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ARTICLE

Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability and B2B Trade Show Participation Decisions: An Integrative Framework for Cross-Cultural Business Contexts

Capacidade de Inteligência Competitiva Sustentável e Decisões de Participação em Feiras Comerciais B2B: Um Modelo Integrativo para Contextos Empresariais Interculturais

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ABSTRACT | **Purpose:** This study develops an integrative framework explaining how Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability can support B2B trade show participation decisions under cross-cultural uncertainty. **Methodology/approach:** A structured purposive synthesis of peer-reviewed literature connects competitive intelligence, information quality, opportunity recognition, perceived strategic value, organizational learning, cultural distance, and participation decisions. Aggregate indicators from the World Bank Enterprise Surveys China 2024 are examined separately as descriptive contextual evidence. **Originality/Relevance:** The study conceptualizes intelligence as a renewable organizational capability sustained through governance, post-decision feedback, accumulated learning, and adaptation rather than as a one-time information-gathering activity. **Key findings:** The synthesis indicates that intelligence may shape participation indirectly through information quality, opportunity recognition, uncertainty reduction, and perceived strategic value. The WBES indicators neither measure the focal constructs nor test their relationships; no statistical relationship between intelligence and participation is estimated. **Theoretical/methodological contributions:** Repeated intelligence-to-action-feedback cycles are proposed as foundations for decision calibration, organizational learning, strategic resilience, and potentially sustainable competitive advantage. The paper also specifies the direct measures required for future firm-event testing.

Keywords | Sustainable competitive intelligence. B2B trade shows. Participation decisions. Cultural distance. Organizational learning. China

RESUMO | **Objetivo:** Este estudo desenvolve um framework integrativo que explica como a Capacidade de Inteligência Competitiva Sustentável pode apoiar as decisões de participação em feiras comerciais B2B em contextos de incerteza intercultural. **Metodologia/Abordagem:** Uma síntese estruturada e intencional da literatura revisada

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por pares conecta Inteligência Competitiva, qualidade da informação, reconhecimento de oportunidades, valor estratégico percebido, aprendizagem organizacional, distância cultural e decisões de participação. Indicadores agregados do World Bank Enterprise Surveys China 2024 (WBES) são examinados separadamente como evidências contextuais descritivas. **Originalidade/Relevância:** O estudo conceitua a inteligência como uma capacidade organizacional renovável, sustentada por meio da governança, do feedback pós-decisão, da aprendizagem acumulada e da adaptação, em vez de tratá-la como uma atividade pontual de coleta de informações. **Principais Resultados:** A síntese indica que a inteligência pode influenciar indiretamente a participação por meio da qualidade da informação, do reconhecimento de oportunidades, da redução da incerteza e do valor estratégico percebido. Os indicadores do WBES não mensuram os construtos centrais nem testam suas relações; nenhuma relação estatística entre inteligência e participação é estimada. **Contribuições Teóricas/Metodológicas:** Ciclos repetidos de inteligência–ação–feedback são propostos como fundamentos para a calibração das decisões, aprendizagem organizacional, resiliência estratégica e, potencialmente, vantagem competitiva sustentável. O artigo também especifica as medidas diretas necessárias para futuros testes empíricos no nível empresa–evento.

Palavras-chave | Inteligência Competitiva Sustentável. Feiras comerciais B2B. Decisões de participação. Distância cultural. Aprendizagem organizacional. China.

1. INTRODUCTION

B2B trade-show participation requires substantial resources. Intangible benefits like relationship building, learning the market, reputation enhancement and access to competitive information are also factors for companies to consider in terms of commercial returns. These assessments are more complicated in international markets due to the uncertainty of the customers and partners, communication and event-market fit (Bai et al., 2022; Chung et al., 2024; Mora Cortez et al., 2022).

In this study, Competitive Intelligence (CI) is defined as an organizational decision-making capability that converts intelligence needs into systematic planning, collection, analysis, dissemination, utilization, and review. Competitive intensity and business intelligence are considered contextual and enabling conditions that cannot replace CI. This distinction preserves the focus on the complete intelligence process and avoids conceptual confusion.

The existing literature has focused on the issues of CI, information management in trade shows, value of participation, exhibitor experience, generation of intelligence in trade shows, and cultural distance in international business relations. However, these research streams remain underdeveloped at the pre-event decision stage. Furthermore, previous research has focused little on the institutionalization of CI routines over time, the renewal of CI routines over time and the resilience and sustainable competitive advantage brought about by repeated intelligence-action-feedback cycles through successive international market decisions.

Research question: How does Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability influence B2B trade-show participation decisions under cross-cultural uncertainty?

This study has three objectives. First, it develops an integrative model to bridge Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability, information quality, opportunity recognition, perceived strategic value, and trade show participation decisions. Second, it provides an understanding of how cultural distance and previous international and event experiences can shape the value and meaning of intelligence. Third, it outlines the measurement and research design that can be used to test the proposed relationships defensibly at the firm-event level.

The study has three contributions. Theoretically, it reframes CI into a re-generative, governable, and learning capacity, based on feedback. In a methodological sense, it sets apart direct CI measurement from the environmental, technological and internationalization indicators which are not a valid substitute for CI. Managerially it provides an understanding of a role for intelligence that goes beyond simply attendance at events and that aims to enhance decision calibration, both in relation to participation and with regard to strategically appropriate non-participation.

The WBES indicators are only descriptive contextual evidence but do not test, validate, or estimate the proposed relationships of Sustainable Competitive Intelligence. The rest of the article summarizes the theory, proposes the propositions, discusses the structured integrative synthesis and the contextual WBES evaluation, outlines the framework, and outlines needs for empirical testing in the future.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Any theory of participation in a trade show can account for information processing and strategic commitment. Dynamic-capability reasoning explains how firms sense opportunities, commit resources, and reconfigure activities, while CI specifies a structured cycle through which intelligence needs are planned, information is collected and analyzed, findings are disseminated and used, and post-decision feedback informs later cycles. The framework therefore combines CI process logic, dynamic-capability reasoning, and decision-making under uncertainty. Its central argument is that CI does not necessarily increase participation; instead, it improves the information environment in which participation is evaluated.

2.1 Competitive Intelligence As A Decision Capability

The value of competitive intelligence lies in converting information into actionable understanding. In B2B trade show environments, relevant intelligence may include information about competitors, customers' buying cycles, changes in distributor networks, product releases, technological developments, pricing, regulation, exhibitor makeup, reputation of the organizer, and quality of visitors. Silva (2021) links CI to information management in trade-show environments and Silva et al. (2021) demonstrate that information can be gained from trade shows regarding products, markets, technologies and competitors. This implies a recursive relationship; pre-event CI can provide input to the decision to participate in a program while participation can provide intelligence for subsequent decision making.

Environmental scanning should therefore constitute only one component of a direct CI measure, which should capture the full intelligence process. Planning identifies the intelligence requirements for decision-making; collection is the process of obtaining intelligence from a variety of internal and external sources; analysis involves assessing and integrating intelligence signals; dissemination involves delivering intelligence to relevant decision-makers; and utilization involves the linkage of intelligence to decisions about positioning, participation, and/or resource allocation for strategic

decision activities. Bao (2020) also emphasizes the need to separate out customer, competitor and supplier intelligence in China.

