Social Motive Expectation as a Moderator of the Concession Timing Effect in Buyer-Seller Negotiations

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Abstract

According to the concession timing effect in the negotiation literature, immediate (vs. gradual or delayed) concessions reduce a negotiator's satisfaction with the negotiation partner and the agreed upon price. In this research, the authors propose a negotiator's expectation of the other party's motives (*social motive expectation*) as a moderator and examine whether the concession timing effect holds in buyer-seller negotiations when a negotiator believes the other party is cooperatively oriented as opposed to being individualistically oriented. An experiment with 2 (social motive expectation; cooperative vs. individualistic) X 3 (concession timing; immediate, gradual, and delayed) between-subjects design was conducted to test the hypotheses. First of all, the analysis produced a significant main effect of social motive expectation: buyers who believed the seller was cooperatively motivated rated the negotiation outcome and partner more positively. Moreover, the results show that when a seller made an immediate (vs. gradual or delayed) concession in a negotiation with an individualistically-oriented person, the buyer was more dissatisfied with the outcome and the negotiation partner and estimated the value of the object to be less. However, when faced with an immediate concession from a cooperatively-oriented opponent, negotiators were less likely to engage in reactive devaluation and possibly counterfactual thinking, and thus their negotiation responses did not differ from those of gradual or delayed concession. That is, buyer's belief about the seller's cooperative social motive overrides the concession timing effect.

Keywords: distributive negotiation, concession timing, social motives, valuation, satisfaction

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INTRODUCTION

Negotiation is a prevalent and crucial phenomenon not only in industrial markets, but also in consumer markets. Individual consumers frequently negotiate over issues such as price and service when purchasing an automobile, a house, and other high-priced items. Surprisingly, however, marketing scholars have devoted very little attention to negotiation (see Bazerman, 2001 for a critical review). An essential aspect of negotiation process is concession-making behavior, which has been studied as a cause as well as an effect in the literature (e.g., Clopton, 1984; Schurr & Ozanne, 1985). Of particular interest in the present research is the concession timing effect initially proposed by social psychologists (Galinsky, Seiden, Kim, & Medvec, 2002; Kwon & Weingart, 2004), and later introduced to marketing (Srivastava & Oza, 2006). The authors classified the timing of the partner's concessions in negotiation into three categories (i.e., immediate, gradual, and delayed concessions) and examined its impact on negotiator's evaluation of own performance and outcomes in buyer-seller negotiation contexts. In particular, they found that when negotiating for the purchase of a product (e.g., car), the buyer felt least satisfied with the outcome if the seller immediately accepted his or her offer. When the seller made gradual concessions, the buyer was most satisfied with the negotiation partner. Buyers reported high levels of satisfaction with the outcome as well as with the estimated value of the object when the seller made delayed concessions.

One limitation of this research is that it failed to recognize the importance of the context within which the concession timing effect occurs. The existing studies examined the concession timing effect in a distributive bargaining context, in which the negotiations took place between participants who were strangers to one another with no information about the other party's reputation or motives. In that negotiations among strangers cue distributive behavior, negotiators entering these situations are likely to expect the other party to be individualistically or competitively motivated, in which they try to maximize own outcome. However, not all negotiations occur between negotiators with these motivational orientations. Buyers may approach with cooperative orientation to maximize both own and others' outcomes when negotiating with sellers in a close and ongoing relationship (cf., Kirmani & Campbell, 2004)

We propose that a negotiator's expectation of the other party's motives (hereafter referred to as *social motive expectation* or SME) will play a crucial role in perceiving and evaluating the negotiation process and outcomes. More specifically, this research examines whether the concession timing effect holds when buyers believe the other party (i.e., seller) is cooperatively motivated, using an experimental setting. We predict that negotiators are less likely to interpret immediate concessions as competitive moves and self-serving when they attribute a cooperative motive to their partner.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

