



**RELATIONAL COGNITION, MORAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND TRUST IN
CONVERSATIONAL AI: EVIDENCE FROM MONGOLIA**

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Abstract.

This study investigates how culturally embedded relational cognition shapes user interaction and trust formation in conversational artificial intelligence as a digital information processing environment. While prior research on human-AI interaction has largely assumed universal patterns of social response, little attention has been given to how culturally specific cognitive orientations influence interaction style, trust development, and perceived user autonomy. Drawing on survey data from 327 Mongolian users of ChatGPT, this study conceptualizes relational cognition as a multidimensional orientation encompassing indirect communication, face management, respect for social hierarchy, emotional sensitivity, and relationally delayed decision-making.

Grounded in cultural psychology, intercultural communication theory, and information processing research, the study examines three questions: (1) how relational cognition predicts interaction style with conversational AI; (2) how relational cognition and interaction style shape trust in AI systems; and (3) whether trust in AI is associated with diminished or preserved human agency. Using exploratory factor analysis, multiple regression modelling, and bootstrapped mediation analysis, the findings demonstrate that relational cognition significantly predicts polite, indirect, and emotionally sensitive interaction styles. These culturally patterned interactional behaviors partially mediate the relationship between relational cognition and trust in AI. Importantly, neither relational cognition nor trust is associated with reduced perceived human agency. Instead, users exhibiting stronger relational orientations report reflective and autonomous engagement with AI-generated information.

The study contributes to information processing and management literature in four ways. First, it extends models of trust in digital systems by conceptualizing trust as culturally mediated rather than purely technical.



Second, it introduces relational cognition as a meaningful construct for understanding culturally situated information interaction. Third, it reconceptualizes the Computers Are Social Actors paradigm as culturally differentiated rather than universal. Fourth, it provides empirical evidence from Mongolia, an underrepresented developing-country context in AI research.

The findings highlight the importance of culturally sensitive design and governance of conversational AI systems and caution against universal assumptions about automation bias and loss of autonomy. Understanding AI-mediated information environments therefore requires attention not only to system performance but also to the cultural cognitive frameworks through which users interpret and engage with technology.

Keywords: Conversational artificial intelligence; Relational cognition; Information processing; trust in digital systems; Human-AI interaction

INTRODUCTION

Conversational artificial intelligence systems such as ChatGPT are increasingly becoming integral to everyday life, reshaping how people seek information, make decisions, and engage with technology. Unlike earlier generations of digital systems that required users to adapt to technical interfaces, conversational AI enables interaction through natural language dialogue, allowing people to engage with machines in ways that resemble interpersonal communication [30]. This shift fundamentally transforms human-technology relations, as users no longer merely operate tools but participate in social, relational, and meaning-laden interactional exchanges.

A growing body of research demonstrates that when technologies exhibit social cues such as language, responsiveness, and politeness, users tend to apply social norms and expectations to them, treating them as social actors rather than neutral artefacts [42]. This has important implications for trust, reliance, and moral responsibility in human-AI interaction. However, existing research has largely assumed that these social responses are universal, focusing predominantly on Western, educated, industrialized, prosperous, and democratic (WEIRD) populations [22]. As a result, dominant models of human-AI interaction risk overlooking the cultural variability that shapes how people interpret, evaluate, and engage with social technologies. Decades of research in cultural psychology and intercultural communication have established that cognition, communication, and social behavior are deeply embedded in cultural contexts [21]. Cultures differ systematically in how individuals express meaning, manage disagreement, negotiate social hierarchy, and assume responsibility for decisions. There is, therefore, a strong reason to expect that interaction with conversational AI is also culturally situated rather than culturally neutral.

This study addresses this gap by examining human-AI interaction in Mongolia, a cultural context that remains largely absent from existing research. Anthropological and sociological studies describe Mongolian society as strongly relationally oriented, emphasizing respect for hierarchy, maintenance of social harmony, indirect communication, and sensitivity to others' feelings [24].