The integration of business intelligence and analytics can improve sensing, operational efficiency, and pattern recognition, especially when embedded in broader organizational capabilities (Chen & Lin, 2020; Mikalef et al., 2020; Han et al., 2024). In this framework, however, these technologies do not replace the full CI cycle, but rather serve as enabling components of the CI cycle. Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability remains the centerpiece strategic construct as it includes planning, collection, analysis, dissemination, utilization, governance and feedback.

Other studies on business intelligence indicate that technological, organizational, and managerial factors jointly influence the value of intelligence (Ahmad et al., 2020; Andoh-Baidoo et al., 2022). Research on the business-intelligence value process also highlights the information acquisition, analysis, dissemination and decision use as an integrated process within the organization (Talaoui & Kohtamäki, 2020).

A valid measure of Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability encompasses the full intelligence process. High scores should reflect the firm's ability to ask intelligence questions related to the decisions it will be making about a trade show, to gather information from a variety of internal and external sources, to analyze and integrate that information, to disseminate the intelligence to the managers who will be making the decisions about the trade show, and to use the information to make a specific decision about participation in a trade show.

Competitor, customer, supplier/partner, technology and event intelligence should be explicitly included in the collection. The contents of competitor intelligence can range from attendance or presence, positioning, pricing, and product launches, to customer intelligence such as customer characteristics, needs, purchasing authority or relationship potential, and supplier/partner intelligence such as channel conditions, complementary resources, and local-access conditions. In the Chinese context Bao (2020) notes the need to differentiate between customer intelligence, competitor intelligence and supplier intelligence, and Silva (2021) discusses the role of CI in B2B trade-show environments. This operationalization places these source domains into the wider intelligence process, and not just as a single environmental-scanning activity, as a measure of CI.

This capability is conceptually distinct from competitive intensity and marketing analytics. Competitive intensity is an external market condition while marketing analytics capability relates to using digital tools to analyze market data (Lyu et al., 2022; Hossain et al., 2022). Neither construct indicates whether a firm executes the complete intelligence cycle. Under conditions of uncertainty, CI can be particularly valuable, consistent with dynamic-capability reasoning. Later studies have focused more on the observables than on the capability labels (Cristofaro & Lovallo, 2022). Taking this micro-foundational approach, Wang and Gao (2020) demonstrate how proactive information search and sensing can assist manufacturers in gaining an understanding of competitor networks and fine-tuning their actions in the market. Additionally, with proper organizational mechanisms, big data analytics can enhance the competitive performance (Song et al., 2022). Competitive Intelligence is not merely the possession of analytical software; rather, it refers to the organizational capability to support strategic decision-making.

2.2 Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability

Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability is the ability of an organization to sustain, renew, govern and use its intelligence routines in ongoing strategic decisions. Here, sustainability refers to the persistence, adaptability, and institutionalization of the intelligence capability rather than to environmental outcomes. Sustainability extends beyond individual employees, technologies, and isolated decisions because the relevant routines, responsibilities, quality controls, and learning mechanisms are embedded within the organization.

CI depends on an intelligence–action–feedback cycle. Planning defines intelligence needs; collection gathers relevant signals; analysis converts them into decision-relevant interpretations. Post-decision feedback then adjusts subsequent intelligence requirements, selection of sources, assumptions used during analysis and decision rules. Through repeated cycles, a firm can build up knowledge about the events and markets that it participates in, instead of having to begin the intelligence process again for each participation decision.

Intelligence governance is the organizational structure for this cycle. It determines who sets the priorities for intelligence, validates information, adjudicates between conflicting interpretations, approves spending on participation and records and disseminates lessons learned throughout marketing, sales, export and finance, and senior management roles. Governance in this way can minimize split or duplicated analysis, and culturally biased interpretation of the information.

Sustainable CI can also play a role in achieving strategic resilience. However, geopolitical shifts, digital event formats, regulations, buyer behavior, and cross-cultural relationships can reduce the value of rules that worked well in the past. Firms with renewable CI capabilities are more likely to be aware of these shifts, re-think event-market fit, and adapt their participation strategies. The advantage created may be sustainable once the intelligence routines, cross-functional integration, accumulated knowledge and learning mechanisms are valuable, embedded in the organization and hard for other organizations to replicate.

2.3 B2b Trade Show Participation as a Strategic Decision

Participation in a trade show could bring about both short-term and long-term advantages, and therefore is not a straightforward promotion choice, but instead a strategic one (Kim et al., 2020). Short-term goals are lead generation, sales discussion, product testing and meeting the distributors, while long-term goals are building reputation, building relationships, learning the market and gaining market legitimacy. Mora Cortez et al. (2022) demonstrate that expectations of performance are also factors in participation and investment, but intangible expectations (such as relationship building, image formation) are also significant. There are some benefits that do not occur immediately or can be hard to measure, so managers must assess participation with a great degree of uncertainty.

In addition, the suitability and value associated with certain trade-fair environments influence exhibitors' preferences, further supporting the role of the trade-fair context to the decision to participate (Shereni et al., 2021).

A certain amount of uncertainty can be eliminated with experience. Prior experiences such as the level of experience of the companies with which the exhibitors have worked are found to relate with exhibitor performance in the study by Geldres-Weiss et al. (2021); Lee and Ryan (2025) have presented evidence that the relationship between the degrees of trust, participation behavior and loyalty are different for first-time and repeat exhibitors. Experience thus gives private information about events. Estimating the quality of visitors, the reliability of the organizers, competitiveness, and follow-up needs may be more accurate with a firm that has this experience, but there is increased information gap for first time exhibitors.

The formats for trade shows are also changing. According to Silva et al. (2023) the perceived suitability of omnichannel trade fairs is positively related to exhibitor engagement and loyalty, and Mora Cortez et al. (2025) highlighted cultural, commercial and digital factors that are redefining the processes of trade shows. The developments are adding more information-processing challenges for exhibitors. The related B2B evidence indicates that the most useful B2B evidence is one which allows market facing organizational capabilities as opposed to being used alone (Sahoo et al., 2024). So, determining whether to participate is important, but determining the best mix of event format, channel mix, market, timing and participation intensity is crucial.

CI is expected to have an indirect impact on participation via the mechanism of decision-quality. It is in line with Kumar et al. (2020) who demonstrate that incomplete information is still sufficient to provide competitive-intelligence inference when collection and inference procedures are disciplined. A company with dependable information on competitors' attendance, the concentration of buyers and their needs, regulatory adjustments, and entry obstacles will be able to make more informed decisions about the value of an event for the business. This intelligence can also detect situations in which it is not advisable to participate. Rather, CI should not be taken for granted to improve attendance in all situations. High-quality intelligence may lead a firm to decide against participating in a major event that is poorly aligned with its target market. The theoretical prediction is of enhanced decision calibration and not necessarily of increased uniform participation.