The Concession Timing Effect

The timing of the other party's concession can be used to infer the value of the object under consideration, the credibility of the other party, and the quality of the agreement in negotiations of transactions (Galinsky et al., 2002; Kwon & Weingart, 2004; Srivastava & Oza 2006). Research examining immediate, gradual, and delayed concessions found that when the other party immediately accepted the focal negotiator's offer, the negotiator felt less satisfied with the negotiation partner and outcome and estimated the value of the object to be

lower, compared to when the other party made gradual or delayed concessions. Galinsky et al. (2002) showed that an immediate concession from the other party triggered counterfactual thinking, "I could have done better," leading individuals who perform objectively better to feel worse than those whom they outperformed (Markman, Gavanski, Sherman, & McMullen, 1993; Medvec, Madey, & Gilovich, 1995). Kwon and Weingart (2004) also reported similar results and explained that the salience and unexpectedness of an immediate concession by a negotiation partner intensifies the *reactive devaluation* (Ross, 1995) effect of a concession, resulting in a buyer's belief that the object is worth less than initially believed and buyer's dissatisfaction with the outcome. Furthermore, the authors demonstrated that concession timing influences the relationship between the seller's justification for making the concession(s) (i.e., you are persuasive or I am too busy) and the buyer's own attribution making (i.e., buyer's persuasive ability, seller's time constraints, and object's lesser value). That is, buyers were less likely to accept the seller's justification, and would attribute the seller's concession to the lesser value of the object when the seller made an immediate concession rather than a gradual or delayed concession.

More recently, Srivastava and colleagues (Oza, Srivastava, & Koukova, 2010; Srivastava & Oza, 2006) also examined the concession timing effect in various negotiation contexts (i.e., salary negotiation, purchase of a bike or a car), and mostly replicated the previous results. More importantly, the authors identified potential moderators such that the concession timing effect was attenuated when an objective (or diagnostic) referent was present (Study 3 in Srivastava & Oza, 2006) or when persuasion knowledge was activated (Study 1 in Oza et al., 2010). Srivastava & Oza (2006) further suggested that a focal negotiator's inference about the level of conflict within the other party mediated the concession timing effect, which could be expressed by muttering under a breath or providing the justification that he or she was in a hurry.

The Expectation of Others' Social Motives

A negotiator's SME informs his/her expectations about how the other party will behave while negotiating. Social motives refer to preferences for certain patterns of outcomes for oneself and others (McClintock, 1978; Messick & McClintock, 1968) and have been shown to influence the use of tactical behavior and quality of joint agreements in negotiations with integrative potential (see De Dreu, Weingart, & Kwon, 2000 for a meta-analytic review). Negotiators with *cooperative motives*, those interested in maximizing both own and others' outcomes and minimizing differences between outcomes for themselves and others, are expected to engage problem-solving approaches. In contrast, negotiators with *individualistic motives*, interested in maximizing only their own outcome, are expected to rely more heavily on distributive tactics (De Dreu et al., 2000)

SMEs are important in a negotiation because they provide the context for interpreting the negotiation partner's tactical behavior. When negotiators believe their partners have a cooperative social motive, their partner's concessions are likely to be interpreted as cooperative (regardless of the timing of the concession) resulting in positive perceptions of the negotiation. In contrast, when negotiators believe the other party has an individualistic social motive, they will assume their partner is trying to maximize individual interest, and the partner's concessions will *not* be interpreted as a cooperative. Instead, negotiators will attribute the concessions to self-serving motives – i.e., that the object was overpriced and unsatisfactory, and the partner was unfair. Thus, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 1. A negotiator will evaluate distributive negotiations, in which the other party concedes, more positively when he or she believes the other party has a cooperative social motive in contrast to an individualistic social motive.

In addition to the direct effect of SME on perceptions of a distributive negotiation, we expect that SMEs will moderate the effects of concession timing on those perceptions. Prior research shows that immediate concessions from a seller result in lower satisfaction with the negotiation and lower valuation of the object being negotiated (Galinsky et al., 2002; Kwon & Weingart, 2004; Srivastava & Oza, 2006). We propose that this effect only holds when a negotiator believes the other party is individualistically motivated. In contrast, when a negotiator believes the other party is cooperatively motivated, immediate concessions (rather than gradual or delayed) are less likely to elicit suspicion and negative attributions for the following reasons.

First, negotiators are more likely to trust others who they believe are cooperatively motivated (De Cremer, Snyder, & DeWitte, 2001; Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2006) and to believe that the other party will not take advantage or exploit the focal negotiator (Ross & LaCroix, 1996). This will result in less suspicion in response to an immediate concession. The higher level of trust in a partner who is believed to be cooperatively motivated should mitigate the potential negative effect of immediate concessions on the valuation of the object being negotiated and satisfaction with the negotiated outcome and the other party.

