instance, alignment in communication could contribute to this cultural fit.

Influences on accommodation

All in all, adaptation is used all the time and all over the world. For instance, adaptation occurs in many different business situations. This research will take into account the presence of accommodation in different business conversation settings, such as business deadlines, personal

relations, and business feedback. However, different factors have an influence on the presence of accommodation (Pardo, 2006).

Age

One of those factors is age, which will be investigated in this study. It could be the case that differences in people's ages influence the extent to which accommodation takes place, which could be caused by the fact that younger and older adults have various ways of communicating. Younger and older adults can be perceived as distinct cultural groups that have their own values and beliefs about communication, different language codes, and different communication goals (Giles & Coupland, 1991).

Previous studies show that, in general, older people are less likely to accommodate than younger people. Younger people would feel more obliged to adapt and be respectful (McCann, Ota, Giles, & Caraker, 2003; Williams & Giles, 1996). The research of Williams and Giles (1996) claims that older adults may even under-accommodate, meanwhile younger adults tend to over-accommodate. The results demonstrated that young people were more likely to show over-accommodation through support, mutuality, and positive emotional expression in conversations. Conversely, older people were more likely to show under-accommodation through restricted communication and negative emotional expression in conversations (Williams & Giles, 1996). However, these findings on the effect of age on accommodation have been found in the general context of communication. The effect has not yet been explored in specific business communication settings.

Cultural context

Another aspect that could influence accommodation is the cultural context. According to Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) theorists (Pearce, 2005), cultural context is necessary to describe and to be able to understand communication within and/or across cultures. However, different cultures in the world have various cultural contexts. In any cultural context, its users will have certain skills, abilities, and personality requirements that are expected and expressed (Shin, Morgeson, & Campion, 2006).

Having more information about the culture of a specific country could result in a better understanding of what certain behaviours and communication messages entail and what is conveyed by the messages. It is important to have some knowledge about cultural contexts because the same communication messages and behaviours can have different meanings in diverse cultures (Brady, Fryberg, & Shoda, 2019). Though, no previous studies have been conducted to examine the effect of information about a culture on accommodation. It would be interesting to investigate whether people's accommodation will increase after more cultural information about a certain country because this knowledge could contribute to a better understanding of cultural gaps in communication.

Cultural dimensions

Different cultural contexts can be assigned to a certain cultural dimension. Hall (1997) developed some of these dimensions, such as monochronic/polychronic time, high-/low context, and proxemics. This research will focus on the high-/low-context dimension. The high-/low-context dimension refers to the way in which information is collected. In high-context cultures, information is collected from physical, social, and psychological contexts, and in low-context cultures, information is collected by explicit verbal codes (Liu, Volcic, & Gallois, 2014).

Cultural differences between China & America

In recent decades, the cultural differences between China and America have been researched. In almost all contexts it appears that the cultural norms and values of these two countries differ extremely from each other (Hall, 1976, 1980; Hofstede, 1981, 2001). The cultures of China and America differ on several dimensions. For example, China has a polychronic culture, which means that Chinese people prefer to do multiple things at the same time. On the other hand, America has a monochronic culture, which means that American people prefer to do one thing at a time (Hall, 1976). In addition, China has a high power distance and America a low power distance, which is about the degree to which inequality of power is allowed (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1981).

The Chinese and American cultures also differ in communication. Concerning high-/low context cultures, China has a high-context culture in which environmental and interpersonal factors determine the way of communication. Chinese people make use of a shared context and implicit messages in conversations (Tang, 2019). For interaction, high-context entails nonverbal elements, indirectness, communication as a form of art, and engaging people (Hall, 1976). Moreover, disagreements are personalised and therefore experienced as personal attacks (Hall, 1976). Furthermore, there are also customs and norms in business that can be derived from the Chinese high-context culture. For example, employees will tend to say 'yes' to a task, even though they do not completely understand what the task entails (Tang, 2019). Employees tend to say 'yes' because saying 'no' is experienced as uncomfortable in the Chinese culture. Additionally, downplaying compliments to demonstrate modesty is a common action because agreeing will be perceived as arrogant (Tang, 2019).

On the other hand, the American communication style is very different from that of the Chinese one. America has a low-context culture in which meaning and information are shared explicitly (Hall, 1976). Regarding interaction, low-context entails low use of nonverbal elements, direct and explicit verbal messages, exchanging information, and depersonalised disagreement (Hall, 1976). Moreover, Americans are very task-oriented. In contrast to the Chinese culture, conflict is approved and saying 'no' is not an inappropriate action at all (Communicaid Group Limited, 2021). Generally, the American low-context culture can be experienced as quite 'direct', which can be perceived as rude by people with the Chinese culture, while Americans do not intend it that way; this directness is just their way of

communication (Communicaid Group Limited, 2021). In conclusion, to avoid possible miscommunications in different business conversation settings that may arise, it could be important to have some knowledge of other cultures and make use of alignment.

<u>Present study</u>

Researchers have already examined accommodation in many ways, and also concerning the cultures of China and America, such as the impact of national culture on managerial work values in China and the US (Ralston, Holt, Terpstra, & Kai-cheng, 1997). The findings of the study confirmed the important role of national culture on individual work values of managers in China and the US (Ralston, Holt, Terpstra, & Kai-cheng, 1997).

However, as mentioned before, there are still some research gaps concerning the effect of cultural information on accommodation and the influence of age on accommodation. It remains unclear whether there is a relationship between cultural information and accommodation, and whether age affects accommodation in business communication in dialogue settings. Furthermore, the effect of both cultural information and age on accommodation has not been examined before. Therefore, these aspects should be further investigated.