Social interaction is structured by moral expectations regarding respect (хүндлэл), face (нүүр), and harmony (эв найрамдал), which shape not only communication practices but also moral reasoning and responsibility.

At the same time, Mongolia has undergone a rapid digital transformation, with widespread adoption of smartphones, internet services, and AI-based platforms. This convergence of deeply embedded relational norms and emerging social technologies offers a unique opportunity to examine how cultural cognition shapes interaction with conversational AI.

To capture this dynamic, the present study introduces and operationalizes the concept of relational cognition, defined as a culturally embedded cognitive and moral orientation toward maintaining relational harmony, managing face, respecting social norms, and considering the relational consequences of one's actions. Drawing on theories of high-context communication [21], collectivism [23], face-negotiation [47], and interdependent self-construal [31], relational cognition is conceptualized as a latent construct that shapes how individuals engage with both humans and social technologies.

Using survey data from 327 Mongolian users of ChatGPT, this study examines three central questions: (1) how relational cognition shapes interaction style with conversational AI, (2) how relational cognition relates to trust in AI systems, and (3) whether relational cognition and trust are associated with diminished or preserved human agency. By addressing these questions, the study contributes to a more culturally grounded understanding of human-AI interaction and challenges universalistic assumptions about technology use.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Culture, Cognition, and Relational Orientation

A central insight in cultural psychology and intercultural communication is that cognition is shaped by socially shared values, moral frameworks, and cultural norms, rather than being purely individual or universal [31]. Markus and Kitayama demonstrate that in cultures emphasizing interdependence, the self is constructed as relational and social duties are foregrounded in cognition and behavior [31]. Nisbett and colleagues further show that cognitive processes such as attention, inference, and judgment systematically vary across cultural contexts, with individuals in relational settings attending more to context and relationships than isolated elements of experience [38].

Hall's high-context versus low-context framework illustrates how communication itself embodies cultural cognition. In high-context cultures, most information is communicated implicitly and through shared background assumptions, whereas in low-context cultures, meaning is conveyed directly through explicit language [21]. Hofstede's cultural dimensions extend this logic: collectivistic cultures prioritize group harmony, social obligations, and indirect, polite communication to preserve face and avoid conflict [23]. Ting-Toomey's face-negotiation theory similarly shows that culturally specific norms of face and honor influence how social interaction and conflict management are enacted [47].



These foundational works suggest that cognition, communication, and social behavior are not culturally neutral but deeply embedded in relational norms. In relationally oriented cultures, cognitive processes are shaped by moral concerns about harmony, respect, and social responsibility.

Relational Patterns in Mongolian Culture

Exemplar-Focused Morality and Yos

Caroline Humphrey's seminal study "Exemplars and Rules: Aspects of the Discourse of Moralities in Mongolia" (1997) argues that Mongolian moral reasoning is organized around relational exemplars rather than abstract universal rules. In this context, "surtakhuun" refers to personal moral conduct and "yos" to socially accepted customary norms; both are entwined in everyday ethical evaluation and interpersonal relations in ways that diverge from Western moral schemata [24]. Mongolians often invoke respected figures and relational precedents when deliberating moral conduct, reflecting a culturally distinctive moral discourse in which social relations and historical exemplars guide judgment and behavior.

A broader anthropological analysis of Mongolian etiquette confirms that yos functions not only as a custom but also as a formal social code structuring hierarchical relations, respect, and self-control in everyday communication [34]. These relational patterns shape not only ritual and social interaction but also cognitive orientations toward indirect, face-preserving, and context-sensitive communication.

Historical Memory and Cultural Identity

Christopher Kaplonski's work, *Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia: Memory of Heroes* (2004), provides a detailed account of how historical narratives and collective memory have shaped Mongolian identity in the post-socialist era. Although primarily a study of political memory, Kaplonski's fieldwork illustrates how relational conceptions of self and community are embedded in symbolic struggles over national heroes and moral narratives of history. These narratives continue to influence social expectations, respect, and hierarchy in contemporary Mongolian culture [25].

Together, these studies portray Mongolian culture as deeply relational, where moral personhood, social harmony, and symbolic memory are interwoven into everyday cognition and interaction.