Second, immediate concessions fit within a cooperative negotiation script or schema, but not an individualistic one. Negotiators may have specific negotiation scripts depending on whether the other party is cooperatively or individualistically oriented. In a negotiation with an individualistically-oriented person, negotiators are likely to expect that the other party will be reluctant to make concessions at all or will make concessions gradually, which is a more effective way to maximize their own outcome. In a negotiation with a cooperatively-oriented person, however, negotiators will not be surprised by or be satisfied with an immediate concession because they expect short cooperative negotiations.

Finally, a cooperative SME can mitigate a negotiator's fixed pie bias and reactive devaluation (Gelfand, Major, Raver, Nishii, & O'Brien, 2006). Negotiators with a cooperative SME will be less likely to assume that the negotiating partner's interests are completely opposed to their own (i.e., that the negotiation is not a fixed pie). Therefore, the negotiation partner's concession will not be perceived to be a deception. In addition, a cooperative partner's concessions are more likely to be perceived positively (i.e., less reactive devaluation) even when the negotiation partner makes an immediate concession, because a cooperative partner is expected to sacrifice their needs for the sake of the relationship (Gelfand et al., 2006). Therefore, we expect that a cooperative social motive expectation will attenuate the concession timing effect.

Hypothesis 2. When a buyer expects the seller to have an individualistic social motive, the buyer will evaluate the negotiation more negatively if the seller immediately concedes rather than if the seller concedes gradually or after a delay. There will be no differences in evaluations of the negotiation due to concession timing when the seller is expected to have a cooperative social motive.

EXPERIMENT

Method

Participants and Design

Eighty-eight undergraduate students enrolled in introductory courses in the management sciences participated in the experiment and received extra course credit in exchange for their participation. The experiment design was 2 X 3 factorial, with expectations

about the other party's social motive (cooperative vs. individualistic) and concession timing (immediate, gradual, and delayed) as between-subjects variables.

Negotiation Task

Pairs of participants, each individual taking the role of buyer or seller, negotiated the price of a used car. Since there was only one issue (i.e., price), the negotiation was distributive. All experimental subjects were given the role of buyer; the role of seller was played by a confederate. The buyer (subject) was told they were participating in a study of ultimatum bargaining and that they should offer $9500 for the used car and should not concede during the negotiation. The confederates, four male students hired from the drama department, were trained to exhibit consistent concession patterns depending on the experimental condition (immediate, gradual, or delayed). However, the seller eventually accepted the buyer's asking price ($9500), regardless of the experimental condition.

Manipulations

Agreed-upon price. To keep the agreed-upon price the same across all conditions, the subjects (i.e., buyers) were instructed to begin and stick with the offer of $9,500 until that offer was accepted (at least 15 minutes).

Concession timing. In the immediate concession condition, the (confederate) seller accepted the buyer's asking price as soon as the buyer proposed the reduced price. In the gradual concession condition, the seller made a concession every three minutes, for a total of 3 concessions. In the delayed concession condition, the seller waited 9 minutes without making any concessions and then accepted the buyer's offer. The seller was able to control his pace by looking at a clock placed next to the table. In that the buyer (the subject) was instructed to offer $9500 and not to concede throughout the negotiation, the agreed-upon price was the same across all conditions.

Social motive expectation. Subjects were asked to respond to a social motive questionnaire after reading the instructions for the negotiation. Prior to negotiating, subjects were provided a completed questionnaire, said to have been completed by the other party. In the cooperative SME condition, participants were shown a cooperative profile and were informed that the other party was cooperatively motivated. In the individualistic SME condition, participants were shown the individualistic profile in the same manner. Social motive was (allegedly) assessed by asking participants to make choices among different distributions of outcomes for oneself and another person.

Procedure

The subject (buyer) and confederate (seller) were instructed to negotiate for a used car. The subject was taken to an adjacent room to read the instructions privately. Both subject and confederate read basic information about the negotiation object (condition of the car, bluebook price, etc.). The subject then filled out the pre-negotiation questionnaire (measuring perceptions of the worth of the car) and responded to the social motives questions.

After verifying that the subject had finished the questionnaire, the subject received "confidential" information that the experimenter was testing the effect of an ultimatum offer on the other party (the seller), and were told they had to start with their target price and continue asking for that price throughout the negotiation. They were asked to justify why the car should be $9,500 and keep offering $9,500. This was to ensure that the confederate's concession was unilateral and that agreed-upon price was the same across all conditions.