2.4 Opportunity Recognition, Perceived Strategic Value and Uncertainty Reduction

Three mechanisms link CI to participation decisions. The first is opportunity recognition. Intelligence can help managers identify target accounts, emerging customer needs, gaps in distribution channels, competitor weaknesses, and new product categories. Sensing, as an initial phase of strategic adaptation, is emphasized in dynamic-capability research. Evidence from China indicates that business-intelligence and analytics capabilities are associated with improved sensing and, in turn, performance outcomes (Chen & Lin, 2020; Han et al., 2024). At trade shows, opportunity recognition refers to translating environmental information into an event-level evaluation.

The second mechanism is perceived strategic value. When managers expect the combined informational, relational, and commercial benefits of participation to exceed its total costs, participation becomes more attractive. Mora Cortez et al. (2022) show that expectations influence participation and investment. CI should sharpen perceived-value judgments by making anticipated

benefits more specific. Rather than relying on a general belief that "the fair is important," managers can assess the number and relevance of buyers, competitive intensity, distributor interest, technology relevance, and host-market importance.

The third mechanism is uncertainty reduction. International B2B events involve decision-making under incomplete information. When information is translated into coordinated action, business intelligence and organizational agility can also facilitate internationalization (Cheng et al., 2020). Firms may be uncertain about buyers' criteria for selecting foreign suppliers, effective communication styles, the need for local intermediaries, or whether a specific event attracts decision makers rather than primarily public visitors. Some of these uncertainties can be reduced through information gathering before the participation decision. However, uncertainty reduction is not equivalent to greater information volume. Misinterpreted intelligence can create false confidence; therefore, information quality, relevance, and cross-cultural interpretation are more important than the number of information sources.

Information-management processes may mediate how CI influences strategic-value judgments. In B2B trade shows, Silva (2021) identifies information management as an important link between CI and intelligent marketing strategy. This finding underscores the need for organizational procedures that filter, store, integrate, and disseminate information to produce usable intelligence. Information quality is therefore treated as a process mediator between CI activity and strategic-value judgment in the proposed mechanism. Firms may gather data on numerous competitors, but those data will have little influence on participation if they are not synthesized and delivered to the managers who control event budgets.

P1: Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability is positively associated with the quality of intelligence available for a firm's event-specific participation decision.

P2: Higher information quality is positively associated with event-specific opportunity recognition.

P3: Higher information quality is positively associated with the perceived strategic value of B2B trade show participation.

P4: Higher information quality reduces decision uncertainty, and opportunity recognition, uncertainty reduction, and perceived strategic value mediate the relationship between Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability and the trade-show participation decision.

P5: Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability improves decision calibration and may result in either participation or non-participation, depending on the intelligence-based assessment of event-market fit.

2.5 Cross-Cultural Business Context as a Boundary Condition

Cross-cultural circumstances affect information needs and information interpretation. Cultural distance can increase uncertainty in communication, trust building, negotiation, relationship development, and the allocation of decision-making authority. Chung et al. (2024) demonstrate that greater cultural distance diminishes the importance of intercultural B2B relationships between exporting firms and customers in Greater China. Similar findings were also reported by Bartosik-

Purgat and Rakowska (2025), namely the difference between the experiences of B2B communication between the Chinese and American business contexts. Combined, these studies show that the integration of relationships into the marketplace calls for market intelligence and that marketplace cannot be understood without understanding culture.

Participation benefits in foreign trade shows may partly stem from the ability to get tacit information that is not readily available at a distance, which may lead to a rise in the value of participation the greater the cultural distance. It can also decrease participation if managers expect higher adaptation costs and/or communication risks to occur. This is especially relevant to evidence relating to the multinational exhibitors at the trade shows in China. Cheng et al. (2022) find that the relationship between cultural distance and exhibitor retention varies across cultural dimensions. This finding cautions against assuming a uniformly negative effect of cultural distance.

Care needs to be taken in measuring cultural distance. However, empirical results can be different depending on the conceptualization and operationalization of the cultural distance (Griffith et al., 2021). If managerial interpretation is a key part of the decision process, one national-distance measure may not be appropriate; perceived cultural distance is the more appropriate focal measure. While there may be objective country-level measures for robustness checks, these should not be viewed as a direct representation of the views of managers.

Institutional conditions also differ across markets. Drawing on SMEs from multiple countries, including China, Bai et al. (2022) show that cultural and institutional factors can affect internationalization decision-making under uncertainty. Trade-show participation may be considered a bounded internationalization action. It does not constitute full market commitment; rather, it can provide a relatively limited-commitment mechanism for market learning, relationship testing, and opportunity evaluation. CI may therefore be particularly valuable when formal market information is limited.

P6: Perceived cultural distance moderates the relationship between information quality and perceived strategic value because it simultaneously increases the demand for external intelligence and the risk of misinterpretation.

P7: Prior international and trade show experience moderates the effect of perceived cultural distance by improving the organization's ability to interpret and apply cross-cultural intelligence.

P8: The systematic incorporation of post-decision feedback into subsequent intelligence cycles strengthens Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability over time.

2.6 The Integrated CI-TO-Participation Mechanism

The integrated framework treats participation as an intelligence-to-action sequence. Planning defines the decision problem; collection gathers relevant intelligence; analysis converts signals into event-level assessments; dissemination communicates these assessments to responsible managers; and utilization translates intelligence into participation and resource-allocation choices.

The mechanism is depicted in Figure 1. Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability is represented as a multidimensional process comprising planning, collection, analysis, dissemination, utilization, governance, and feedback. Intelligence activity is linked to the participation decision through information quality, opportunity recognition, uncertainty reduction, and perceived strategic value. Prior international and trade-show experience and perceived cultural distance operate as boundary conditions. Decision outcomes feed back into subsequent intelligence cycles, supporting learning and capability renewal across successive event decisions.