For this research, the two countries, the USA and China, and their cultures are chosen to be examined. The focus will be on the high-/low-context dimension because this dimension has the most significant discrepancy between the USA and China (Hall, 1976). All in all, one research question and four hypotheses are raised:

RQ: What is the effect of cultural information about China and people's age on accommodation of Americans to Chinese people in business communication settings?

H.1: Americans who obtain cultural information about China provide more accommodation to Chinese people in business communication settings than Americans who do not obtain cultural information about China.

H.2: American adults of younger age are more likely to accommodate to Chinese people in business communication settings than American adults of older age.

H.3: Americans who obtain cultural information about China and being of younger age provide more accommodation to Chinese people in business communication settings than Americans who obtain cultural information about China and of older age.

H.4: Americans who do not obtain cultural information about China and being of younger age provide more accommodation to Chinese people in business communication settings than Americans who do not obtain cultural information about China and of older age.

It is relevant to investigate the research question because the related aspects, such as culture, languages, and communication are becoming increasingly important due to the globalizing world. As mentioned before, companies can come easier and faster into contact with other organisations on the other side of the world. These organisations have their own cultures with different norms and values that they have to take into account or adapt to when communicating (Baylis, Smith, & Owens, 2001). It is important to learn more about what factors could influence accommodation as globalizing companies can take these factors into account and respond to them in their international communication strategies.

By examining whether people's degree of accommodation will increase after being exposed to information about a culture, international companies will be able to determine more easily whether making people aware of cultural differences could help bridge cultural gaps in business settings. Furthermore, a new understanding of the impact of cultural information on business communication processes in dialogue settings will be gained, on which future research can be built.

Finally, investigating whether age influences accommodation in business communication in dialogue settings will be relevant, as companies will learn more about which age category adapts their communication best to other cultures. Based on this knowledge, international companies could determine to which group of employees they can best assign their business communication with international trade contacts. Besides, the results will contribute to a better understanding of the influences that age can have on different business communication settings. However, in this study, only one aspect will be considered, accommodation, but future research could look at other factors in business communication that age could influence.

Method

<u>Materials</u>

In order to investigate the research question, the overall structure of the experiment consisted of 6 business-related messages from a Chinese person to which participants had to respond. All participants were assigned to one of the two conditions: without cultural information about China, and with cultural information about China. The participants who did not receive information had to respond to the messages without cultural information. The participants who did receive information had to read the cultural information prior to responding to the messages. Finally, the number of accommodated answers per participant was assessed, and the results of both conditions were compared.

In this experiment, there were two independent variables, 'cultural information about China' and 'age'. Firstly, the variable 'cultural information about China' consisted of two levels: with cultural information, and without cultural information.

This study belonged to a bigger experiment. In total, the bigger experiment consisted of 24 fictional messages related to communication in international business settings, to which participants had to respond. Half of the messages represented the American nationality and its culture, and the other half represented the Chinese nationality and its culture. However, the section of this study focused only on the messages representing the Chinese nationality and its culture, which was done by the use of a fictional Chinese person called Li Wei who was born and grew up in China. All messages had been pre-checked by native Chinese speakers to ensure that the messages would fit well with the Chinese culture.

A total of 12 messages were coming from Li Wei who represented the Chinese nationality and its culture. The 12 messages were divided into two conditions with 6 messages each: without cultural information about China and with cultural information about China. For the condition with cultural information, a small piece of text about the way of communication in the Chinese culture was given before the 6 messages were displayed. Although, the messages themselves across the two conditions were the same, so that any differences in the results could only be caused by cultural information. For the condition without cultural information, the 6 messages were shown without any previous information about the Chinese culture. Therefore, the variable 'cultural information about China' was manipulated and could be regarded as the experimental variable of the study. Furthermore, per condition each message belonged to one of the six business situations dealt with in this research: compliment, feedback, favour, deadline, personal relation, and apology. What the messages and conditions exactly look like can be viewed in appendix A.

The other independent variable in this study was 'age', which consisted of two age categories: younger age and older age. At the beginning of the experiment, participants were asked some questions about

personal information, including the age category they belonged to. Participants between 18 – 35 years old were attributed to the younger age group, and participants over 35 years were attributed to the older age group.

The experiment was implemented as a 'Qualtrics' survey, on which personal information of the participants was obtained. The information from all participants was collected in a database and analysed on SPSS, to be able to examine whether the variable affected the extent of accommodation. The complete survey can be found in appendix A.

<u>Subjects</u>

The participants recruited for the experiment were US-American people with American English as their native language. Furthermore, they had to be 18 years or older, should be at least a high-school graduate or equivalent, and had to have experience in business/corporate. Participants whose native language was not American English, who were not 18 years of age or older, and/or had no experience in business, were excluded from the experiment and were taken directly to the end of the survey. In total, 255 respondents participated in the survey. Ultimately, after eliminating all invalid respondents, 105 valid respondents remained.

Subsequently, this experiment used a subset of the data including only the participants who were assigned to a Chinese condition. As a result, 59 respondents remained, 36 of whom belonged to the control group (without cultural information about China) and 23 to the experimental group (with cultural information about China).

In the experiment, 27 respondents had identified themselves as male, 17 of whom had been placed in the control group and 10 in the experimental group. Moreover, 32 respondents had identified themselves as women, of which 19 were placed in the control group and 13 in the experimental group. A Chi-square test did not show a significant relation between gender and cultural information about China (X^2 (1) = .08, p = .778). This result means that the distribution of men and women over the two conditions of cultural information was comparable.

