



# E-negotiation versus face-to-face negotiation what has changed – if anything?

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## Abstract

The focus of the present study is the relatively new and still controversial electronically mediated negotiation (hence denoted e-negotiation) as compared to the good old face-to-face negotiations. The main research question is the impact that the type of negotiation media (face-to-face versus e-negotiation) has on the features of the negotiation process (duration and tactics) and on its outcomes. It also examines the moderation effects of the sequence of the negotiation media, i.e., face-to-face negotiation, when carried out prior to, or after e-negotiation. For this purpose, 80 young students were exposed to the two types of negotiations, whilst various intervening variables were controlled by randomization. It was found that the negotiation media, as well as the negotiation sequence, barely affects the negotiation outcomes. Face-to-face negotiation was not different than e-negotiation, in terms of the final price, the number of installments for the balance and the sum of the advanced payment. However, both the negotiation media and the negotiation sequence significantly affected the main features of the negotiation process, in terms of time duration and the use of hard or soft tactics. These results are discussed and interpreted in terms of existing theories.

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## **1. Introduction**

With the growing interest in electronic business and the emerging of several price models (Hobson, 1999) of electronically mediated negotiation (e-negotiation), the impact of the electronic media on the negotiation process and its outcomes has become an important issue for both researchers and practitioners. Technology may change the negotiation process, but has it already done so? Has the electronic media changed the traditional process of face-to-face negotiation and if so in which ways? Is it more integrative or competitive? Does it lead to different features and outcomes?

The present study examines the impact that the type of negotiation media (face-to-face versus e-negotiation) has on the negotiation process and its outcomes. It also examines the moderation effects of the sequence of the negotiation media (face-to-face negotiation, when carried out prior to or after e-negotiation) and the moderation effects of the negotiated content.

The literature and research findings concerning the impact of the negotiation media on the negotiation process and its outcomes are inconclusive. On one hand, it has been argued that face-to-face negotiation has a great advantage over e-negotiation, while, on the other hand, it has been found that in many ways e-negotiation offers a new and better media for the parties involved in negotiation.

## **2. On the good old face-to-face negotiation**

It has been argued that face-to-face negotiation offers a better flow of information between the negotiating parties, thus enabling better decision-making. Studies that examined the effects of computer-mediated interaction on group processes and decisions vs. face-to-face interaction found that computer-mediated interaction suppressed information exchange and led to poor group decisions (Hollingshead, 1996). Research results have also shown lowered judgment accuracy, poorer outcomes and less equal distribution of resources for computer-mediated groups than for face-to-face groups (Arunachalam & Dilla, 1995). The rationale given to explain these differences was that during e-negotiation, the parties could make their decisions and judgments on the basis of text only. The absence of non-verbal or verbal signals, which could help the parties attribute the “true meaning” to the message, may result in misunderstanding, misjudgment and undesired outcomes.

It has also been found that face-to-face negotiations in mixed-motive conflicts (Drolet & Morris, 2000) facilitate better understanding of negotiators' non-verbal cues and thus fostered the development of rapport, strengthened the basis of trust and helped negotiators coordinate a mutually beneficial settlement. In contrast, it has been alleged that e-negotiation may lead to conflict escalation, as a result of increased mistrust, as the parties are more likely to engage in conflict escalation in an anonymous exchange than in a face-to-face exchange. Also, there is evidence that e-negotiation takes longer than face-to-face negotiation and is less satisfactory to the parties involved (Carnevale & Probst, 1997). In studies where negotiators had

the opportunity to assess the weaknesses and strengths of e-negotiations vs. face-to-face negotiations, the conclusion was that face-to-face negotiations lead to better outcomes in competitive or individualistic climates, but not in cooperative ones (Landry, 2000).