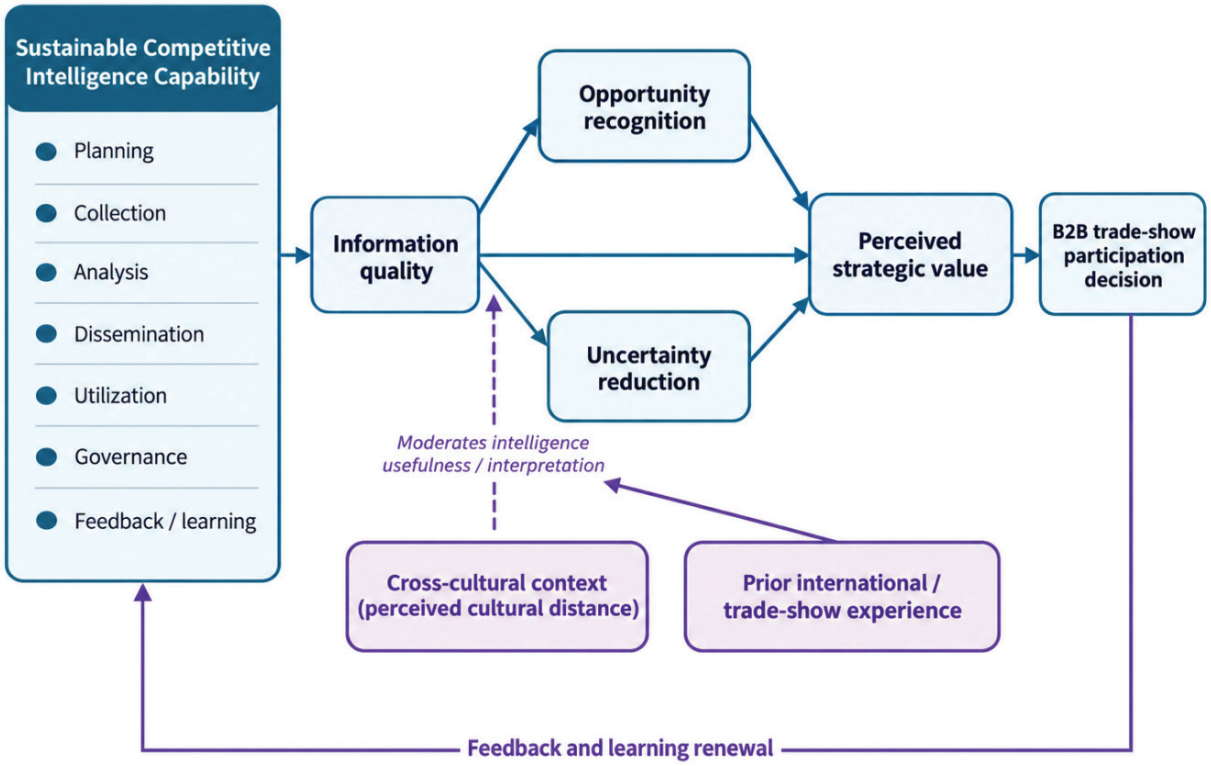


Figure 1. Sustainable Competitive Intelligence mechanism for B2B trade show participation decisions.

The framework must explicitly represent the transformation of intelligence into action and include non-participation as a potentially effective intelligence-based outcome. If intelligence reveals weak buyer attendance, excessive competitor crowding, or poor host-market fit, non-participation may be the better strategic choice. Accordingly, the mechanism predicts decision calibration rather than attendance growth. Empirical testing should therefore focus on an actual firm-event participation decision rather than a general attitude toward exhibitions.

3. METHOD

The study combines two analytically distinct evidence layers: a structured purposive synthesis of 30 peer-reviewed journal articles and a separate descriptive assessment of

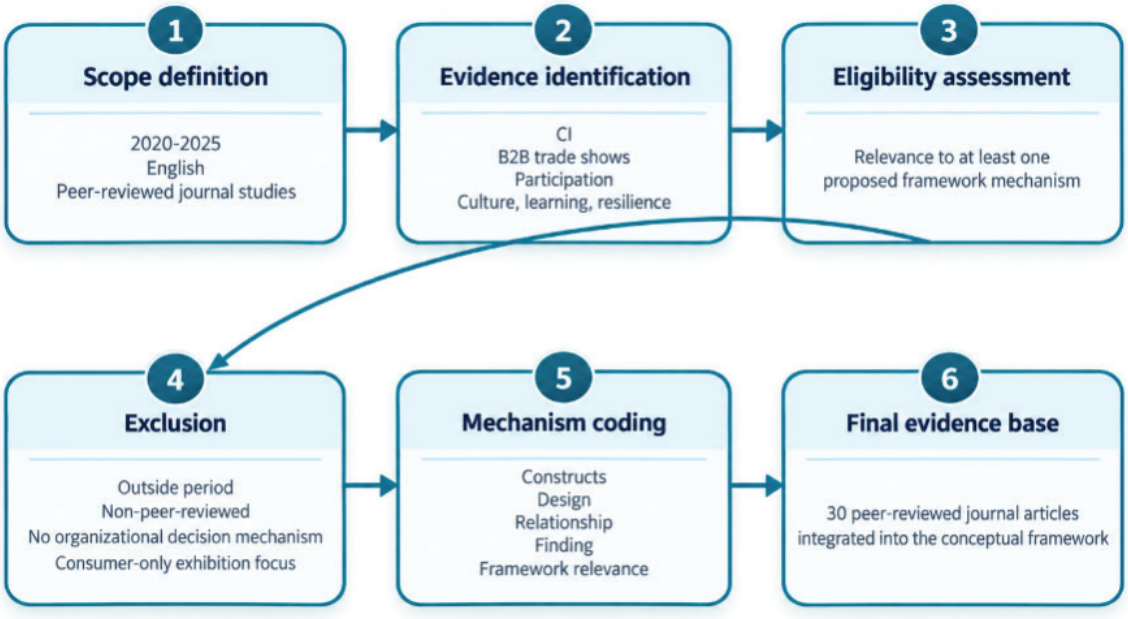
aggregated China 2024 World Bank Enterprise Surveys (WBES) indicators. The literature synthesis provides the theoretical basis for the proposed framework, whereas the WBES indicators characterize selected features of the competitive, trade, technological, innovation, and management context. The WBES extract contains neither direct measures of Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability nor a firm-event trade-show participation outcome. Accordingly, the WBES evidence is not used to test, validate, mediate, moderate, predict, or causally estimate any of the proposed relationships.

3.1 Structured Purposive Evidence Synthesis

This study adopts a structured purposive evidence synthesis rather than a systematic review or meta-analysis. The final evidence base consists of 30 peer-reviewed English-language journal articles published during 2020-2025 and cited in the manuscript. Studies were included when they informed at least one element of the proposed framework, including Competitive Intelligence and information processing, trade-show participation and expected value, prior experience, cultural distance, organizational learning, resilience, dynamic capabilities, or intelligence-related capabilities in Chinese firms. Studies were excluded if they fell outside the specified publication period, were not peer reviewed, were unrelated to the organizational decision mechanism, addressed digital technology without an intelligence-process component, or treated exhibitions exclusively as consumer events.

For each retained article, the synthesis examined the research context, design, principal constructs, proposed relationships, key findings, and relevance to the framework. Evidence was organized into the following streams: CI and information processing; expected value and participation; trade shows as intelligence environments; prior experience; cultural distance; organizational learning and resilience; and intelligence capabilities in Chinese firms. Business intelligence, analytics, and dynamic-capability studies were interpreted as boundary conditions or enabling processes, whereas direct CI and trade-show studies were used to anchor interpretation of the broader evidence.

Because the evidence base was purposively constructed and no systematic-search record was logged in advance, no PRISMA-based retrieval, duplicate-removal, or exclusion counts are reported. Accordingly, the synthesis does not claim comprehensive or systematic coverage of the literature. Its purpose is to integrate heterogeneous evidence theoretically rather than estimate study prevalence or a pooled effect size.



Structured purposive synthesis; not a PRISMA systematic-review flow diagram.

Figure 2. Structured purposive evidence-identification and synthesis workflow

Scope definition — 2020–2025; English; peer-reviewed journal studies
↓
Evidence identification — CI, B2B trade shows, participation, culture, learning, resilience and related capability literature
↓
Eligibility assessment — Relevance to at least one proposed framework mechanism
↓
Exclusion — Outside period; non-peer-reviewed; no organizational decision mechanism; consumer-only exhibition focus
↓
Mechanism coding — Constructs, design, relationship, finding and framework relevance
↓
Final evidence base — 30 peer-reviewed journal articles integrated into the conceptual framework

Source: Developed for this study. The workflow represents a purposive integrative synthesis and should not be interpreted as a PRISMA systematic-review flow diagram.