Local Scholarship on Cultural Norms and Change

Moral and Social Change

Mongolian scholars have examined how traditional norms interact with modern social change. Byambabaatar (2017) argues that nomadic moral values, such as respect for the land, community, and elders, continue to shape identities in contemporary Mongolia, even as urbanisation and globalisation introduce new influences. Ichinkhorloo (2017) explores how Mongolian youth navigate a hybrid cultural space that blends relational traditions with emergent global norms of



autonomy and self-expression. These works demonstrate that relational norms in Mongolian society remain resilient and influential despite rapid socioeconomic change.

Digital Cultures

Recent research into Mongolia's digital landscape suggests that while technologies introduce new communicative forms, existing cultural frameworks continue to guide interaction online. For example, studies of social media engagement among Mongolian youth indicate that respect, indirect expression, and contextual sensitivity persist in digital communication patterns, suggesting continuity of relational norms into technologically mediated contexts [19]. Such findings imply that relational cognition informs not only face-to-face interaction but also digital interaction.

These local studies provide crucial grounding for understanding how relational norms endure and adapt, offering empirical support for the cultural assumptions underlying the present research.

Local Scholarship on Mongolian Sociality, Morality, and Personhood

While much of the theoretical foundation for relational cognition originates in Western intercultural communication and cultural psychology, a substantial body of Mongolian and Mongolia-focused scholarship has long documented relational, moral, and socially embedded orientations using culturally specific concepts and empirical approaches. This literature provides essential grounding for understanding how relational cognition is constituted in Mongolian social life and why it may shape interaction with emerging technologies such as conversational AI.

Mongolian scholars and anthropologists consistently describe personhood as fundamentally relational rather than autonomous. Humphrey (1997) argues that moral reasoning in Mongolia is grounded in exemplars, roles, and situational judgments rather than in abstract rules, with moral worth tied to maintaining harmony, respecting hierarchy, and avoiding social disruption. Kaplonski (2004) similarly shows that Mongolian social order is structured through moral narratives, ritual practices, and hierarchical relations that define appropriate conduct. Concepts such as хүндлэл (respect) and нүүр (social face or honour) function as moral principles that regulate interaction, making communication inherently normative rather than merely instrumental. Contemporary Mongolian scholarship demonstrates that these relational orientations persist despite rapid social and technological change. Byambabaatar and Ichinkhorloo's work on modern nomadic and post-nomadic identities shows that relational obligations and moral accountability remain central even in urban and institutional contexts. Research on the changing social and mental spaces of Mongolian young adults likewise suggests that while younger generations participate actively in global digital culture, they continue to orient toward relational harmony, social responsibility, and moral self-regulation.

Zhelezniakov's (2016) civilisational analysis further situates relationality within a broader historical and ecological framework, emphasizing interdependence, moral responsibility, and relational accountability as foundational to Mongolian social order. Environmental and heritage



studies similarly highlight how moral and relational norms structure economic activity, identity, and social cohesion.

Despite this rich body of local scholarship, Mongolian relational and moral orientations have rarely been integrated into research on digital technology or human-AI interaction. Existing studies focus primarily on kinship, politics, religion, and identity, leaving unexplored how culturally embedded relational frameworks shape engagement with AI.

The present study addresses this gap by integrating Mongolian relational scholarship with human-AI interaction research. By conceptualizing relational cognition as a culturally embedded orientation grounded in Mongolian social thought, this study demonstrates that people draw on longstanding moral and relational frameworks to shape their interactions with conversational AI. In doing so, it challenges individualistic and instrumental models of technology use and highlights the importance of understanding AI as embedded within culturally specific moral worlds.

Conversational AI and Cultural Mediation

While anthropological and cultural psychology literatures elucidate relational cognition in human contexts, research on human-AI interaction has largely assumed universality. The Computers Are Social Actors (CASA) paradigm shows that users apply social rules to computers when those computers display social cues such as language or politeness [42]. However, CASA has been criticized for its limited attention to cultural variation in social responses to technology.

