

**Click, Connect, Contract:
A Strategic Alignment Approach in Supplier Selection Across Asia**

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ABSTRACT

Globalization and accelerated digitalization have reshaped international procurement, shifting supplier evaluation beyond technical criteria toward digital visibility and relational capabilities. This study examines how social media, digital communication, and emotional intelligence (EI) influence supplier selection in Asia, using the Strategic Alignment Model (SAM) as the analytical foundation and extending it through the Digital–Emotional Strategic Alignment (DESA) perspective. A qualitative exploratory case study was conducted through digital document analysis and interviews with procurement practitioners from China, Thailand, and Indonesia. The findings indicate that social media serves as a practical digital strategy tool for early supplier screening by enhancing transparency and reducing uncertainty. The quality of digital communication, reflected in clarity, responsiveness, and communication tone, signals suppliers’ professionalism and digital readiness. EI further strengthens cross-border relationships by fostering empathy, adaptability, and trust in digital interactions where non-verbal cues are limited. Together, these elements reinforce alignment with organizational strategy by supporting risk mitigation, negotiation effectiveness, and relational continuity. The study contributes by extending SAM with two key dimensions for digital global sourcing: social media as an indicator of digital readiness and EI as a driver of relational resilience. The DESA framework enhances theoretical understanding of strategic alignment in supplier selection and offers practical guidance for improving global sourcing effectiveness in the digital era.

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication; Digital communication; Digital readiness; Digital sourcing; Emotional intelligence; Global supply chain; International procurement; Social media; Strategic Alignment Model; Supplier selection; DESA framework.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of globalization and digital technology has brought structural changes to the management of international supply chains (Lee & Wang, 2017). Companies no longer rely solely on physical interactions or direct recommendations; instead, they increasingly utilize digital communication patterns to assess reputation, credibility, and interconnectivity among stakeholders (Leonardi, 2020). The complexity of international procurement requires firms to ensure that every supplier selection process is aligned with business strategies and organizational goals.

The Strategic Alignment framework proposed by Henderson and Venkatraman (1993) provides important insights into how a company’s digital strategy must be aligned with organizational

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needs. Subsequent studies indicate that alignment is crucial not only for IT–business integration but also for cross-functional decision-making processes, including supply chain management (Luftman, 2000; Muraina, 2024). In the context of international procurement, achieving such alignment becomes even more challenging due to differences in culture, communication norms, and business expectations (Luo, 2020). While many studies discuss technical aspects of supplier selection, such as price, quality, and timeliness, there remains limited research emphasizing the integration of digital and emotional dimensions, particularly in the highly heterogeneous Asian region. Therefore, this study examines these three dimensions through three case studies from China, Thailand, and Indonesia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media has evolved into a digital public space that enables suppliers to openly showcase their professionalism and portfolios. Platforms such as LinkedIn, Alibaba, Facebook Business, and Instagram function as information sources that help buyers reduce uncertainty before entering formal communication (Chae, 2019; Wang et al., 2023).

Digital communication plays a significant role as a medium for cross-cultural coordination. Short, clear, polite, and timely messages signal supplier professionalism, whereas mismatched communication styles may lead to misinterpretation (Shirish et al., 2022). Recent studies emphasize that digital communication contributes to the formation of trust and facilitates international B2B negotiations (Kumar et al., 2020).

Beyond technical factors, cross-border relationships are strongly influenced by emotional intelligence. Elements such as empathy, emotional regulation, and adaptive communication styles support the stability of business relationships in culturally diverse environments (Goleman, 1995; Kim et al., 2018). These three components are closely linked within the concept of Strategic Alignment, which requires coherence between business strategy, digital utilization, and human capabilities (Luftman, 2000).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design, as recommended for gaining an in-depth understanding of cross-cultural and digital phenomena (Yin, 2018). Data were collected through digital document analysis and in-depth interviews with three informants from the following companies:

- **China:** Siriusmed
- **Thailand:** Shireen Bike & Toys
- **Indonesia:** PT. Medical Grey Internasional

The interviews focused on the informants' experiences in utilizing social media, digital communication, and emotional intelligence throughout the process of international supplier selection and negotiation. The data were analyzed using manual coding techniques to identify the main themes, which were then interpreted through the Strategic Alignment framework (Henderson & Venkatraman, 1993).

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Social Media as the Initial Gateway in Supplier Selection

The findings indicate that social media serves as an essential preliminary source for assessing supplier credibility and professionalism. The informant from China uses LinkedIn and Alibaba as tools to verify company legitimacy and product portfolios, aligning with Wang et al. (2023), who

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highlight the use of social signals as indicators of supplier credibility. In Thailand, Facebook Groups and Line function as digital community spaces that provide recommendations based on user experiences (Kumar et al., 2020). The informant from Indonesia utilizes Instagram and LinkedIn to evaluate posting consistency, visual communication style, and the supplier's professional image.

This digital trace enables buyers to conduct rapid digital due diligence, minimizing uncertainty risks and increasing efficiency during the early stages of supplier selection (Chae, 2019).