Concerning age, all 59 participants belonged to one of the two age categories. Thirty-one participants belonged to the younger age category, of which 18 people were placed in the control group and 13 people in the experimental group. Furthermore, 26 participants belonged to the older age category, of which 18 people were placed in the control group and 10 people in the experimental group. A Chi-square test did not show a significant relation between age category and cultural information about China (X^2 (1) = .24, p = .625). This result means that the distribution of the people with a younger age and people with an older age over the two conditions of cultural information was comparable.

The most common level of education was a bachelor's degree, which was the case for 23 respondents. The range for the level of education was 7, with a high school graduate or equivalent as the lowest

level and professional degree as the highest level. A chi-square test did not show a significant relation between level of education and cultural information about China (X^2 (6) = 1.34, p = .970). This result means that the distribution of different levels of education over the two conditions of cultural information was comparable.

The average number of years of experience in business was 13 years. The range for years of experience in business was 40, with 1 year experience as the lowest level and 40 years of experience as the highest level. An independent samples t-test did not show a significant difference between years of business experience with regard to cultural information about China (t (6.03) = .47, p = .545). This result means that the distribution of the different number of years of experience over the two conditions of cultural information was comparable.

Design

The design of the experiment was a 2 (age) x 2 (cultural information) inter-design. The components of the variable 'age' consisted of 2 age categories: younger age, and older age. The components of the variable 'cultural information' consisted of two levels: without cultural information about China, and with cultural information about China. Participants took part in only one of the two levels, which means the experiment was a between-subjects design. The control group for this experiment was the group of participants who were not exposed to cultural information about China.

Instruments

The one dependent variable used for this experiment was 'accommodation' and consisted of 7 levels from 0-6. This variable was operationalized by letting the participants of the survey choose between 2 responses after the 6 messages they received. One of the responses was a high-context response, which belongs to the Chinese culture, and therefore was accommodated to the message of the Chinese person. The other answer was a low-context answer, which belongs to the American culture, and therefore was not accommodated to the message of the Chinese person. Just like the messages, the determined responses were pre-checked by native Chinese people. By looking per participant at how many of the chosen responses were Chinese-like, a score could be assigned on a scale from 0-6 (0 = no accommodation - 6 = full accommodation).

Consequently, the accommodation scores of the participants who had not received cultural information about China and the scores of those who had received cultural information could be compared to see for which group the score was higher. The accommodation scores could also be compared between participants of the two different age categories.

Procedure

The experiment consisted of an online survey conducted by means of the software program 'Qualtrics'. Through various social media channels, friends, acquaintances, and other networks, people were approached to participate in the survey. No rewards for participation were used, so partaking was completely voluntary. If participants decided to take part, they were forwarded to the survey via a link. The survey had to be carried out on an individual basis.

Firstly, a short piece of practical information about the experiment, the research data, and participation was given to the participants. However, in this part, no concrete information was given about the research so as not to disclose the aim of the experiment. At the end of this section, three statements were given that participants had to assent to in order to proceed to the survey.

Thereafter, the participants were asked six demographic and personal questions, concerning age, gender, native language, etc. The exact questions can be found in appendix A. Subsequently, all participants were equally randomly assigned to one of the four conditions: no cultural information American, cultural information American, no cultural information Chinese, cultural information Chinese. For this study, only the results of the two Chinese conditions were considered.

Subsequently, the participants assigned to a condition without cultural information were shown six fictional messages related to communication in international business settings. The participants who were assigned to a condition with cultural context were first given a piece of cultural information to read. At the end of that piece, a comprehension question was asked to check whether the piece had actually been read by the participant. Thereafter, the six messages were drawn up to the participants. The order in which the messages were displayed was randomized.

After each trial, participants had to choose one of the two suggested answers, of which one was accommodated and the other was not. Likewise, the order of the Chinese-like and American-like responses was randomized, so that the participants could not find a fixed pattern in the answers. The participants assigned to one of the two Chinese conditions were also given the Likert scale with a statement about how friendly they thought the Chinese person in the messages was. Additionally, participants with a Chinese condition received a statement about response adaptation to the Chinese person in the messages.

Finally, all participants were asked some background information about their own experiences and working environment in the final questionnaire on the basis of a seven-point Likert scale. All in all, the experiment took approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Statistical treatment

A two-way univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to be able to answer the research question. In this test, the variables 'cultural information' (yes/no) and 'age' (younger age/older age) have been analysed to determine whether they affect accommodation behaviour.

Results

A two-way analysis of variance with cultural information about China (context) and age category as factors showed a significant main effect of cultural information about China on accommodation ($F(1, 55\ 47) = 8.52$, $p = .005$). Age category was not found to have a significant main effect on accommodation ($F(1, 55) = 1.50$, $p = .226$). The interaction effect between cultural information about China and age category was not statistically significant ($F(1, 55) = 1.56$, $p = .217$).

People who received cultural information about China ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 1.33$) were shown to have greater accommodation than people who did not receive cultural information about China ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.10$). Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of cultural information about China.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for accommodation to the Chinese culture (0 = no accommodation, 6 = full accommodation) in function of cultural information about China.

Cultural information:	with cultural information n = 23	without cultural information n = 36
M	4.70	3.78
DS	1.33	1.10

Furthermore, people with a younger age ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.09$) were not shown to have greater accommodation than people with an older age ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.41$). This was also not the case the other way around. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of age categories.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for accommodation to the Chinese culture (0 = no accommodation, 6 = full accommodation) in function of age categories.