### **3. On the advantages of electronically mediated negotiations**

In contrast to the above findings and arguments, some research findings suggest the opposite, i.e., that conventional face-to-face negotiations often lead to ineffective outcomes (Rangaswamy & Shell, 1997) and that e-negotiation has clear advantages over face-to-face negotiation. It has been argued that e-negotiation is quick, direct and to the point and due to the effect of anonymity, helps the parties separate the negotiated issues from the personalities involved (Carmel, Herniter, & Nunamaker, 1993). Furthermore, when non-verbal cues are removed, concession making and problem solving, as well as reduced hostility have been frequently observed. Studies have indicated that the absence of non-verbal cues in hostile negotiations may reduce, not increase, the level of conflict (Carnevale, Pruitt, & Seilheimer, 1981; Lewis & Fry, 1977). Also, the depersonalized nature of e-negotiation has been found to eliminate status differences between groups (Hewstone & Brown, 1986) as well as between people (Kiesler, Siegal, & McGuire, 1984; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). Several studies have indicated that computerized interaction increases the resources of low-network people (Weisband, Schneider, & Connolly, 1995). Where status distance makes direct negotiations improbable, e-negotiations enables people to communicate on an equal status. Due to the absence of face-to-face contact, e-negotiation may prevent hostility, overpass suspicion, cut across group boundaries and thus form a basis for agreement (Carnevale & Probst, 1997). Some research results also suggest (Croson, 1999) that many of the negotiating “tricks”, which negotiators have learned in order to gain advantage in face-to-face negotiating, do not translate well in the electronic media.

### **4. A possible moderation effect**

According to face-to-face negotiation supporters, the greatest disadvantage of e-negotiation is the lack of rapport and trust in the absence of personal cues. According to the supporters of e-negotiations, the greatest advantage of e-negotiation is the absence of face-to-face contact. In order to resolve such an alleged contradiction, it is possible to assume that the sequence of the negotiation media (face-to-face, e-negotiation) may serve as a moderating variable, which affects the relations between the communication media and the processes and outcomes of negotiation.

Perhaps the advantage of anonymity in e-negotiation can be maintained without losing rapport and trust, on the basis of a previous “positive” face-to-face

experience. Such previous personal experience may help negotiators to overcome the total anonymity of e-negotiation and thus promote the ability of the parties to reach an agreement. It has been found that even superficial encounters, in which people reveal relatively little about themselves, may create positive feelings, which in turn may lead to more cooperative negotiations (Moore, Kurtzberg, Thompson, & Morris, 1999). Moreover, it was found that negotiators who experience positive feelings towards each other are more likely to make concessions (Barry & Oliver, 1996), whereas negative feelings harbored by negotiators, especially those deriving from prior experience in distributive negotiation, are likely to hinder performance in subsequent integrative negotiations (Thompson, 1989).

Thus, the effects of e-negotiation may be moderated, not necessarily by previous acquaintance from face-to-face negotiations, but by the overall previous experience of the negotiators. It has already been found (Thompson, 1989) that negotiators were able to apply the integrative skills, learned in one task, to different negotiation situations. Accordingly, we anticipated that the mere experience with face-to-face negotiation, when carried out prior to e-negotiation, would affect both the e-negotiation process and the negotiation outcomes. Face-to-face negotiation prior to e-negotiation may create a positive atmosphere and lead to: (a) greater use of soft tactics, including the use of active listening, revealing information and concession making, (b) shortening the length of negotiation and (c) increase the chances of reaching an agreement between the negotiation parties. Also, it has been argued (Thompson, 2001) that e-negotiation prior to face-to-face negotiation may result in the negotiators' nightmare, as the parties learn that they can use e-negotiation to reach consensus on easy issues and resolve their acute differences through face-to-face negotiation. In so doing, they may turn their face-to-face negotiation into "combat zones".

## **5. The research hypotheses**

1. Face-to-face negotiation is different than e-negotiation in terms of the outcomes of the negotiation. Face-to-face negotiation yields more integrative outcomes, due to the richness of non-verbal cues, the development of rapport and the promotion of better judgment accuracy.
2. Face-to-face negotiation is preferable to e-negotiation in terms of time duration. This is due to the fact that the actual writing down (and checking before transmission) of the messages demands more time than does the oral presentation demands in face-to-face negotiation. Also the communication in face-to-face negotiation is less ambiguous, due to the richness of non-verbal cues, and therefore demands less time.
3. During face-to-face negotiation soft tactics are more frequently used than in e-negotiation, whereas hard tactics are more frequently used in e-negotiation than in face-to-face negotiation. Face-to-face negotiation enables a better flow of infor-

mation between the negotiating parties, enables better understanding between the parties, strengthens the basis of trust and thus both reduces the need to utilize hard tactics and promotes the use of soft tactics.

4. The sequence of the negotiation media affects both the negotiation process and its outcomes. The very experience of face-to-face negotiation prior to e-negotiation leads to more integrative outcomes. E-negotiation benefits from the positive effects, such as rapport and trust, previously experienced in the face-to-face phase. In the same way, experiencing e-negotiation prior to face-to-face negotiation will influence the face-to-face phase in a distributive way and will lead to distributive outcomes. The features of the negotiation process, i.e., the duration and tactics, are also influenced by the sequence. On one hand, the contribution of the prior face-to-face negotiation to the later e-negotiation is in the promotion of soft tactics, the demoting of hard tactics and the curbing of the duration. On the other hand, the contribution of the prior e-negotiation to the later face-to-face negotiation is the increased use of hard tactics and an extension of the duration.