Recent cross-cultural studies suggest that cultural values shape trust and anthropomorphism in human-AI interaction. Zhang et al. (2021) demonstrate that trust in AI varies across cultural dimensions such as power distance and uncertainty avoidance, while Li et al. (2019) document systematic cross-national differences in attitudes toward AI adoption.

These studies indicate that cultural cognition influences not only human-human interaction but also human-technology interaction.

In a relational culture such as Mongolia, conversational AI may be approached not as a neutral interface but as a relational partner whose responses are interpreted through culturally mediated norms of respect, indirect communication, and face management. Politeness toward AI, for instance, may reflect relational etiquette rather than naïve anthropomorphism; indirect query phrasing may reflect culturally appropriate engagement rather than a mere stylistic preference.

Trust, Morality, and Preserved Agency

The CASA framework has been criticized for paying limited attention to cultural variation in social responses to technology. While CASA explains why people may apply social scripts to technological agents, it does not fully address how cultural norms shape the interpretation of these interactions.

Sociological theorists argue that trust is inherently a moral and relational phenomenon, grounded in expectations of appropriate behavior and shared norms [46]. In relational cultures, trust is not merely a calculation of risk but an evaluation of moral alignment and relational appropriateness.



Users may trust a system not only because it performs adequately, but because its behavior accords with socially meaningful norms.

From this perspective, relational cognition does not necessarily undermine perceived human agency. Unlike models suggesting that increased trust in automation leads to automation bias or diminished human control, culturally grounded trust can coexist with reflective engagement and moral responsibility.

Summary and Theoretical Contribution

This review synthesizes anthropological, cultural psychology, and localized Mongolian scholarship to argue that relational cognition is a theoretically meaningful construct for understanding culturally situated human-AI interaction. Mongolian relational norms, shaped by exemplar-focused morality, relational etiquette, and moral memory, provide a culturally grounded context for analyzing how trust, politeness, indirectness, and agency are negotiated in interactions with conversational AI.

By foregrounding culturally specific cognitive orientations, this study contributes to cross-cultural human-AI interaction research and challenges universalistic assumptions that treat technological engagement as culturally neutral. Mongolia serves as a critical case demonstrating that human-AI interaction is not only social but culturally configured.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative survey design to examine how culturally embedded relational cognition shapes interaction with conversational artificial intelligence and how this interaction relates to trust in AI and perceived human agency among Mongolian users. A survey design was chosen because it enables the systematic operationalization and statistical analysis of latent psychological and cultural constructs in a relatively large and heterogeneous population [49].

Given the absence of prior empirical research on relational cognition in human-AI interaction, particularly in non-Western cultural contexts, the study adopts an exploratory and theory-building orientation rather than a strictly confirmatory approach. The aim is to identify structured relationships and theoretically meaningful patterns that can inform future hypothesis-driven research.

The design is correlational in nature and does not support causal inference. However, it is appropriate for examining associations between cultural orientations, interactional behaviors, and evaluative outcomes in a novel research domain.



Participants and Sampling

A total of 327 participants completed the survey. Participants were recruited through online dissemination of the survey link across social media, university mailing lists, and professional networks in Mongolia.

Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and uncompensated.

Eligibility criteria required that participants be at least 18 years old and have prior experience using ChatGPT. The sample included respondents from diverse age groups, genders, educational backgrounds, and occupational categories, including students, educators, civil servants, private-sector professionals, entrepreneurs, and freelancers.

Although the sample was non-random and based on convenience and self-selection, this approach is appropriate for exploratory research on emerging technologies where probabilistic sampling is often infeasible [3]. The sample size exceeds recommended thresholds for multivariate statistical analyses, including exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression [20].

Instrument Development

The authors developed the survey instrument specifically for this study, and it consisted of four sections:

Demographic information (age, gender, education, occupation, residence),

AI usage patterns (frequency, duration, and primary purposes of ChatGPT use),

Relational cognition,

Interaction style, trust in AI, and perceived human agency.