Age category:	Younger people n = 31	Older people n = 28
M	4.39	3.86
DS	1.09	1.41

Ultimately, people who received cultural information about China and being of younger age (M = 4.69, DS = 1.32) were not shown to have greater accommodation than people who received cultural information about China and being of older age (M = 4.17, DS = .86). On the other hand, people who did not receive cultural information about China and being of younger age (M = 4.17, DS = .86) were shown to have greater accommodation than people who did not receive cultural information about China and being of older age (M = 3.39, DS = 1.20). Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations of cultural information about China and age categories. In order to get a clearer picture of these results, figure 1 can be found in appendix B.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations for accommodation to the Chinese culture (0 = no accommodation, 6 = full accommodation) in function of cultural information about China and age categories.

Age category:	Younger people *M (DS)*	Older people *M (DS)*
With cultural information:	4.69 (1.32)	4.70 (1.42)
Without cultural information:	4.17 (.86)	3.39 (1.20)

Conclusion and discussion

Conclusion

This research aimed to examine whether providing cultural information about a particular country provides better accommodation to the country's culture in communication, and to experiment whether age affects accommodation. Specifically, to verify whether providing cultural information about China leads to better accommodation of Americans to Chinese people in business communication settings, and to audit whether the extent of accommodation differs between Americans within age categories.

In terms of cultural information about China, the results of this investigation showed that Americans who obtained cultural information about China showed more accommodation to Chinese people in business communication settings than Americans who did not obtain cultural information about China. Therefore, based on the results hypothesis 1 can be confirmed.

Concerning age category, the results demonstrated that there was no difference in the extent of accommodation to Chinese people in business communication settings between Americans of different ages. In other words, American adults of younger age were not necessarily more likely to accommodate than Americans of older age. Therefore, based on the results hypothesis 2 can be rejected.

Regarding both aspects, cultural information about China and age category, the results demonstrated that the variables together partially affected accommodation. It appeared that Americans who obtained cultural information about China and being of younger age did not provide more accommodation to Chinese people in business communication settings than Americans who obtained cultural information about China and of older age. Therefore, based on the results hypothesis 3 can be rejected.

However, Americans who did not obtain cultural information about China and being of younger age provided more accommodation to Chinese people in business communication settings than Americans who did not obtain cultural information about China and of older age. Therefore, hypothesis 4 can be confirmed.

Discussion

The result for cultural information could be explained by the fact that obtaining cultural information about a country will increase understanding, and thereby will facilitate accommodation to the culture because people will feel more secure about how to adapt. As Brady et al. (2019) already found in their research, it appears to be important to have some information and knowledge about a different culture because the same communication messages can have a different meaning. The result of this research is consistent with those of Pearce (2005) who found that cultural context is necessary to understand the

communication of other cultures. The results of this research have added more knowledge to the importance and influence of cultural information in business communication settings

Furthermore, the results for age suggest that age, on its own, does not seem to have such a relevant influence on accommodation in business communication settings after all. The result is not in line with previous studies showing that older people are less likely to accommodate than younger people (McCann et al., 2003; Williams & Giles, 1996). In fact, the research by Williams and Giles (1996) even encountered that older people may under-accommodate, while younger people tend to over-accommodate. However, there is a significant difference between this study and previous studies that may have caused the results to be different. This research has focused on the effect of age on accommodation in business communication settings, while previous studies mainly investigated accommodation in the general context of communication. Therefore, it could be the case that the difference in age does not apply in business communication settings. An explanation could be that all participants have a common interest, business, and therefore exhibit roughly the same behaviour regarding accommodation regardless of their age.

In contrast, the results for the interaction between cultural information and age did show a partial effect on the degree of accommodation. In the case of the absence of cultural information, a higher degree of accommodation was shown by those of a younger age than those of an older age. This result is in line with the findings of previous studies (McCann, Ota, Giles, & Caraker, 2003; Williams & Giles, 1996). In the case of the presence of cultural information, no difference in the degree of accommodation was found between the two age groups, which is not in line with the findings of previous studies (McCann, Ota, Giles, & Caraker, 2003; Williams & Giles, 1996). Nevertheless, the results of this study cannot be compared completely correctly with the findings of previous studies because those findings were not found in interaction with cultural information or context about another country.

Despite the interesting results, this study also had some limitations that could be avoided in future research. Firstly, the sample size of 59 participants was quite small. This number of participants may not be representative enough for the entire American population. In addition, this study only used two age categories causing that the influence of age on the degree of accommodation could be represented to a limited extent.

Another limitation is that this study only looked at the extent of accommodation of Americans to Chinese people. Therefore, the results cannot be considered representative for other countries and/or cultures. Thirdly, both countries involved in this research, the USA and China, have been attributed to one of Hall's cultural dimensions (1997). The USA has been regarded as a low-context culture and China as a high-context culture. However, it is arguable to attribute an entire population of a country, with many diverse people, religions, norms, values, etc. to one particular cultural dimension.

Especially, within such large countries as America and China, there can still be large dissimilarities in communication styles between various regions, but also between interpersonal habits.

For future research, it would be better to take a larger sample size so that the results can be considered more representative. Furthermore, a suggestion would be to use more age categories in order to get a more specific picture of what concrete age categories have an influence on accommodation.

Another suggestion for future research is to explore other countries in the field of this study. It could be interesting to compare and examine two European countries and their cultures as they differ less in culture and communication style than the diverse cultures of America and China. Finally, it might be better to investigate smaller areas/countries and their culture, so that there is a smaller probability that the communication system of an entire population is considered the same when it is not.