## 6. The experiment

Eighty (80) students, with an equal number of men and women, constituted the sample of negotiators. All of them were young (average age 25.3) and born in Israel. At each stage of the experiment, the negotiators were introduced to one of two possible negotiation scenarios.

### 6.1. “Instrumental Content A” – buying/selling a piece of equipment

In this scenario, the negotiator plays the role of either a seller or a buyer of a personal computer. The negotiation process is defined by its length and the tactics employed. The outcome of the negotiation is defined by the following variables: (1) agreed down payment, (2) final (agreed) price, (3) number of (equal) installments for the balance.

As a result of a pilot test, negotiators were restricted to similar monetary ranges, in order to avoid the impact of additional intervening variables. The specific model of the personal computer was also omitted, in order to avoid biases from the negotiators’ prior experience.

### 6.2. “Leisure Content B” – buying/selling intangible goods

In this scenario the negotiator either offers or seeks to buy a package deal for an organized tour abroad, with similar variables measuring the process and its outcomes. As a result of a pilot test, negotiators were restricted to similar monetary ranges and the specific destination of the holiday package was omitted, in order to avoid biases from prior experience of the negotiators.

The experimenting participants were also randomly allocated into four (4) groups, to fully take into consideration the two different forms of negotiation (face-to-face vs. e-negotiation). In this way, each group was exposed to both types of negotiation media – face-to-face and e-negotiation, in the two possible sequences.

In each group the experiment was conducted in two (2) stages. In Groups Nos. 1 and 2, the sequence of the negotiation media was: face-to-face negotiation and then e-negotiation. In Groups Nos. 3 and 4, the sequence of the negotiation media was: e-negotiation and then face-to-face negotiation.

Group No. 1 held face-to-face negotiations in the “Instrumental Content A” scenario and subsequently negotiated the “Leisure Content B” issues using e-negotiation. Group No. 2 first held face-to-face negotiations in the “Leisure Content B” scenario and later on used e-negotiation for the “Instrumental Content A” scenario. Group No. 3 first held e-negotiations over the “Instrumental Content A” issues and later on conducted face-to-face negotiations in the “Leisure Content B” scenario. Group No. 4 first held e-negotiations on the “Leisure Content B” scenario and later on conducted face-to-face negotiations over the “Instrumental Content A” issues.

Twenty (20) students were randomly assigned to each of the groups and were then randomly “coupled” to form ten (10) negotiating couples in each of the groups. The groups were re-mixed and the couples re-assigned (randomly) after each stage. For example, the couples in group No. 1 were reallocated after the face-to-face negotiations in the “Instrumental Content A” scenario to e-negotiation in the “Leisure Content B” scenario.

Negotiations were fully recorded (on a tape recorder, or computer hard disk). A content analysis of the full recordings was conducted later on. The analysis also referred to the tactics the two sides employed, grouped into five categories according to Galin (1996): soft tactics, hard tactics, time-related tactics, authority-related tactics, persuasive tactics. Soft tactics included concessions, active listening, promises and information revealing. Hard tactics included threats, intimidation, take-it-or-leave-it and walking away from the negotiations. Time-related tactics included deadlines on the one hand and postponements on the other. Authority-related tactics included emphasizing the existence or absence of authority (full or partial). Persuasion tactics included tactics based on facts, tactics based on worthwhileness, ridiculing the other’s demands. At the end of each stage, the parties were asked to report the outcomes of the process in writing. These reports were cross-checked and verified with the recordings from the tape recorder and the computer hard disk. As it was not possible to cross-check the use of tactics, the analysis of the tactics was based on content only.

## **7. Results**

Table 1 presents a general description of the dependent variables: the features of the negotiation processes and outcomes.