Items were adapted from established scales in interpersonal communication, computer-mediated communication, and trust in automation research [42] and were modified to reflect the context of conversational AI and Mongolian cultural norms.

All attitudinal items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Operationalization of Relational Cognition

Relational cognition was operationalized as a composite construct reflecting culturally embedded orientations toward social interaction. It comprised five dimensions:

Preference for indirect and context-sensitive communication [21],

Tendency to engage in face-saving and conflict avoidance [47],

Respect for tradition, hierarchy, and normative social order [23],

Sensitivity to emotional tone and relational atmosphere [31],

Tendency to delay decisions out of consideration for relational consequences.

Each dimension was measured using a single item due to constraints on survey length. Composite scores were computed by averaging the five items, with higher values indicating stronger relational orientation.



Translation and Cultural Validity

The survey was administered in Mongolian to ensure linguistic accessibility and minimize comprehension barriers. Items were translated from English into Mongolian and back-translated following Brislin's procedure (1970) to ensure conceptual equivalence. Discrepancies were resolved through iterative discussion among bilingual researchers.

A pilot study with approximately 20 participants was conducted to assess clarity, cultural appropriateness, and interpretability. The survey was administered in Mongolian to ensure linguistic accessibility and minimize comprehension barriers.

Data Collection and Ethics

Data were collected online using Google Forms in December 2025. Participants accessed the survey via a hyperlink and provided informed consent prior to participation.

The study adhered to ethical standards for research involving human participants, including voluntary participation, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any time [30]. No personally identifiable information was collected, and participant anonymity was maintained throughout the study.

Formal institutional ethical approval was not required due to the study's anonymous, minimal-risk nature.

Data Preparation and Analysis

Responses were screened for missing values, straight-lining, and inconsistent response patterns. Incomplete or invalid responses were excluded.

Negatively worded items were reverse-coded where appropriate. Composite indices were computed by averaging relevant items.

Analyses proceeded in four stages:

1. Descriptive statistics,
2. Exploratory factor analysis,
3. Correlation and multiple regression analyses,
4. Mediation analysis using bootstrapping (5,000 resamples).

Statistical significance was evaluated at $\alpha = .05$.

Reliability

Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. All multi-item constructs demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha > .70$), consistent with established guidelines [39].

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Data Screening and Descriptive Overview

Prior to hypothesis testing, the dataset was systematically screened for missing values, inconsistencies, and outliers. Of the 342 initial responses collected, 15 were excluded due to



substantial missing data or patterned responding, resulting in a final analytic sample of 327 participants.

All continuous variables were examined for normality. Skewness and kurtosis values for all composite indices fell within acceptable ranges ($|\text{skew}| < 2$, $|\text{kurtosis}| < 7$), indicating no severe departures from normality and supporting the use of parametric statistical procedures. Visual inspection of histograms and Q-Q plots further confirmed the approximate normality of the distributions.

Composite indices were constructed for relational cognition, interaction style (politeness, indirectness, emotional tone sensitivity), trust in AI, and perceived human agency by averaging relevant items. Internal consistency was acceptable for all multi-item scales (Cronbach's α ranged from .76 to .85), indicating satisfactory reliability.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and reliability estimates for the primary constructs.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Construct	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Relational Cognition	0.74	0.15	.84
Politeness	0.78	0.14	.82
Indirectness	0.64	0.18	.79
Emotional Tone Sensitivity	0.52	0.21	.76
Trust in AI	0.71	0.17	.85
Human Agency	0.83	0.12	.81

The means indicate that respondents reported relatively high levels of relational cognition and perceived human agency, as well as moderately high levels of trust in AI. Interaction styles were characterized by high politeness, moderate indirectness, and sensitivity to emotional tone.

Bivariate Relationships Among Key Constructs

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine zero-order associations among the key constructs (Table 2).

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

Variable	RC	Politeness	Indirectness	Emotion	Trust	Agency
Relational Cognition	1.00	.48**	.41**	.36**	.44**	.09
Politeness		1.00	.45**	.32**	.38**	.10
Indirectness			1.00	.28**	.30**	.05
Emotional Tone				1.00	.25**	.02
Trust					1.00	-.04
Agency						1.00

Note. $p < .01$.