All in all, the implementation of this research has contributed to communication in the corporate world of the USA. Thanks in part to this study, American companies will have a better understanding of the impact of cultural information on accommodation to other cultures in business communication settings. Due to the improved understanding, American globalizing companies can incorporate this knowledge and respond to the findings of this research in their international communication strategies.

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Appendix A

Survey on Qualtrics

<u>Introduction</u>

Dear participant,

Thank you for wanting to participate in this experiment that improves our knowledge about communication in international business settings. This experiment is conducted by a group of Bachelor's thesis students of International Business Communication at Radboud University Nijmegen (NL).

The experiment consists of three parts and will overall take approximately 5 minutes.

The research data will be made anonymous and safely stored according to the research data management guidelines of Radboud University and conform to General Data Protection Regulation. As soon as possible, any personal data will be deleted. The researchers involved in this study will use the research data for academic publications and presentations. The data will not be used for other studies.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. This means that you can withdraw your participation and consent at any time during the data collection period without giving a reason.

Should you have any complaints regarding this research, please contact the m.troncosoruiz@let.ru.nl or contact the confidential Advisors Academic Integrity via email vertrouwenspersonen@ru.nl

Thank you again,

Anna Bos, Amelia Gilardi Tenés, Fritz Köster, Sanne van Lieshout, Julia Strooper & Andrea Vivas Aguilar

- You have taken note of and you understand this information.
  - o Yes
  - o No
- You voluntarily agree to participate.
  - o Yes
  - o No
- You are at least 18 years of age.
  - o Yes
  - o No

By clicking the arrow in the bottom right corner you will proceed to the survey.

<u>Background variables</u>

- Please indicate your age category (e.g., 36 – 45).

  - o < 25

  - o 25 – 35

  - o 36 – 45

  - o 46 – 55

  - o 56 – 65

- o 66 – 75

- o 76 – 85

- o > 85

- Please indicate your gender.

  - o Male
  - o Female
  - o Non-binary

- What is the highest level of schooling you have completed?

  - o High school graduate or equivalent

  - o Associate degree

  - o Bachelor's degree

  - o First- professional degree

  - o Master's degree

  - o Doctorate/Phd degree

  - o Trade/Technical/Vocational training

  - o Professional degree

- Is American English your native language?

  - o Yes

  - o No

- Are you currently employed?

  - o Yes

  - o No

- Do you have experience in business/corporate? If yes, please indicate how many years in a number (e.g., 6).

  - o Yes, …

  - o No

Production – Chinese/No context

In this part of the survey, you will read some messages to which you will be asked to respond. Imagine that you work for an international company with colleagues such as Li Wei. He was born and raised in China. You are currently working on the same project together.

Read the following messages from your colleague and choose the response you find most appropriate for the situation.

*Message from **Li Wei**:*

I have seen your speech on communication improvement you gave to the board and you really hit the nail on the head with it. You can be very proud and I hope you can teach me about those speaking skills sometime.

How do you respond?

- Thank you, I agree. I hope the speech will be useful for the company and of course I would like to help you.

- There is always room for improvement. I hope the speech will be useful for the company and of course I would like to help you.

*Message from **Li Wei**:*

I am sorry to bother you, but last week I started a new project, and it seems like this project is not in line with my expertise. However, it is related to a project you are working on. I know you are busy, but it would be amazing if you could help me out.

How do you respond?

- Unfortunately, I cannot help you because I have a deadline coming up. I do not have the time, but I hope you will manage.

- Unfortunately, I cannot help you because I have a deadline coming up. I will try my hardest to see if I can make some time for you.

*Message from **Li Wei**:*

It is my brother's birthday party tomorrow. I have to go because family is really important to me. I will work on the conference later this week instead of tomorrow.

How do you respond?

- Thank you for informing me. It is a shame that you cannot meet the agreed deadline because we planned this long before. I hope to receive the notes as soon as possible.

- Thank you for informing me. Enjoy your time with your family. I hope to receive the notes as soon as possible.

*Message from **Li Wei**:*

Last week, I finished the banners for the business fair, and it would be perfect if you could check the content. Now I finally have time to finish other tasks.

How do you respond?

- I will step by your office when you are available.

- I will step by your office when it is convenient for you.

*Message from **Li Wei**:*

I am sorry to bother you, but I think it is time to make some final decisions with regard to the division of our department's budget. I am sure we can figure it out quickly, so I propose we go out for dinner tonight. Then we can also talk about how your weekend was.

How do you respond?

- That sounds good. I already have some ideas about the budget division. Let's discuss that tonight.
- That sounds good. I already have some ideas about the budget division. I would love to hear about your weekend too.
-

*Message from **Li Wei**:*

This morning we had a meeting about our project where we talked about next week's deadline. Our manager expected everyone to attend, and I assumed you would be there too.

How do you respond?

- I did not realize the meeting was supposed to be today. What a shame… This will not happen again.

- I did not realize the meeting was supposed to be today. I am really sorry. This will not happen again.

I have adapted the way I respond to Li Wei.

- Yes
- No

Please respond the following statement:

I think Li Wei is a friendly person.

- 1: strongly disagree – 7: strongly disagree

Production: American/No context

In this part of the survey, you will read some messages to which you will be asked to respond. Imagine that you work for an international company with colleagues such as David Cooper. He was born and raised in the USA. You are currently working on the same project together.

Read the following messages from your colleague and choose the response you find most appropriate for the situation.