3.2 Wbes Contextual Data and Analytical Boundary

The official China 2024 WBES was collected at the establishment level, whereas the custom-query extract examined here contains aggregated country-indicator values in a single worksheet. Consequently, the present analysis cannot recover establishment-level heterogeneity or estimate firm-level relationships. The extract covers finance, firm characteristics, informality, corruption, regulation, infrastructure, trade, competition, public procurement, workforce, innovation and technology, business obstacles, and management practices; some indicators are unavailable.

The China 2024 WBES was retained because it was the latest China Enterprise Survey edition available at the evidence-search cut-off. Although it was released in 2025 and fieldwork extended into February 2025, the World Bank designates it as the China 2024 survey (World Bank, 2025). No separate China WBES edition labeled 2025 was available. The 2024 designation identifies the survey edition and does not represent the endpoint of the literature synthesis, which included publications through 2025.

The aggregated China 2024 extract provides descriptive context. Selected indicators report that 45.0% of firms export at least some products through parcel services, average direct exports equal 2.6% of sales, 4.1% of firms export at least 10% of sales directly, and 8.9% use material inputs or supplies of foreign origin. In the competition block, 90.6% report more than five competitors in their main market and 92.6% report that raising prices above competitors would risk losing customers. Other indicators report internationally recognized quality certification (16.0%), website ownership (29.3%), product or service innovation during the previous three years (32.7%), and process innovation (24.8%). These values remain descriptive and are not treated as CI measures.

These indicators were not converted into a synthetic CI score because market structure, digital presence, trade activity, and innovation outcomes do not represent the intelligence cycle. The extract contains no trade show participation outcome; therefore, no participation model, mediation analysis, moderation analysis, reliability analysis, or construct-validity test was estimated. The WBES indicators provide descriptive contextual evidence only; they do not test, validate, or estimate the proposed Sustainable Competitive Intelligence relationships.

Table 1 distinguishes the constructs required for a valid firm-level test from contextual proxies. The focal independent construct is Competitive Intelligence rather than competitive intensity or generic digital capability. CI is conceptualized as a multidimensional process covering planning, collection, analysis, dissemination, utilization, governance, and feedback. Collection captures intelligence related to competitors, customers, suppliers, technology, and trade-show events. Analysis covers source comparison, pattern identification, credibility evaluation, and the transformation of signals into decision-relevant judgments. Dissemination concerns the delivery of intelligence to managers responsible for event budgets, while utilization refers to the use of intelligence in event selection, resource commitment, timing, or non-participation. This operationalization keeps CI at the center of the empirical design while clearly distinguishing it from market rivalry, business-intelligence technology, and export activity.

Table 1. Variable definitions and measurement requirements

Construct	Direct measurement required	Available in supplied WBES extract	Analytical role
Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability	Planning, collection, analysis, dissemination, utilization, governance, and feedback; competitor, customer, supplier, technology, and event intelligence	No direct CI scale	Independent variable
Information quality	Accuracy, relevance, timeliness, completeness	No	Mediator
Opportunity recognition	Event-specific market and relationship opportunities	No	Mediator
Perceived strategic value	Expected sales, relationship, learning and positioning value relative to cost	No	Mediator
Trade-show participation	Actual firm-event participation decision (1/0), ideally observed	No	Dependent variable
Perceived cultural distance	Manager-perceived cross-cultural difference and adaptation difficulty	No	Moderator
Prior experience	International-market and trade-show experience	Partly contextual only	Moderator/control
Firm characteristics	Size, industry, age, export intensity	Aggregated indicators only	Controls

Source: Construct requirements derived from the evidence synthesis; WBES availability based on the supplied China 2024 custom-query workbook.

Reflective or composite indicators require theoretical justification. The suggested practical instrument is composed of seven dimensions: intelligence planning, systematic collection, analytical interpretation, internal dissemination, decision utilization, governance and feedback/learning. Customer, competitor, supplier, technology, and event intelligence are source domains rather than substitutes for the CI process. The measurement model should evaluate the reliability of the indicators, internal consistency and convergent and discriminant validity. If CI is represented as a higher-order construct, then there is also a need to assess the second order specification explicitly. Given the importance of these claims, these checks are required prior to making statements about the impact of CI on participation.

Ideally, the test would be at the firm-event level. The sampling frame would consist of the Chinese B2B companies that attended and did not attend any international trade shows in a given timeframe. The use of only exhibitors would result in a selection bias as no non-participation cases would be available. The participants would be managers, who would be involved in marketing, export, business development, sales, and/or event-budget decisions; participation would be confirmed by a screening question. The sustainable competitive intelligence capability measurement model and the proposed mediators would be evaluated first on the basis of confirmatory factor analysis or the appropriate PLS measurement model assessment depending on the specification of the constructs, the distribution properties, and the estimation goals.

Because firm-event participation is binary, structural relations with firm participation should be estimated using a logistic regression model, a generalized structural equation model, or other latent variable model with a dichotomous outcome. When event decisions are observed more than once for the same firms, a multilevel logistic model would be suitable for modeling within-firm clustering.

Sample size requires justification through an a priori power analysis depending on the smallest effect of substantive interest, number of predictors, anticipated participation rate, and desired statistical power. Common-method risk is reduced if participation outcome is measured, by separating the self-reported measures of CI and cultural-distance from the observed participation outcome. A prospective design that measures CI before the event decision and subsequently observes participation would be preferable to a retrospective survey.

Figure 3 summarizes the research process. It begins by defining structural validation, then proceeds to identifying context-based WBES evidence and direct measurement and ends by proceeding to a valid design for testing the mechanism at the firm level. This boundary is significant because although the current data are informative, it is not enough for causal estimation.

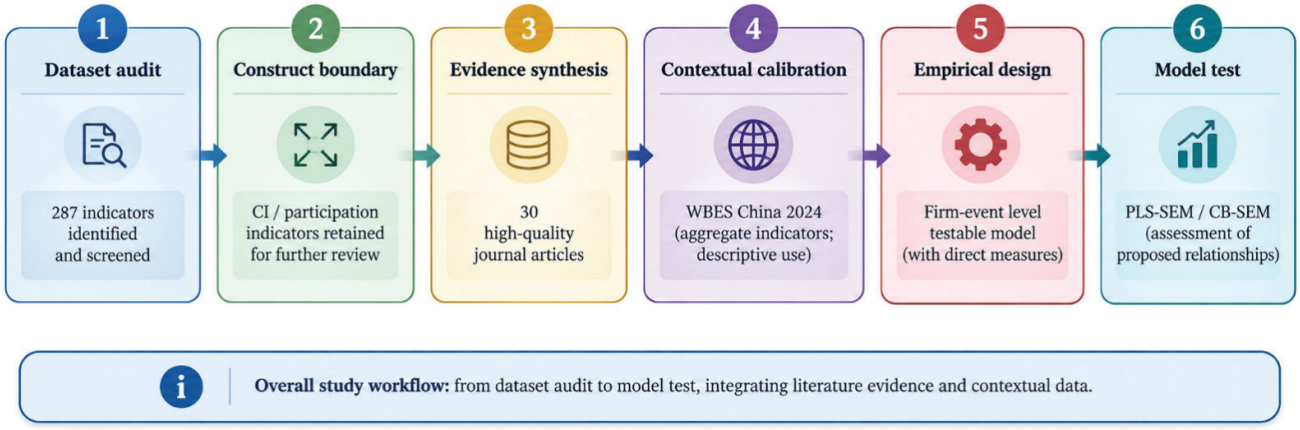


Figure 3. Research workflow and data-processing boundary

No machine-learning model was used. Machine learning would add little value at the current stage because the dependent variable and direct CI measures are absent. Once firm-level data are available, interpretable predictive models could be used as supplementary robustness tools, but they should not replace theory-driven estimation of the intelligence mechanism.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are reported in two analytically distinct layers. The integrative synthesis establishes the theoretical basis and identifies unresolved relationships in the proposed mechanism. The aggregated China 2024 WBES indicators describe selected characteristics of the business environment in which an eventual firm-level test may be relevant. The WBES indicators provide descriptive contextual evidence only; they do not test, validate, or estimate the proposed Sustainable Competitive Intelligence relationships.