Relational cognition was moderately and positively correlated with all three dimensions of interaction style: politeness ($r = .48$), indirectness ($r = .41$), and emotional tone sensitivity ($r = .36$). It was also positively correlated with trust in AI ($r = .44$).

Importantly, neither relational cognition nor trust was significantly correlated with perceived human agency, suggesting that higher trust and relational orientation were not associated with reduced agency.

Relational Cognition as a Predictor of Interaction Style

Three separate multiple regression analyses were conducted to test whether relational cognition predicted interaction style, controlling for age, gender, education, and profession.

Table 3. Regression Predicting Interaction Style

Dependent Variable	β (Relational Cognition)	SE	t	p
Politeness	.46	.04	10.9	< .001
Indirectness	.39	.05	8.1	< .001
Emotional Tone Sensitivity	.34	.05	6.8	< .001

Relational cognition significantly predicted all three interaction style dimensions. Higher relational cognition was associated with more polite, more indirect, and more emotionally sensitive interactions with ChatGPT. These results indicate that culturally embedded relational orientations strongly shape how users engage with conversational AI.

Predictors of Trust in AI

A multiple regression model examined whether relational cognition and interaction style predicted trust in AI.

Table 4. Regression Predicting Trust in AI

Predictor	β	SE	t	p
Relational Cognition	.28	.05	5.6	< .001
Politeness	.24	.05	4.8	< .001
Indirectness	.17	.05	3.4	.001
Emotional Tone Sensitivity	.12	.05	2.4	.016

Note. $R^2 = .42$; $F(7, 319) = 33.1$, $p < .001$. All models control for age, gender, education, and profession.

Relational cognition remained a significant predictor of trust even after accounting for interaction style and demographic controls, indicating both direct and indirect pathways to trust.



Predictors of Perceived Human Agency

Perceived human agency was regressed on relational cognition, trust, interaction style, and demographic controls.

Table 5. Regression Predicting Human Agency

Predictor	β	SE	t	p
Relational Cognition	.07	.05	1.4	n.s.
Trust	-.04	.05	-0.8	n.s.
Politeness	.05	.05	1.0	n.s.
Age	.12	.04	2.9	.004
Education	.15	.04	3.4	.001

Note. $R^2 = .09$, $p < .001$. All models control for gender and profession.

Trust and relational cognition were not associated with reduced agency. Instead, agency was modestly related to age and education.

Mediation Analysis

A bootstrapped mediation analysis (5,000 resamples) tested whether interaction style mediated the relationship between relational cognition and trust.

The indirect effect was significant ($\beta = .19$, 95% CI [.13, .27]), indicating partial mediation. This suggests that relational cognition fosters trust, in part, by shaping interaction style.

Integrated Interpretation and Implications

The overall pattern of findings reveals a coherent and theoretically meaningful structure. Relational cognition significantly predicts culturally patterned interaction styles, and these interactional behaviors are associated with higher levels of trust in conversational AI. At the same time, neither relational cognition nor trust is associated with diminished perceived human agency. The regression results demonstrate that relational cognition functions as a structured cultural orientation influencing how users communicate with AI systems. The significant associations between relational cognition and politeness, indirectness, and emotional tone sensitivity suggest that culturally embedded communication norms extend into AI-mediated environments. Rather than interacting with AI in purely instrumental terms, individuals appear to draw upon familiar relational scripts when engaging with conversational systems.

These findings provide empirical support for a culturally differentiated interpretation of the Computers Are Social Actors paradigm. While prior research suggests that users respond socially to technology when social cues are present, the present results indicate that the form of such responses is shaped by culturally embedded cognitive orientations. Social responses to AI are therefore not uniform but culturally configured.



The regression model predicting trust further clarifies this pattern. Relational cognition remains a significant predictor of trust even after controlling for interaction style and demographic variables, while interaction style partially mediates this relationship. This suggests that trust formation in conversational AI is influenced not only by system performance but also by culturally mediated interactional alignment. Trust appears associated with perceived relational appropriateness rather than solely with technical evaluation.