Message from David Cooper:

Wow, I have never heard someone speak so well as you did during the press conference last night.

How would you respond?

- Thank you, I really appreciate your feedback. It would not have been such a success without the speechwriter.

- You are so kind, I really appreciate your feedback. It would not have been such a success without the speechwriter.

Message from David Cooper:

I have a favor to ask you. Could you send me the paperwork regarding the business deal we closed last week?

How would you respond?

- Sure, but I unfortunately do not have access to the paperwork today. Can I send it to you when I am back in the office?
- Sure, but I unfortunately do not have access to the paperwork today. I will take care of it.

Message from David Cooper:

I am sorry to inform you that I have not been able to finish the presentation for the board of partners due to some personal circumstances.

How would you respond?

- I hope all is well and thanks for letting me know. How do you suggest we get this finished? The partners are coming tomorrow, but we can postpone the meeting. Things come up in our lives, but please let me know as soon as possible in the future if you cannot meet a deadline.
- I hope all is well and thanks for letting me know. How do you suggest we get this finished? The partners are coming tomorrow, but we can postpone the meeting. Let's set another deadline.

Message from David Cooper:

As you know, I had my first product presentation today for the board and colleagues. I was wondering whether you could give me some feedback.

How would you respond?

- Sure, I will send you my feedback after today's sales meeting.
- Sure, I will come by your office after today's sales meeting.

Message from David Cooper:

The deadline for the security plan is coming up soon. I think it is a good idea if we have dinner to plan the last tasks that need to be finished.

How would you respond?

- I agree. Also, I have some questions that I would like to discuss.
- I agree. Also, I am curious to know how you and your family are doing.

Message from David Cooper:

I have unfortunately not yet received the details of the brochures for the business fair next month that you had promised to deliver. Can you send them to me as soon as possible?

How would you respond?

- Sorry, it slipped my mind. Here are the details on the brochure. Looking forward to your feedback and I will get this done in time for the business fair.
- I am so sorry. I must have missed your email. Here are the details on the brochure. Looking forward to your feedback and I will get this done in time for the business fair.

Please respond the following statement:

I think David Cooper is a friendly person.

- 1: strongly disagree – 7: strongly disagree

Production: Chinese/Context

In this part of the survey, you will read some messages to which you will be asked to respond. Imagine that you work for an international company with colleagues such as Li Wei. He was born and raised in China. You are currently working on the same project together.

- Since Li Wei has a Chinese background, his way of communicating is different from how Americans tend to communicate.

- Modesty is important in the Chinese culture, which results in compliments being played down. Agreeing with questions can be perceived as arrogance.

- Li Wei is used to not asking for favors, as the Chinese culture requires members to seek answers for themselves.

- In Chinese culture, deadlines are flexible. They tend to be discussed in an implicit way resulting in room for their own interpretation.

- Indirect communication is common in China. They prefer discussing things face-to-face personally, which takes more time.

- Feedback is given implicitly and in a positive manner. Suggestions are preferred over negative feedback.

- Personal relations are formed over dinner with colleagues. Not only business is discussed, but also personal topics like family, hobbies, dreams, and wishes. Personal relations are fundamental to creating a successful business relationship.

- Apologies are giving very explicitly. People from a Chinese culture tend to blame themselves instead of others.

Read the following messages from your colleague and choose the response you find most appropriate for the situation.

Comprehension question:

Communication in China is preferably done in an indirect manner.

- True
- Neither true nor false
- False

*Message from **Li Wei**:*

I have seen your speech on communication improvement you gave to the board and you really hit the nail on the head with it. You can be very proud and I hope you can teach me about those speaking skills sometime.

How do you respond?

- Thank you, I agree. I hope the speech will be useful for the company and of course I would like to help you.

- There is always room for improvement. I hope the speech will be useful for the company and of course I would like to help you.

*Message from **Li Wei**:*

I am sorry to bother you, but last week I started a new project, and it seems like this project is not in line with my expertise. However, it is related to a project you are working on. I know you are busy, but it would be amazing if you could help me out.

How do you respond?

- Unfortunately, I cannot help you because I have a deadline coming up. I do not have the time, but I hope you will manage.

- Unfortunately, I cannot help you because I have a deadline coming up. I will try my hardest to see if I can make some time for you.

*Message from **Li Wei**:*

It is my brother's birthday party tomorrow. I have to go because family is really important to me. I will work on the conference later this week instead of tomorrow.

How do you respond?

- Thank you for informing me. It is a shame that you cannot meet the agreed deadline because we planned this long before. I hope to receive the notes as soon as possible.

- Thank you for informing me. Enjoy your time with your family. I hope to receive the notes as soon as possible.

*Message from **Li Wei**:*

Last week, I finished the banners for the business fair, and it would be perfect if you could check the content. Now I finally have time to finish other tasks.

How do you respond?

- I will step by your office when you are available.

- I will step by your office when it is convenient for you.

*Message from **Li Wei**:*

I am sorry to bother you, but I think it is time to make some final decisions with regard to the division of our department's budget. I am sure we can figure it out quickly, so I propose we go out for dinner tonight. Then we can also talk about how your weekend was.

How do you respond?

- That sounds good. I already have some ideas about the budget division. Let's discuss that tonight.
- That sounds good. I already have some ideas about the budget division. I would love to hear about your weekend too.

*Message from **Li Wei**:*

This morning we had a meeting about our project where we talked about next week's deadline. Our manager expected everyone to attend, and I assumed you would be there too.

How do you respond?

- I did not realize the meeting was supposed to be today. What a shame… This will not happen again.