4.1 Descriptive Wbes Context and Measurement Boundary

The WBES extract is used exclusively to characterize selected features of the Chinese business environment. Because it contains no direct measures of Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability or firm-event participation, its indicators are interpreted only as contextual conditions that may increase or constrain the need for intelligence. They are not treated as proxies for CI, participation, information quality, opportunity recognition, perceived strategic value, or cultural distance.

Selected China 2024 indicators are summarized in Table 2. The indicators describe high competitive density and price pressure alongside heterogeneous international, technological, and innovation exposure. For example, 90.6% report more than five competitors in their main market, while 92.6% report that raising prices above competitors would risk losing customers. Average direct exports represent 2.6% of sales, and 4.1% of firms export at least 10% of sales directly. Product or service innovation is reported by 32.7%, and process innovation by 24.8%.

Table 2. Descriptive China 2024 WBES contextual indicators

Indicator	China 2024 value	Interpretive relevance
Firms exporting at least some products via parcel service	45.0%	International commercial exposure
Average proportion of total sales exported directly	2.6%	Direct export intensity
Firms exporting directly at least 10% of sales	4.1%	Established direct-export orientation
Firms using material inputs/supplies of foreign origin*	8.9%	International supply exposure
Firms reporting more than five competitors in main market	90.6%	Competitive density
Firms unable to raise prices above competitors without losing customers	92.6%	Competitive pressure
Internationally recognized quality certification	16.0%	External-market capability signal
Firms with own website	29.3%	Digital market presence
Firms introducing a new product/service in previous three years	32.7%	Innovation activity
Firms introducing a process innovation in previous three years	24.8%	Process adaptation

Source: World Bank Enterprise Surveys China 2024 custom-query extract. Values are aggregated country indicators.

The WBES indicators provide descriptive contextual evidence only; they do not test, validate, or estimate the proposed Sustainable Competitive Intelligence relationships.

These patterns illustrate a business environment in which structured intelligence may be managerially relevant. They do not establish that the surveyed establishments possess Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability or that intelligence affects their trade show participation decisions.

4.2 Evidence for the Ci-To-Participation Mechanism

The most straightforward evidence is provided by Silva (2021) who examined Competitive Intelligence, information management and exhibitor marketing strategy in B2B trade shows. The study shows that information management in the organization precedes action in marketing, in line with the proposed mechanism of CI. The second stream of evidence relates to participation and investment: Mora Cortez et al. (2022) demonstrate how the expected sales, information, image and relationship benefits influence participation and resource investment. These results support perceived strategic value as a decision-making mechanism proximal to participation, but do not necessarily show a direct effect of CI on participation.

A third stream of evidence is that of trade shows as intelligence environments. In this article, Silva et al. explain how trade fairs can serve as a source of knowledge on products, markets, technology and the competition. This evidence complements the pre-participation mechanism and demonstrates how past attendance can provide intelligence specific to an event for future decisions. Geldres-Weiss et al. (2021) find that exhibiting in a trade show is correlated with exhibitor performance, and Lee and Ryan (2025) find that there are differences between first-time exhibitors and repeat exhibitors. Participation may thus provide behavioral experience and event-specific information.

The fourth evidence stream is related to the changing format of trade fairs. Perceived omnichannel trade-fair suitability has an impact on the involvement of exhibitors and their loyalty towards trade shows (Silva et al., 2023) and cultural, commercial and digital factors are a significant influence on

the development of trade shows (Mora Cortez et al., 2025). The results presented here indicate that when the format of the event changes, attendance in the past may not be as informative. CI therefore needs to remain adaptable.

The strategic significance of an event cannot be assumed to be the same as at an earlier time, even if the event is being covered by the same media, or if the event has remained the same but is being broadcast digitally instead.

The fifth evidence stream is related to the Chinese business context of CI and sensing. Bao (2020) offers firsthand evidence for the significance of customer, competitor and supplier intelligence in China. The business-intelligence capabilities–firm-performance relationship is related to the dynamic capability structure (Chen and Lin, 2020); internal and external business-intelligence sensing capabilities are found to be positively correlated with process efficiency and performance for Chinese SMEs in manufacturing activities (Han et al., 2024). Additionally, Wang and Gao (2020) demonstrate that proactively searching for information can improve the value of competitor networks. While these studies do not measure actual trade-show participation in China, they all lend credence to the plausibility of the intelligence-based decision mechanism in the context of China.

Table 3 provides a mapping of these evidence streams to the proposed mechanism. The strongest support concerns the link between CI and information processes, expected value as a driver of participation, and the role of prior experience. The weakest evidence is for the indirect pathway from CI through opportunity recognition to a binary participation decision among Chinese companies. That path is an empirical gap – and not a result.

Table 3. Evidence synthesis for the proposed mechanism

Mechanism link	Evidence pattern	Representative studies	Assessment
CI → information management/ strategy	Direct trade-show evidence	Silva (2021)	Strong conceptual support
Expected value → participation/ investment	Participation depends on sales, information, image and relationship expectations	Mora Cortez et al. (2022)	Strong direct support
Trade shows → intelligence generation	Shows provide product, market, technology and competitor information	Silva et al. (2021)	Strong support
Experience → decision quality/ performance	Prior attendance affects performance and loyalty	Geldres-Weiss et al. (2021); Lee & Ryan (2025)	Moderate-to-strong support
CI/sensing in Chinese firms	Customer/competitor/supplier intelligence and BI sensing are meaningful capabilities	Bao (2020); Chen & Lin (2020); Han et al. (2024)	Strong contextual support
Cultural distance → B2B/event outcomes	Distance changes relationship value and exhibitor retention	Chung et al. (2024); Cheng et al. (2022)	Strong boundary support
Integrated CI-to-participation mechanism in Chinese firms	No direct study in supplied evidence base	—	Unresolved empirical gap

Source: Integrative synthesis of peer-reviewed studies cited in the article.