4.2. Digital Communication as the Infrastructure for Validation and Negotiation

Once suppliers are deemed credible through social media, digital communication becomes the primary medium for clarifying expectations and ensuring information accuracy. The informant from China emphasizes the importance of professional language and complete technical documentation, consistent with the findings of Shirish et al. (2022). The informant from Thailand highlights the importance of a confirmation loop to reduce cross-cultural misinterpretation (Leonardi, 2020). The Indonesian informant views prompt responses, structured messages, and a professional communication tone as indicators of supplier quality, supporting the results of Kumar et al. (2020). Thus, digital communication functions not only as a tool for information exchange but also as a mechanism that shapes perceptions of credibility and trust within buyer–supplier relationships (Luo, 2020).

4.3. Emotional Intelligence as the Foundation of Cross-Border Relationships

Emotional intelligence emerges as a crucial element in maintaining relationship stability amid cultural differences and negotiation pressures. Informants emphasized that empathy, the ability to regulate emotions, and adaptability to partners' communication styles contribute to harmonious and sustainable business relationships, consistent with the findings of Kim et al. (2018) and Rockstuhl et al. (2011). In cross-border contexts, emotional intelligence acts as an emotional stabilizer that reinforces supplier trust and loyalty (Goleman, 1995)

4.4 Strategic Integration of the Three Dimensions within the DESA Model

The findings demonstrate that social media, digital communication, and emotional intelligence complement one another. These three elements integrate into the Digital–Emotional Strategic Alignment (DESA) framework, which involves alignment between:

- Supplier identification through social media,
- Validation and negotiation through digital communication,
- Relationship strengthening through emotional intelligence.

This model is consistent with alignment principles that emphasize the integration of business strategy with digital and human capabilities (Henderson & Venkatraman, 1993; Luftman, 2000).

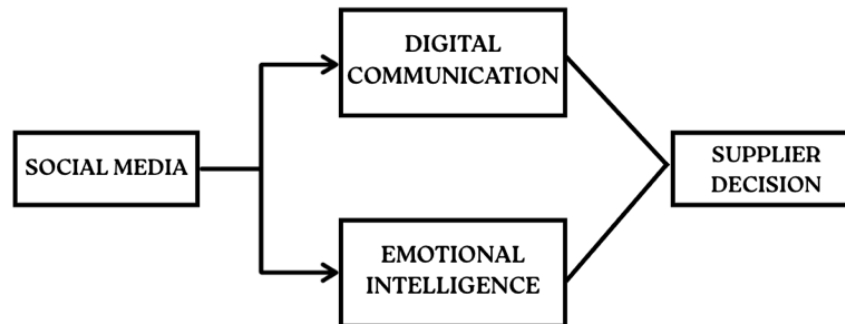


Figure 4.4.1

Integration of Digital - Emotional Strategic Alignment (DESA) in the International Supplier Selection Process

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

This study confirms that international supplier selection in Asia is strongly influenced by the integration of three key components: social media, digital communication, and emotional intelligence. These aspects work complementarily, forming a supplier selection pattern that is more strategic, adaptive, and responsive to cross-cultural dynamics. Social media serves as the initial point for supplier screening and reputation verification, while digital communication provides a space for information clarification, negotiation, and formal validation. Meanwhile, emotional intelligence strengthens the relational dimension necessary for building long-term trust. When these three dimensions are integrated into the DESA framework, the selection process becomes more aligned with organizational strategy and supports the implementation of strategic alignment in the context of global buyer–supplier relationships.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

From an academic perspective, this study contributes significantly to expanding the understanding of how social media, digital communication, and emotional intelligence support organizational strategic alignment. Social media proves to be an effective tool for initial validation, helping reduce uncertainty and enhance trust in suppliers. Digital communication emerges as a foundation for cross-cultural coordination, enabling more accurate, efficient, and less misinterpreted exchanges. Emotional intelligence reinforces business relationships by providing relational stability and better adaptability in cross-border negotiations. The integration of these three elements broadens the scope of strategic alignment and demonstrates its relevance in the context of international procurement.

5.3. Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, this study provides guidance for companies seeking to improve the effectiveness of international supplier selection. Organizations need to establish and maintain a strong digital footprint as a form of transparency and professionalism, given that digital reputation serves as the starting point in supplier screening. Furthermore, procurement teams should be equipped with cross-cultural digital communication skills, as message

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clarity, communication style, and timely responses can influence negotiation outcomes. Moreover, emotional intelligence should be considered a core competency in the supplier selection process to ensure long-term, harmonious, and trust-based relationships that are adaptive to global cultural dynamics.

5.4 Research Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it only involves three informants from three countries, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Second, the fully qualitative approach makes the results highly dependent on researcher interpretation and lacks objective quantitative verification. Third, the study does not include the supplier perspective, leaving the two-way dynamics in the selection process not fully captured

5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

For future research, it is recommended to test the DESA model using a quantitative approach to strengthen generalizability and empirical validity. Involving suppliers as informants is also highly encouraged to obtain a more comprehensive two-way perspective on buyer–supplier dynamics. Additionally, future studies could compare different industry sectors, as varying levels of digitalization and communication patterns across sectors may influence the integration of social media, digital communication, and emotional intelligence in supplier selection.

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