- I did not realize the meeting was supposed to be today. I am really sorry. This will not happen again.

I have adapted the way I respond to Li Wei.

- Yes
- No

Please respond the following statement:

I think Li Wei is a friendly person.

- 1: strongly disagree – 7: strongly disagree

Production: American/Context

In this part of the survey, you will read some messages to which you will be asked to respond. Imagine that you work for an international company with colleagues such as David Cooper. He was born and raised in the USA. You are currently working on the same project together.

- Compliments are accepted as a sign of gratitude and shared with the rest of the team.

- Deadlines are met on time and planned ahead. There is little room for flexibility.

- Explicit communication is preferred. This results in very direct replies in order to be clear when asked for a favor or feedback.

- Feedback is given explicitly by mentioning both positive and negative elements and including tips. Opinions are not perceived as bad because honesty is appreciated.

- Business meals are mainly used for business purposes and include little chit-chat.

- Apologies are given implicitly in American culture. They tend to describe the circumstances of their shortcoming rather than explicitly saying sorry.

In the following section, you will be asked to respond to some emails that David sent you in a way you think most appropriate for the situation.

Comprehension question:

Directness and honesty are appreciated when giving feedback in American culture.

- True
- Neither true nor false
- False

Message from David Cooper:

Wow, I have never heard someone speak so well as you did during the press conference last night.

How would you respond?

- Thank you, I really appreciate your feedback. It would not have been such a success without the speechwriter.
- You are so kind, I really appreciate your feedback. It would not have been such a success without the speechwriter.

Message from David Cooper:

I have a favor to ask you. Could you send me the paperwork regarding the business deal we closed last week?

How would you respond?

- Sure, but I unfortunately do not have access to the paperwork today. Can I send it to you when I am back in the office?
- Sure, but I unfortunately do not have access to the paperwork today. I will take care of it.

Message from David Cooper:

I am sorry to inform you that I have not been able to finish the presentation for the board of partners due to some personal circumstances.

How would you respond?

- I hope all is well and thanks for letting me know. How do you suggest we get this finished? The partners are coming tomorrow, but we can postpone the meeting. Things come up in our lives, but please let me know as soon as possible in the future if you cannot meet a deadline.
- I hope all is well and thanks for letting me know. How do you suggest we get this finished? The partners are coming tomorrow, but we can postpone the meeting. Let's set another deadline.

Message from David Cooper:

As you know, I had my first product presentation today for the board and colleagues. I was wondering whether you could give me some feedback.

How would you respond?

- Sure, I will send you my feedback after today's sales meeting.
- Sure, I will come by your office after today's sales meeting.

Message from David Cooper:

The deadline for the security plan is coming up soon. I think it is a good idea if we have dinner to plan the last tasks that need to be finished.

How would you respond?

- I agree. Also, I have some questions that I would like to discuss.
- I agree. Also, I am curious to know how you and your family are doing.

Message from David Cooper:

I have unfortunately not yet received the details of the brochures for the business fair next month that you had promised to deliver. Can you send them to me as soon as possible?

How would you respond?

- Sorry, it slipped my mind. Here are the details on the brochure. Looking forward to your feedback and I will get this done in time for the business fair.
- I am so sorry. I must have missed your email. Here are the details on the brochure. Looking forward to your feedback and I will get this done in time for the business fair.

Please respond the following statement:

I think David Cooper is a friendly person.

- 1: strongly disagree – 7: strongly disagree

<u>Final questionnaire</u>

In the following section, you will be asked some background information about your own experience and working environment. Choose the option that applies the most.

Please respond the following statements:

I have contact with people from a Chinese background outside of a work environment.

- 1: not at all – 7: always

I have contact with people from a Chinese background in a work environment.

- 1: not at all – 7: always

I tend to take the other person's cultural background into account when I am communicating with them.

- 1: not at all – 7: always

<u>End of survey</u>

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey. Your response has been recorded.