4.3 Cross-Cultural Moderation

This interpretation is supported by cross-culture evidence. Chung et al. (2024) demonstrate that cultural distance between B2B partners in Greater China impacts B2B relationship resources. Bartosik-Purgat and Rakowska (2025) point to discrepancies in business communication between partners from China and America; Bai et al. (2022) show that the cultural and institutional environment has an impact on decision strategies on internationalization under uncertainty. In addition, Griffith et al. (2021) demonstrate that different conclusions can be drawn based on the operationalization of cultural distance. This is reinforced by evidence from trade shows, which Cheng et al. (2022) find that cultural distance has varying effects on the retention of multinational exhibitors at large-scale trade shows in China according to the cultural dimensions. The notion of cultural distance should not, therefore, be interpreted as uniformly negative. The cultural dimension of the trade show, as well as managerial interpretation, could play a role in determining whether greater cultural distance enhances value for the trade show as a means of establishing a relationship and gathering information, or raises the costs of adaptation and interpretive risk.

As such, the proposed model views perceived cultural distance as a moderator of the intelligence-to-value relationship. When the cultural distance is perceived as higher, companies might need to gather more external intelligence before investing in an event and the chances of misunderstanding the intelligence might also be higher. Cross-cultural competence and local partners and previous international experience can then enhance the translation of intelligence to more accurate strategic-value assessments. This is one type of logic that is consistent with international marketing research findings on decision making in the face of uncertainty. The study by Oliveira et al. (2023) reveals that behavior and context drive global marketing decisions, and the study by Bai et al. (2022) provides evidence for how an organization can use different logics of strategic decision making in institutional and cultural uncertainty. Then, participation in trade shows is a valuable context in which to consider international marketing decisions that are discrete, costly, reversible, and have strategic implications.

4.4 Proposed Main Model and Empirical Status

Table 4 reports the status of all eight propositions and separates theoretical grounding from empirical estimation. P1-P8 are grounded to varying degrees in the synthesized literature, but none was statistically estimated using the aggregated WBES extract. The table therefore presents propositions for future testing rather than empirical results.

Table 4. Proposed main-model relationships and empirical status

Proposition	Relationship	Theoretical status	Estimated with supplied data?
P1	Sustainable CI capability -> information quality	Grounded proposition	No
P2	Information quality -> opportunity recognition	Grounded proposition	No
P3	Information quality -> perceived strategic value	Grounded proposition	No

Proposition	Relationship	Theoretical status	Estimated with supplied data?
P4	Higher information quality reduces decision uncertainty; opportunity recognition, uncertainty reduction, and perceived strategic value mediate the Sustainable CI capability–participation relationship	Requires direct test	No
P5	Sustainable CI improves decision calibration and may support participation or non-participation	Requires direct test	No
P6	Perceived cultural distance moderates intelligence usefulness and interpretation risk	Direction may vary	No
P7	Prior experience moderates the effect of perceived cultural distance	Grounded proposition	No
P8	Post-decision feedback strengthens Sustainable CI capability over time	Grounded proposition	No

Source: Evidence synthesis. No coefficient is reported because the supplied workbook cannot estimate these relationships.

The central pathway in the proposed framework links Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability to information quality and, subsequently, to opportunity recognition, uncertainty reduction, perceived strategic value, and the firm-event participation decision. Information quality is a key part of this mechanism because intelligence must be credible, timely, relevant and decision-relevant if it is to support managers' judgment. Opportunity recognition involves opportunities discovered in the market, customer, channel, and relationship segments related to the events, while perceived strategic value is a measure of managers' perceived benefits and risks of participation when it comes to commercial, informational, relational, and positioning benefits. Uncertainty reduction is the measure of how well decision-relevant intelligence aids managers in assessing the match between the events and the market when information is limited. Cultural distance and previous foreign and trade-show experience are boundary conditions that influence the understanding and utilization of intelligence. The current framework therefore emphasizes an indirect relationship between CI and participation. In the proposed model, a direct path from the Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability to participation is not defined and could be explored as an alternative specification in future empirical studies with firms.

The model also makes predictions of asymmetric decision effects. Event-market fit can boost participation and unfavorable intelligence can reduce participation. The logic of intelligence-driven decision making can thus be misrepresented by conventional linear models which are based on the premise that attendance should always be higher with CI. Future studies should consider the quality of the decisions made as well as attendance, such as by comparing expectations before the event with actual event outcomes, or by modeling participation given the attractiveness of the event.

4.5 Sustainability, Governance, and Decision Calibration

Intelligence and participation are not necessarily linearly related. Stronger intelligence capability does not automatically increase participation. If intelligence indicates strong buyer relevance, valuable relationship opportunities, and good event-market fit, participation may become more likely. Conversely, weak visitor quality, excessive competition, regulatory uncertainty, or poor

strategic fit may justify non-participation. The emphasis is therefore on decision calibration rather than attendance maximization.

Through post-decision feedback, an isolated decision becomes a source of organizational learning. Firms can assess the quality of buyers, their costs, their relationships and market opportunities against pre-event predictions and then observe the results. Variance between expectations and outcomes can then be used to fine-tune the intelligence questions, rules for evaluating the sources, analytical assumptions, and rules for allocating resources. This recursive process supports capability development over time.

The greater the cultural distance, the more likely the need for intelligence and the higher the likelihood of interpretive error. Managers can gather extensive data, but then filter them with incorrect domestic preconceptions. This risk can be mitigated by intelligence governance processes such as assuming responsibility for the verification of intelligence sources, integrating local knowledge, documenting divergent interpretations and having cross-functional review prior to the commitment of resources to participation.

Institutionalization occurs when these activities become routinized and not reliant on any individual. Standardized pre-event intelligence briefs, documented evidence standards, cross-functional review, post-event evaluation, and accessible knowledge repositories can help to retain learning when there are changes in personnel or market. Such practices can enhance strategic resilience by helping firms adjust their involvement as circumstances in the geopolitical, technological, cultural and institutional landscape evolve.

4.6 Construct Sensitivity and Future Empirical Design

Because the current study does not estimate coefficients, robustness is assessed through construct sensitivity. Table 5 shows how the interpretation would change under common alternative operationalizations. Replacing CI with competitive intensity would test whether rivalry predicts participation, not whether intelligence predicts participation. Replacing CI with website ownership or R&D would test digital or innovation capability. Replacing participation with export intensity would test internationalization. None of these alternatives is equivalent to the stated research question.

Table 5. CI measurement specification and construct-sensitivity checks

CI dimension	Direct measurement focus	Do not substitute	Reason
Planning	Explicit intelligence needs and pre-event decision questions	General strategy planning	CI begins with a defined intelligence requirement.
Collection	Systematic competitor, customer, supplier, technology, and event information	Number of competitors	Rivalry creates information demand but is not intelligence activity.
Analysis	Source comparison, credibility checks, pattern recognition, and interpretation	Website ownership or analytics software	Technology can enable analysis without proving that intelligence is produced.
Dissemination	Timely delivery of intelligence to managers responsible for event decisions	Internal communication frequency	CI requires decision-relevant intelligence, not communication volume.

CI dimension	Direct measurement focus	Do not substitute	Reason
Utilization	Use of intelligence to select, reject, time, or resource a trade-show decision	Export intensity	International activity is an outcome/context variable, not CI use.
Feedback and learning	Post-decision evaluation used to revise later intelligence requirements and decision rules	Repeat attendance alone	Experience strengthens CI only when it is captured, evaluated, shared, and reused.
Governance	Assigned responsibilities, source-validation rules, cross-functional review, and knowledge retention	Unstructured communication	Governance institutionalizes CI and reduces fragmented or culturally biased interpretation.