Table 1  
Means and SD of the dependent variables

	Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Features of face-to-face negotiation process	Duration	6.47	1.99	3	12
	Soft tactics	0.25	0.18	0	0.75
	Hard tactics	0.20	0.12	0	0.50
	Time-related tactics	0.04	0.07	0	0.20
	Authority-related tactics	0.08	0.12	0	0.33
	Persuasive tactics	0.42	0.20	0	1.00
Face-to-face negotiation outcomes	Final price	951	246.6	500	1400
	Number of installments for the balance	12.6	3.24	7	20
	Advanced payments	158	66.45	0	350
Features of e-negotiation process	Duration	15.0	2.56	10	21
	Soft tactics	0.16	0.14	0	0.67
	Hard tactics	0.41	0.11	0.17	0.67
	Time-related tactics	0.04	0.07	0	0.25
	Authority-related tactics	0.02	0.05	0	0.17
	Persuasive tactics	0.36	0.12	0.15	0.60
E-negotiation outcomes	Final price	927.75	252.59	600	1300
	No. of installments for the balance	12.2	3.29	7	20
	Advanced payments	163.12	55.22	60	250

$N = 40$  dyads in all cases.

### 7.1. Analysis of variance of the negotiation outcomes

The analysis of variance of the negotiation outcomes yielded no significant differences between the two negotiating media, with  $F$  values of 0.762, 0.306 and 0.376, respectively, for the final price, number of installments and down payment. Nor did we find a significant influence of the sequence of the negotiation media, with  $F$  values of 0.007, 0.230 and 0.341, respectively, for the final price, number of installments and down payment, or any significant effect of the order of the scenarios, with  $F$  values of 0.053, 0.491 and 0.008, respectively, for the three outcomes.

### 7.2. The impact of the negotiating media and sequence of the negotiation media on the features of the process

The features of the negotiation process included the duration of the negotiation and the use of various tactics during the process. The duration of e-negotiation was found to be substantially longer than that of face-to-face negotiation ( $F = 259.66$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Also the amount of tactics employed was found to be significantly higher in e-negotiation than in face-to-face negotiation ( $F = 9.53$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ). The interaction between the sequence of negotiation media and the duration of time yields no significant difference between the time duration of face-to-face negotiation and e-negotiation. However, the interaction between the sequence of negotiation

media and the amount of tactics employed yields a significant difference between e-negotiation and face-to-face negotiation ( $F = 10.116$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ).

Next, we analyzed the impact of the negotiating media and sequence on the relative intensity of each type of tactics, defined as the ratio between the number of times a certain type of tactics was used and the total number of times that tactics (of all types) were used. The differentiation between the types of tactics employed yields the following analysis of variance of the relative intensity (Table 2).

The findings in Table 2 indicate significant differences between face-to-face negotiation and e-negotiation regarding the relative intensity of use of the various types of tactics employed. The use of hard tactics is significantly more frequent in e-negotiation, while the use of both soft and authority-related tactics is more frequent in face-to-face negotiation.

A detailed analysis of the type of tactics employed indicated that the sequence of the negotiation media yielded a significant impact only on the authority-related tactics ( $F = 6.96$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). When face-to-face negotiation took place prior to e-negotiation, the amount of authority-related tactics employed was significantly higher than when e-negotiation took place prior to face-to-face negotiation.

## 8. Discussion

Has e-negotiation changed anything in the essence of traditional negotiation? Our first hypothesis was that face-to-face negotiation yields more integrative outcomes than e-negotiation does. However, perhaps the most interesting finding in this research is that the negotiation media does not yield any significant difference in the outcomes of negotiation. Face-to-face negotiation was not found to be preferable to e-negotiation regarding the following outcomes: final price, number of installments for the balance and the volume of the advanced (down) payment. Our findings regarding the negotiation outcomes are in line with previous findings (Purdy & Nye, 2000), that did not indicate a difference between face-to-face and e-negotiations outcomes. It was found that subjects negotiating face-to-face did not achieve significantly higher joint profits than subjects negotiating through e-negotiations did. Our study demonstrates that face-to-face negotiation and e-negotiation yield a wider scope of similarities throughout the negotiation

Table 2  
Analysis of variance of the tactics

	MS	F
Hard tactics	0.919	81.264 <sup>a</sup>
Soft tactics	0.172	11.507 <sup>b</sup>
Time-related tactics	3.887	0.001
Authority-related tactics	8.060	10.772 <sup>b</sup>
Persuasive tactics	6.858	2.24

<sup>a</sup>  $p < 0.001$ .