We then asked the subject to spend a few more minutes to develop a plan or strategy for the negotiation, after which the subject was shown the confederate's social motive response sheet. Subjects were asked to use this information to devise a strategy for the negotiation. The subject was also told that his or her own social motive response would *not* be

shown to the other party. This was to ensure that the subject did not try to second-guess the other party when developing his or her own strategy. We asked the confederate to finish planning in the next few minutes in a voice loud enough to be overheard by the subject. Then, the subject was led to the original laboratory.

The participants were introduced and informed that the negotiation would be videotaped. Upon completing the negotiation, they responded to a post-experimental questionnaire. Subjects were then debriefed and asked not to discuss the study with other potential participants.

Dependent Measures of Negotiator Perceptions

Two items assessed the buyer's *satisfaction with the negotiation partner* (α = .86): "Would you be willing to negotiate with the same partner again?" (1 = *No, prefer another* to 7 = *Yes, prefer this partner*) and "Would you recommend this seller to your friend for another negotiation?" (1 = *definitely would not* to 7 = *definitely would*). Two items measured the *buyer's satisfaction with the negotiated outcome* (α = .82): "How satisfied are you with your agreement?" (1 = *very dissatisfied* to 7 = *very satisfied*) and "Would you tell your friend that it was a good deal?" (1 = *definitely would not* to 7 = *definitely would*). After the negotiation, subjects were asked to estimate the value of the car in dollars (*estimated value of the object).* They had access to the bluebook price and the features of the car from an advertisement.

Results

Manipulation Checks

Concession timing. In the post-negotiation questionnaire participants were asked to choose between three descriptions of the timing of concessions: immediate, gradual, and delayed. Ninety-three, 78, and 90 percent of the participants in the immediate, gradual, and delayed concession conditions respectively responded correctly ($\chi^2(4, N = 88) = 118.28$, $p < .001$). Hypothesis tests were conducted with and without responses from participants who incorrectly identified the type of concession timing. Results did not differ; therefore, the full dataset was used for the analyses.

Social motive expectations. In the post-negotiation questionnaire, participants were asked to report the social motive of the other party (1 = cooperative to 5 = uncooperative). Participants who were told that the other party had a cooperative social motive reported that the other party was more cooperative ($M = 1.53$, $SD = .73$, $n = 45$) than did participants who were told that the other party had an individualistic orientation ($M = 1.98$, $SD = .99$, $n = 43$), $t(86) = 2.41$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.51$. It is notable that respondents in both conditions provided cooperative assessments of the other party. The fact that the other party conceded and accepted the buyer's offer in all conditions might have influenced the participants to perceive the other party as cooperative.

Hypothesis Tests

In order to test the effects of SMEs and concession timing on negotiator perceptions, a 2 (expectation of partner's social motive) X 3 (concession timing) MANOVA was performed.[1] Multivariate results showed a main effect of SME on negotiation perceptions, Wilks' $\Lambda = .84$, $F(3, 80) = 5.00$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .16$. An examination of the univariate results revealed that SME had a significant effect on satisfaction with the outcome, $F(1, 82) = 9.11$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .10$ and satisfaction with partner, $F(1, 82) = 11.70$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$, but not on the estimated value of the object, $F(1, 82) = 0.77$, $p > .10$, $\eta^2 = .01$ (see Table 1 for means and *SD*s). That is, buyers who believed the seller was cooperatively motivated rated the negotiation outcome and partner more positively - Hypothesis 1 is supported.

As predicted in Hypothesis 2, the interaction of concession timing and SME was also significant, Wilks' $\Lambda = .72$, $F(6, 160) = 4.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .15$. Univariate tests showed that the interaction between concession timing and SME significantly influenced satisfaction with the outcome, $F(2, 82) = 9.00$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .18$, value estimation of the object, $F(2, 82) = 3.46$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .08$, and satisfaction with the negotiation partner, $F(2, 82) = 6.65$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .14$. To illustrate the interaction pattern, the satisfaction interactions are graphed in Figures 1a and 1b.

One-way MANOVA was performed to examine the concession timing effect in more detail where the negotiation SME was *individualistic*. Multivariate results revealed that concession timing had significant effects on outcome and person perceptions (Wilks' $\Lambda = .56$, $F(6, 76) = 4.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .25$). Planned contrasts showed that the immediate concession caused lower satisfaction with the outcome, $t(40) = 4.17$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.36$, lower valuation of the object, $t(40) = 2.45$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.80$, and lower satisfaction with the negotiation partner, $t(40) = 2.01$, $p < .05$, $d = 0.65$ (See Table 1 for means and *SD*s). That is, the concession timing effects were confirmed when the other party was believed to have individualistic social motives.