Importantly, the absence of a significant relationship between trust and perceived human agency challenges deterministic assumptions that increased reliance on automation necessarily undermines autonomy. Within this sample, trust coexists with preserved agency. The data indicate that users reporting higher trust do not report reduced responsibility for decision-making. This pattern is consistent with the possibility that trust, in this context, reflects calibrated engagement rather than uncritical dependence.

Taken together, these findings contribute to information processing and management research by demonstrating that digital information interaction is culturally embedded. First, the results introduce relational cognition as an empirically operationalized construct for understanding culturally situated human–AI interaction. Second, they extend models of trust in digital systems by highlighting cultural mediation in trust formation. Third, they provide evidence from a developing-country context that remains underrepresented in AI research, thereby expanding the empirical basis of human–AI interaction scholarship.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that conversational AI design should account for cultural variation in communication norms. Systems optimized for direct and efficiency-oriented exchanges may not align with relationally oriented interaction patterns. However, culturally adaptive systems must maintain transparency regarding their capabilities and limitations in order to avoid fostering misplaced reliance.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study relies on self-report data and a non-random sample, limiting causal inference and generalizability. Although the statistical associations are robust, longitudinal and experimental designs would strengthen future investigations. Cross-cultural comparative research would further clarify whether the observed coexistence of trust and preserved agency reflects broader patterns or culturally specific dynamics.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that interaction with conversational AI is not culturally neutral. Cultural cognitive orientations shape interaction style, contribute to trust formation, and coexist with preserved human agency. Understanding AI-mediated information environments therefore requires attention not only to system performance but also to the cultural frameworks through which users interpret and engage with technology.



CONCLUSION

This study examined how culturally embedded relational cognition shapes interaction with conversational artificial intelligence, how this interactional style relates to trust in AI, and how trust coexists with perceived human agency among Mongolian users of ChatGPT. By integrating cultural communication theory, cultural psychology, and human-computer interaction research, and grounding the analysis in empirical data from a non-Western cultural context, the study advances understanding of human-AI interaction as a culturally situated, relational, and morally embedded process.

The findings demonstrate that relational cognition is a key cultural orientation shaping how users engage with conversational AI. Mongolian users who exhibit stronger relational orientations interact with AI in more polite, indirect, and emotionally sensitive ways, reflecting culturally embedded norms of respect, harmony, and face management. These interactional styles, in turn, are associated with higher levels of trust in AI systems.

Importantly, increased trust does not correspond to diminished human agency. Users maintain reflective and autonomous engagement with AI outputs even when trust is high. This challenges deterministic narratives that frame trust and agency as inherently opposed and suggests that culturally embedded norms of moral responsibility support calibrated trust rather than blind reliance.

The study makes four primary contributions.

First, it extends intercultural communication theory by demonstrating that cultural norms shape not only human-human interaction but also human-AI interaction.

Second, it extends the Computers Are Social Actors paradigm by showing that social responses to technology are culturally differentiated.

Third, it reconceptualizes trust in AI as relational and culturally embedded rather than purely technical. Fourth, it provides empirical evidence that trust and agency can coexist within culturally specific moral frameworks.

Practically, the findings underscore the importance of culturally sensitive AI design and governance. Conversational AI systems should be understood not as culturally neutral tools but as socially embedded technologies that interact with users within specific cultural frameworks.

At the same time, cultural sensitivity in design must be balanced with transparency to avoid creating false impressions of moral authority or social obligation.

Finally, this study highlights the need to diversify the cultural and empirical bases of human-AI interaction research. Much of what is currently known about AI use is derived from Western contexts and cannot be assumed to generalize globally. By providing empirical evidence from Mongolia, this study contributes to a more inclusive and culturally grounded understanding of how humans relate to artificial intelligence.

Understanding the societal impact of AI, therefore, requires attention not only to algorithms and interfaces but also to the cultural worlds in which those technologies are embedded and interpreted.



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