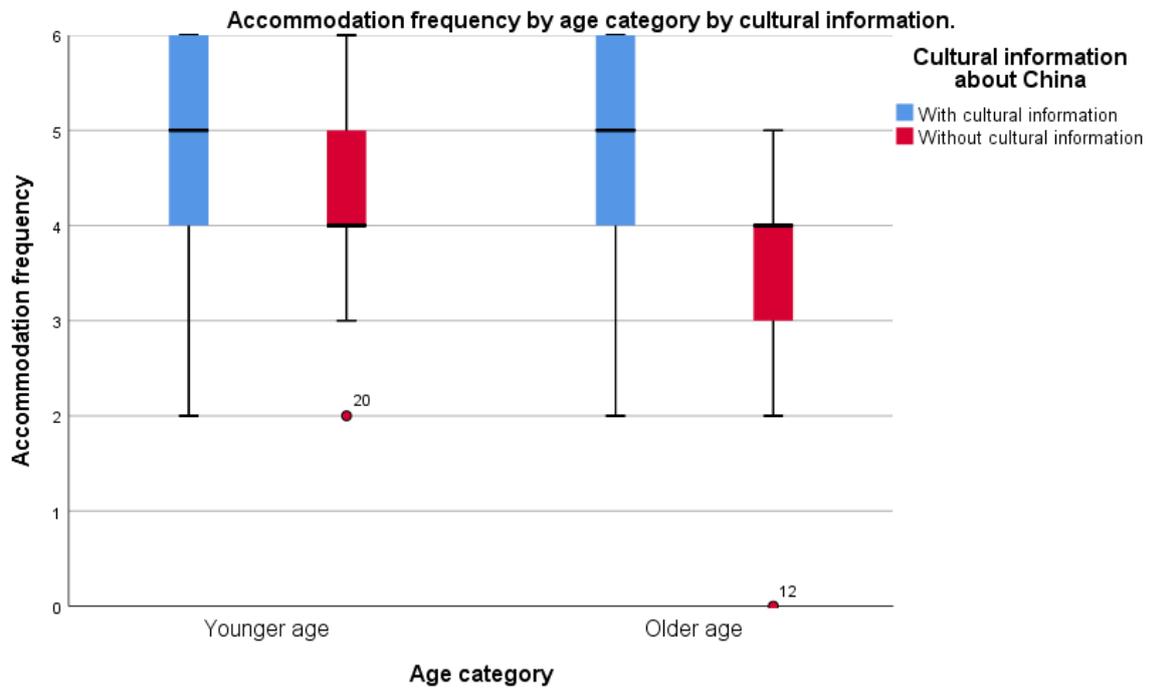**Appendix B**

Boxplot results section (figure 1)

Figure 1. Accommodation frequency for each age category and cultural information about China.

Appendix C

Ethical review checklist

<u>Checklist EACH</u> (version 1.6, november 2020)

You fill in the questions by clicking on the square next to the chosen answer □

After clicking, a cross will appear in this square ⊠

1. Is a health care institution involved in the research?

Explanation: A health care institution is involved if one of the following (A/B/C) is the case:

    A. One or more employees of a health care institution is/are involved in the research as principle or in the carrying out or execution of the research.

    B. The research takes place within the walls of the health care institution and should, following the nature of the research, generally not be carried out outside the institution.

    C. Patients / clients of the health care institution participate in the research (in the form of treatment).

        ⊠ No → continue with questionnaire

        □ Yes → Did a Dutch Medical Institutional Review Board (MIRB) decide that the Wet Medisch Onderzoek (Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act) is not applicable?

        □ Yes → continue with questionnaire

        □ No → This application should be reviewed by a Medical Institutional Review Board, for example, the Dutch <u>CMO Regio Arnhem Nijmegen</u> → end of checklist

2. Do grant providers wish the protocol to be assessed by a recognised MIRB?

        ⊠ No → continue with questionnaire

        □ Yes → This application should be reviewed by a Medical Institutional Review Board, for example, the Dutch <u>CMO Regio Arnhem Nijmegen</u> → end of checklist

3. Does the research include <u>medical-scientific research</u> that might carry risks for the participant?

        ⊠ No → continue with questionnaire

        □ Yes → This application should be reviewed by a Medical Institutional Review Board, for example, the Dutch <u>CMO Regio Arnhem Nijmegen</u> → end of checklist

Standard research method

4. Does this research fall under one of the stated <u>standard research methods</u> of the Faculty of Arts or the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies?

        ⊠ Yes → Standard experimental research into linguistic judgement of language fragments (4) → continue with questionnaire

        □ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist

Participants

5. Is the participant population a healthy one?

        ⊠ Yes → continue with questionnaire

☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

6. Will the research be conducted amongst minors (<16 years of age) or amongst (legally) incapable persons?

      ☐ Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

      ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

Method

7. Is a method used that makes it possible to produce a coincidental finding that the participant should be informed of?

      ☐ Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

      ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

8. Will participants undergo treatment or are they asked to perform certain behaviours that can lead to discomfort?

      ☐ Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

      ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

9. Are the estimated risks connected to the research minimal?

      ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

      ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

10. Are the participants offered a different compensation than the usual one?

      ☐ Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

      ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

11. Should [deception](#) take place, does the procedure meet the standard requirements?

      ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

      ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

12. Are the standard regulations regarding [anonymity and privacy](#) met?

      ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

      ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

Conducting the research

13. Will the research be carried out at an external location (such as a school, hospital)?

      ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

      ☐ Yes→ Do you have/will you receive written permission from this institution?

            ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

            ☐ Yes → continue with questionnaire

14. Is there a contact person to whom participants can turn to with questions regarding the research and are they informed of this?

☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

15. Is it clear for participants where they can file complaints with regard to participating in the research and how these complaints will be dealt with?

☐ No→ assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

16. Are the participants free to participate in the research, and to stop at any given point, whenever and for whatever reason they should wish to do so?

☐ No→ assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

17. Before participating, are participants informed by means of an information document about the aim, nature and risks and objections of the study? (zie explanation on informed consent and sample documents).

☐ No→ assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

18. Do participants and/or their representatives sign a consent form? (zie explanation on informed consent and sample documents.

☐ No→ assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

☒ Yes → checklist finished

If you want to record the results of this checklist, please save the completed file.

If you need approval from the EACH due to the requirement of a publisher or research grant provider, you will have to follow the formal assessment procedure of the EACH.

Appendix D

Statement of own work

Student name: Julia Strooper

Student number: XXX

PLAGIARISM is the presentation by a student of an assignment or piece of work which has in fact been copied in whole or in part from another student's work, or from any other source (e.g. published books or periodicals or material from Internet sites), without due acknowledgement in the text.

DECLARATION:

a. I hereby declare that I am familiar with the faculty manual (https://www.ru.nl/facultyofarts/stip/rules-guidelines/rules/fraud-plagiarism/) and with Article 16 "Fraud and plagiarism" in the Education and Examination Regulations for the Bachelor's programme of Communication and Information Studies.
b. b. I also declare that I have only submitted text written in my own words.
c. I certify that this thesis is my own work and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports, lecture notes, and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication.

Signature: XXX

Place and date: Nijmegen, 11-06-2021