One-way MANOVA was conducted using only the cases where the SME was *cooperative*. Multivariate results showed that concession timing did *not* have significant effects on negotiator perceptions, Wilks' $\Lambda = .87$, $F(6, 80) = 1.00$, *ns*, $\eta^2 = .07$ (See Table 1 for means and *SD*s). Planned contrast tests, which compared immediate concession with other (gradual and delayed) concessions, did not reach statistical significance: satisfaction with the outcome, $t(42) = -1.24$, $d = 0.39$, estimation of the value of the object, $t(42) = -.31$, $d = 0.10$, satisfaction with the partner, $t(42) = -1.37$, $d = 0.43$. Therefore, concession timing did not influence perceptions when the other party was believed to have a cooperative social motive. This result completes the support for Hypothesis 2.

CONCLUSION

Our research demonstrates that social motive expectations influence the interpretations of the other party's concessions, and thus can moderate the concession timing effect evidenced by previous studies (e.g., Galinsky et al., 2002; Kwon & Weingart, 2004; Srivastava & Oza, 2006). Specifically, our results confirmed the concession timing effect when the negotiation partner (i.e., seller) was believed to have an individualistic social motive. That is, when a seller made an immediate concession and was believed to be individualistically motivated, the buyer was dissatisfied with the outcome and the negotiation partner and estimated the value of the object to be less. The results also show that a negotiator's belief about the other party's cooperative social motive can override the concession timing effect for unilateral concessions. That is, when faced with an immediate concession from an opponent known to be cooperative, negotiators are less likely to engage in reactive devaluation ("the object must be worth less than I thought") and possibly counterfactual thinking ("I could have done better"), as evidenced by their valuation of the object and satisfaction with the outcome and their partner. It appears that in situations that are counter normative (e.g., immediate concessions in a distributive bargaining context), negotiators search for explanations for the other party's behavior. On the other hand, when the seller made gradual concessions, a process that is normative for distributive negotiations, there was no difference in the effect of social motive on satisfaction with the outcome and the partner. Information about the other party's social motive provided information with which to interpret the counter-normative behavior.

The current study addresses an under-investigated area - how social motive expectations influence negotiator perceptions in buyer-seller negotiations. Most studies on

social value orientation have investigated the effect of the focal person's motivation on the negotiation process and its outcome (De Dreu et al, 2000). Only a few studies have investigated the effect of the focal negotiator's expectations regarding the social motive of the other party and most have focused on its effect on trust (e.g., De Drew & Van Lange, 1995; Van Kleef et al., 2006). In that expectations provide a lens through which experiences are interpreted, and these interpretations influence subsequent behavior, understanding the effects of social motive expectations becomes crucial.

The findings of this study imply that reactive devaluation may not occur in response to immediate concessions when negotiators believe their partner to be cooperative – either via direct information about their social motives or via friendship. In our study, buyers only responded to immediate concessions by devaluing the car when they believed their partner to be individualistically motivated or was a stranger. Reactive devaluation did not occur in response to an immediate concession amongst friends or with cooperators. In other words, negotiators do not need to be tough in order to satisfy their negotiating partners in such situations. These results suggest a boundary condition to the research on reactive devaluation (Ross, 1995).

It's interesting to note that the results held regardless of the focal negotiator's social motive. One might expect that one's own social motive would influence how we expect others to behave. Prior research shows that individualists/competitors are likely to assume that their opponents are also individualistic/competitive (e.g., Kelley & Stahelski, 1970). However, perceptions of the other party's behavior were not influenced by whether the perceiver was cooperatively or individualistically oriented. It is possible that the information about the other party's social motive was considered a more reliable, dominant source of information to make attributions. Future research could test whether the own social motive would moderate the concession timing effect when information about the other party's motives is not available.

Lastly, there are limitations for methodology used in our studies. Our methods do not allow us to speak to how negotiators perceive different types of concessions from opponents in real distributive negotiations. We chose to use experimental methods to test our hypotheses because they allowed us to manipulate concession timing and social motive expectations and to infer causality as a result. Future research is needed to determine the joint effects of concession timing and social motive expectations in real-world negotiations.

