

# The differences in expressiveness in non-verbal communication between Greek and Dutch people

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## Abstract

Recent research has established cultural background of people to be an important factor affecting their expressiveness in non-verbal communication. The present study examines the impact of culture and the role of gender in terms of non-verbal communication and aims at determining differences between expressiveness of people from Greek and Dutch cultures, through a perception test. These two cultures differ in their tendency for uncertainty avoidance, one of the five dimensions defined by Hofstede's cultural model. The results show that members of the culture that rank higher in the uncertainty avoidance scale, such as Greeks, are more expressive than those who rank low, like Dutch people. Moreover, the gender differences play a role in expressiveness, as it was found that women from both cultures were more expressive than men.

**Keywords:** non-verbal communication; cross-cultural comparison; uncertainty avoidance; Hofstede's theory; expressiveness; gender differences; Greece; The Netherlands.

## Introduction

Globalization and communication between people from different cultures have become important topics of research. An influential cultural theory is the theory of Hofstede (1983), who defines culture as a mental programming that is part of our conditioning and that we share with other members of a particular nation, region or group. In addition, Hofstede (1983) offers six dimensions on which national cultures differ. One of these dimensions, uncertainty avoidance, relates particularly to communication and presupposes high levels of expressiveness. Uncertainty avoidance is defined by Hofstede as 'the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity'. Countries can score between 100 (highest) and 0 (lowest) on this dimension (The Hofstede Centre, 2015).

However, Hofstede's theory is based on surveys and it is criticized for lacking empirical evidence. The current study will investigate cultural differences in expression as well as the validation of the Hofstede's dimensions, by comparing a high uncertainty avoidance culture of Greece (100%), with a medium uncertainty avoidance culture of the Netherlands (53%). This comparison is done by studying the non-verbal communication of participants in fragments of Dutch and Greek hidden camera shows that are, in essence, similar to each other. Therefore the research question and hypothesis listens as follows:

To what extent do differences exist in expressiveness in non-verbal communication between Greek and Dutch people?

*H1: Greek people are more expressive concerning non-verbal communication in comparison with Dutch people.*

## Stimuli Collection

### Selection criteria and Procedure

Existing data available on the internet was selected in order to compare the expressiveness of Greek and Dutch people. Our data consisted out of fragments from Greek and Dutch hidden camera shows that are based on the American hidden camera show 'Impractical Jokers'. The name of the Greek show is 'Wanted' and the name of the Dutch show is 'De Fokkers'.

The concept of the shows is the same: hidden cameras follow four friends and every time one of them gets an assignment, which is directed by the other friends. The given assignment usually consists out of putting unaware people in a strange situation. This can vary from asking them an abnormal survey question, to stealing their groceries. In this study, the reactions of the unaware participants were studied due to the fact that it is essential that the expressions were real and not acted.

### Clips

First of all, the selected clips were analyzed in terms of common similarities regarding the joke and/or setting. Furthermore, it was important that the people who were fooled were clearly visible at the time that they were fooled. The selected Dutch and Greek clips which were similar and trimmed at the point that the most expression was expected, namely right after the joke had been made.

In order to compare the two cultures in terms of expressiveness in non-verbal communication, the design of the experiment was a within-subject design. All participants received exactly the same survey with the same clips. In total, Greek and Dutch participants gave their feedback on the total amount of forty clips. Furthermore, in this research, gender and nationality were controlled by using a between-subject design.

### Video Editing

All the videos were retrieved from YouTube. After selecting the clips, the content was edited with the program Windows Movie Maker. The fragments were quite short (two to four seconds) and they showed only the expression of the person who was fooled. In addition, the participants were asked to turn off their computer sound. This was asked in order to prevent any bias. Otherwise, people would possibly be affected by the origin of the actors.

## Perception Test

A perception test is used, which means that different participants have rated the expressiveness occurring in clips on a 5 point scale.

### Participants

In this study a total of 42 people participated. 47.6% ( $N = 20$ ) of them were of Greek origin and 52.4% ( $N = 22$ ) were of Dutch origin. The participants were all living in the Netherlands at the time. The age ranged from 18 to 67 with a mean of 30 ( $SD = 12.7$ ). In total, 45.2% ( $N = 19$ ) of the participants were men and 54.8 ( $N = 23$ ) were women. The participants were selected on the base of their origin and recruited through internet-generated applications such as WhatsApp and Facebook.

### Materials and Procedure

The perception test was done by conducting an online survey made in qualtrics in which the participants answered questions about the clips that had been selected. The survey consisted out of two parts; in the former the participants could read a general introduction with instructions about the survey.

Additionally, the latter part consisted out of the viewing of the clips and answering two questions about each clip. The first question was a general question about the expressiveness of the person. An example of a question is: '1. Do you think that the MAN IN THE PINK SHIRT is expressive (i.e. facial expressions, gestures/movements, body language) in this clip?' The second question originally asked about the expression of more, specific emotions. However, after piloting the survey, the decision was made to exclude the second question due time issues. The pilot showed that completing the survey took too long. In addition, the second question's contribution towards answering the main research question was insufficient. Therefore, participants only had to fill in one question (the question about the expressiveness) after watching each fragment.