Source: CI dimensions synthesized from the recent CI, business-intelligence, and B2B trade-show literature cited in this article. Items are measurement specifications, not observed values.

The interpretation also depends on how cultural distance is measured. Objective national-distance indices may be useful when home and host countries are known, but they may not capture managers' perceived adaptation difficulty. For the proposed decision mechanism, perceived cultural distance is therefore the preferred focal moderator, while an objective country-level index can serve as a robustness measure.

Selection bias is also an important design concern. A sample composed only of exhibitors cannot explain the participation decision because it contains no non-participation cases. Research on exhibitor engagement and loyalty remains valuable, but a participation model requires both firms that participated and firms that considered an event and chose not to participate. Valid tests of the proposed mechanism should therefore include participating and non-participating firms.

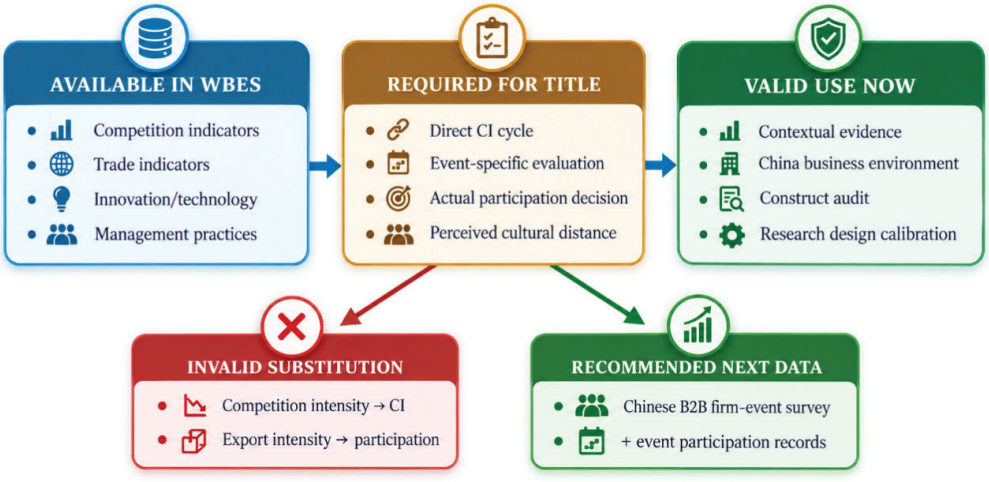


Figure 4. Measurement boundary: what the supplied data can and cannot support

The decision window also matters. Post-event surveys can generate hindsight bias. Managers may reinterpret their pre-event expectations after seeing event outcomes. A stronger design would collect CI and event evaluation before the decision deadline, observe the participation decision, and then record outcomes after the event. This three-stage structure would permit a clearer test of the proposed mechanism and reduce common-method bias.

4.7 Theoretical Contributions

The first contribution is to relate trade show involvement to a continuous cycle of renewal of intelligence instead of a one-off information-gathering exercise. The framework encompasses elements of information quality, opportunity recognition, perceived strategic value, cross-cultural interpretation, governance, feedback and organizational learning. It helps to understand how intelligence routines can be maintained and revitalized over subsequent international market decisions.

The second contribution is greater construct discipline: competitive intensity is an environmental condition, business intelligence is an enabling infrastructure, and export intensity is an internationalization indicator; none is equivalent to Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability. The third contribution concerns decision calibration: effective CI may support either participation or non-participation, depending on event-market fit. The fourth contribution introduces a cross-cultural boundary logic in which cultural distance can increase the value of intelligence while also increasing the risk of misinterpretation.

4.8 Managerial Implications

Managers can separate the participation choice from the event-execution plan. A formal intelligence brief can list the target accounts, quality of the buyers, competition, market fit, relationship opportunities, regulatory and cultural risks, total resource needs, and explicit reasons why the event is not a good fit for a company to participate before approving a budget. Responsibility for the evidence included in the intelligence brief rests jointly with marketing, sales, export, finance, and senior management. Cross-cultural preparation should address decision authority, negotiation norms, channel structures, language requirements, and follow-up expectations specific to the event. Organizers can contribute to the effective decision-making process by providing their visitors with a credible exhibitor list, a profile of the visitors attending their event, historical data on buyers, event sector segmentation and clear event metrics.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study conceptualizes Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability as a renewable decision capability that supports B2B trade-show participation decisions under cross-cultural uncertainty.

The framework links information quality with opportunity recognition, uncertainty reduction, and perceived strategic value as mechanisms supporting better-calibrated participation choices.

5.1 Methodological Limitations

The study does not test an empirical causal model; instead, it develops propositions for future empirical testing. The purposive integrative synthesis includes heterogeneous constructs, contexts, designs and outcomes and thus is not suitable for a defensible pooled effect estimate or exhaustive

systematic-review coverage. No direct measures of Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability, perceived cultural distance, mediators, and firm-event participation decisions are included in the aggregated WBES custom-query extract. It is used only for description in context and does not claim to be empirically valid, to mediate, to moderate, to predict or to be a causal explanation.

The literature synthesis and contextual dataset also differ temporally. All scholarly publications are included in the synthesis through 2025. The contextual assessment uses the latest China WBES edition available at the evidence-search cut-off: China WBES 2024. Accordingly, the WBES indicators should be interpreted as contemporaneous contextual evidence rather than evidence covering the full literature-review period.

5.2 Future Research Agenda

Future research can collect prospective firm-event data from both participating and non-participating Chinese B2B firms. Sustainable Competitive Intelligence Capability can be measured before the participation deadline through validated multidimensional indicators covering planning, collection, analysis, dissemination, utilization, governance, and feedback. Information quality, opportunity recognition, perceived strategic value, cultural distance, and prior experience can be measured separately, while the actual participation decision can be observed rather than inferred from attitudes or export activity. Post-event outcomes can subsequently be recorded to evaluate decision calibration and learning. Such data could support confirmatory measurement assessment followed by logistic, generalized structural-equation, or multilevel analysis.

Sustainable Competitive Intelligence is therefore not defined by the quantity of information collected or by the frequency of trade show attendance. It is reflected in the organization's continuing ability to transform credible intelligence into appropriately calibrated decisions, learn from their outcomes, and renew its decision routines as business conditions change.

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Data Availability: The contextual indicators examined in this study were obtained from the World Bank Enterprise Surveys China 2024. Official survey documentation and data-access information are available at https://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/6676. The analyzed custom-query extract contains aggregated indicators and does not include direct Competitive Intelligence measures or firm-event trade show participation decisions. No synthetic observations were created.

Declaration of AI-Assisted Use: OpenAI's ChatGPT was used solely to assist with English-language editing, textual organization, and drafting support during manuscript revision. It was not used to generate or fabricate data, statistical results, or empirical evidence. All numerical information, literature-based claims, citations, conceptual interpretations, and final manuscript content were independently reviewed and verified by the authors against the underlying sources. The authors made all final scholarly decisions and accept full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the manuscript.

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