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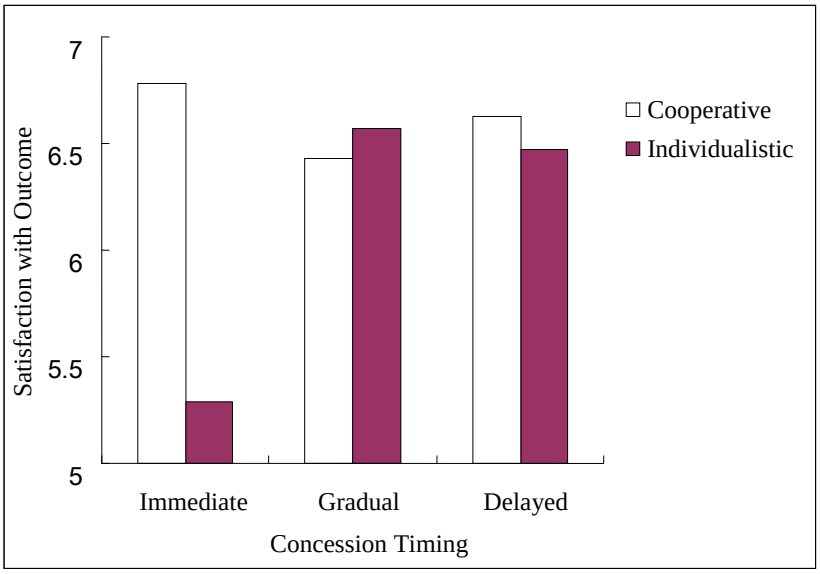
Table.
Means and Standard Deviations for Dependent Variables across Social Motive Expectation and Concession Timing

Dependent Variables	Social Motive Expectation	Concession Timing	n	Mean	*SD*
Satisfaction with the Outcome	Cooperative	Immediate	16	6.78	.45
		Gradual	14	6.43	.96
		Delayed	15	6.63	.44
	Individualistic	Immediate	14	5.29	1.25
		Gradual	14	6.57	.85
		Delayed	15	6.47	.48
Estimated Value of the Object	Cooperative	Immediate	16	10043.75	600.80
		Gradual	14	9946.43	777.19
		Delayed	15	10003.33	779.30
	Individualistic	Immediate	14	8946.43	2453.76
		Gradual	14	10502.86	790.64
		Delayed	15	9870.00	870.10
Satisfaction with the Partner	Cooperative	Immediate	16	6.56	.54
		Gradual	14	6.04	.69
		Delayed	15	6.50	.82
	Individualistic	Immediate	14	5.25	1.42
		Gradual	14	6.36	.72
		Delayed	15	5.53	.93



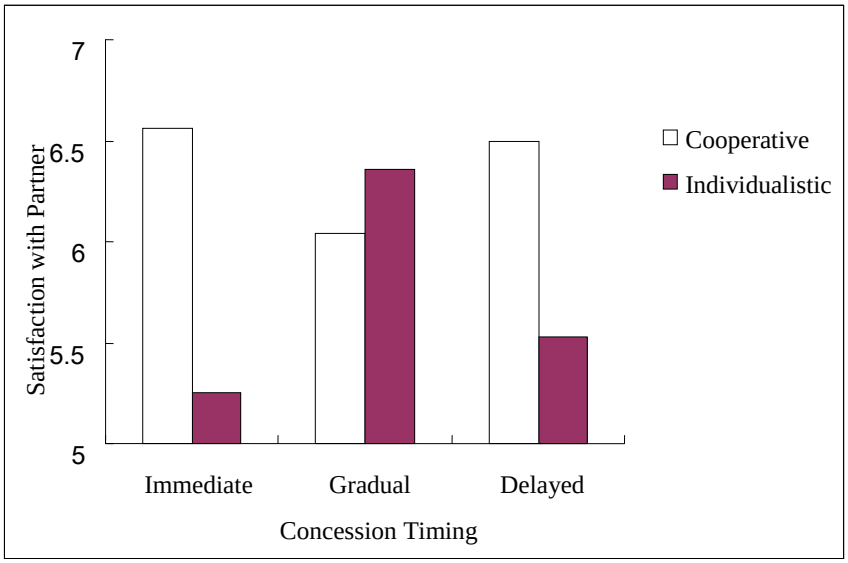


Figure1. Interactive effects of concession timing and social motive expectation.

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