<sup>b</sup>  $p < 0.005$ .

outcomes, not only regarding the joint profits. These similarities in the outcomes are somewhat surprising due to that fact that face-to-face negotiation has non-verbal cues, and allegedly promotes rapport and better judgment accuracy (Drolet & Morris, 2000). These findings also negate the research findings on computer-mediated groups (Arunachalam & Dilla, 1995), which indicated that e-communication obtained poorer outcomes. However, whilst the electronic media has not changed the outcomes of negotiation, it has a profound effect on the time duration and significantly influences the tactics employed, that is, it has a significant effect on certain features of the negotiation process.

Our second hypothesis, that face-to-face negotiation is preferable to e-negotiation in terms of time duration, was confirmed in this study. Findings from past research regarding time duration of the negotiation process are not conclusive. On the one hand, previous findings (Carmel et al., 1993) indicate that e-communication is a more concise form of correspondence and an easier and quicker way to interact, as the demands for traditional formalities are far fewer. It was also argued that face-to-face negotiation may be more time consuming, due to the inducement of “combat zones” (Thompson, 2001), which deflect the parties’ focus from the actual issues at hand, diverting their attention to the ongoing personal interactions. On the other hand, it was found (Purdy & Nye, 2000) that the time required to complete negotiations significantly differed between face to face and e-negotiations, with the face to face being notably shorter ( $M = 14.5$  min) than e-negotiations ( $M = 47.4$  min). Our findings also strongly indicate that the duration of e-negotiations was substantially longer than that in face-to-face negotiation – in fact negotiation time was more than double. Prima facie, this could be explained by the fact that e-negotiation necessitates that the parties actually write down the material to be put forward. Writing down the material can be a laborious task, with the writer rereading and double-checking his/her composition before actually electronically releasing it. Moreover, e-negotiation being totally reliant on text alone requires more words, which necessarily lengthens the process. Face-to-face negotiation by contrast enjoys the benefit of non-verbal cues, which are likely to convey the message at hand in a more rapid way.

Our third hypothesis, maintaining that soft tactics are more frequently employed in face-to-face negotiation and that hard tactics are more frequently utilized in e-negotiation, was also supported in this study. This is not in line with previous findings, that e-negotiations, in the absence of face-to-face contact, can prevent hostility, overpass suspicion and eliminate the “tricks” that negotiators use during face-to-face negotiation (Carnevale & Probst, 1997; Croson, 1999). The frequent employment of soft tactics in face-to-face negotiation may be explained by the prevalence of higher rapport and trust. It is interesting to note that the use of authority-related tactics was also found to be more frequent in face-to-face negotiation. This could be explained by the fact that face-to-face negotiations create and maintain status differences, whereas e-negotiation eliminates status-related advantages during the negotiation process (Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Kiesler et al., 1984; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986; Weisband et al., 1995).

Very little support was found in this study for our fourth hypothesis. With one exception, neither the outcomes nor the features of the process were influenced by the sequence of the negotiation media. The exception was the use of authority-related tactics. When face-to-face negotiations were held prior to e-negotiations, authority-related tactics were more abundant in the later e-negotiation phase. It seems that the lack of authority-related tactics, typical to the anonymity of e-negotiations, disappears once face-to-face negotiations are experienced prior to e-negotiations.

In our opinion, it is rather interesting that the negotiation media, as well as the negotiation sequence, barely affect the negotiation outcomes but significantly affect the main features of the process, such as duration and tactics. This may imply that technology may have changed the features of the negotiation process but the negotiation outcomes are not determined only according to the process. It is possible to divide the variables that affect the negotiation outcomes into the intrinsic and the extrinsic. The intrinsic variables are the features of the negotiation process, such as the time duration and the tactics employed. The extrinsic variables that influence the outcomes may be external time pressure, negotiators' gender or culture and the substance of negotiation (Harinck, Dreu, & Van Vianen, 2000). These and other extrinsic variables may have a greater impact on the negotiation outcomes than the intrinsic variables studied in this research. One extrinsic variable studied in this research, namely, the technology of the negotiation media, had no effect on the negotiation outcomes. However, there are other technology-related outcomes, which were not studied in this research, such as post-negotiation stress (e-negotiation may leave stressful feelings as a negotiation outcome), or a lesser or greater desire to re-negotiate again using the same technology. These variables may serve as interesting objectives for future research.

It should also be noted that the negotiators in the present research were relatively young, which perhaps restricts the validity of the results. The same research performed on an older population may yield different findings, as today's older people are less attuned to the e-media than their younger contemporaries. Nevertheless, the justification for focusing on young negotiators in the present research is that in years to come, when e-negotiating may reasonably be expected to be a commonly used form of communication, the e-negotiating patterns of the present younger generation will be the prevailing ones.

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