## Results

To analyze the data, a repeated measure ANOVA was conducted. Before conducting the ANOVA, the data was checked for a normal distribution. This was done by using Q-plots, Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests and Shapiro-Wilk tests. Although the Shapiro-Wilk test pointed out no significantly other distribution from the normal distribution, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed some significant results in the categories Greek women ( $p = 0.09$ ), Dutch men ( $p = 0.069$ ) and Greek men ( $p = 0.025$ ). However, literature suggests that this can happen in small samples (Field, p.184) and does not need to be a cause for alarm. The distribution of those groups was then checked again by using a P-Plot which showed that the observed values were fairly close to the line, to which it was concluded that our sample is approximately normally distributed.

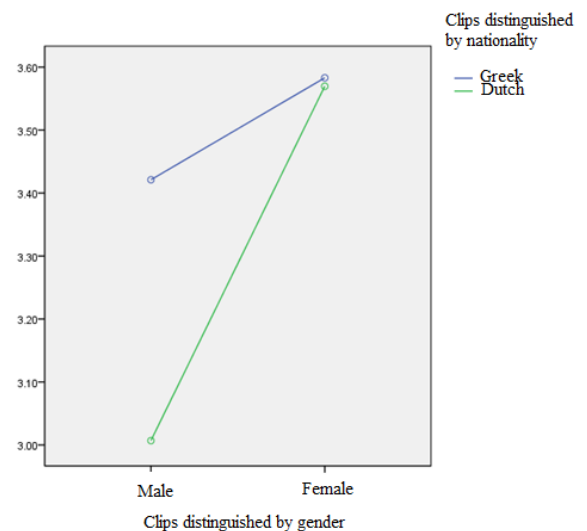
**Expressiveness** has been measured on a 5-point Likert scale to find out if people from Greece showed were rated as more expressive than Dutch people. Additionally, it was measured if men and women were rated differently on expressiveness. The means and standard deviations are shown below in table 1.

**Table 1:** Expressivity measured on nationality (Greek versus Dutch) and on gender

Nationality & gender	<i>N</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
<b>Greek men</b>	42	3.43 (0.55)
<b>Dutch men</b>	42	3.02 (0.63)
<b>Greek women</b>	42	3.60 (0.40)
<b>Dutch women</b>	42	3.58 (0.30)

To measure if the ratings of Greek and Dutch people by respondents as well as ratings of men and women differed significantly, a repeated measure ANOVA was conducted. The analysis showed that respondents rated Greeks significantly higher than Dutch people,  $F(1,38) = 14.597$ ,  $p = .000$ , Partial Eta squared = .278 and respondents rated women significantly higher than men  $F(1,38) = 47.741$ ,  $p = .000$  Partial Eta squared = .557. However, an interaction effect showed that this was mainly true for clips showing men,  $F(1,38) = 7.757$ ,  $p = .008$ , Partial Eta squared = .170). This is also shown by graph 1 in which the interaction effect is graphically displayed.

Graph 1



Moreover, the repeated measure ANOVA showed that on average, females have higher ratings on expressivity  $F(1,38) = 7.999$ ,  $p = .007$ , Partial Eta squared = .174. It also showed that Greek people gave higher ratings than Dutch people  $F(1,38) = 5.495$ ,  $p = .024$ , Partial Eta squared = .126.

The mean, standard error and confidence interval for nationality is shown in Table 2. The mean, standard error and confidence interval for gender is shown in Table 3.

**Table 2:** Expressivity measured on nationality (Greek versus Dutch)

Nationality	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
<b>Greek</b>	3.508	.069	3.368	3.647
<b>Dutch</b>	3.283	.067	3.148	3.418

**Table 3:** Expressivity measured on gender (Man versus Woman)

Gender	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
<b>Man</b>	3.260	.071	3.117	3.403
<b>Woman</b>	3.531	.065	3.400	3.662

## Discussion

The aim of the current research study was to examine the differences in expressiveness in the non-verbal communication of Greek and Dutch people. The results of the present study pointed out that Greek people are seen as more expressive than Dutch people. Therefore, our hypothesis is confirmed. This is in accordance with the theory of Hofstede (1983), who emphasized that people living in a high uncertainty avoidance culture such as Greece, tend to display high levels of expressiveness.

As stated before, the significant results are mainly due to the difference in ratings of clips showing Dutch or Greek men. This fact has the potential to be associated with another cultural dimension that Hofstede has proposed, i.e. masculinity/femininity. A possible explanation arises from Hofstede's cultural model (1983), in which Greece is characterized as a medium ranking masculine society (57%) and the Netherlands as a low ranking masculine society (14%); a masculine society is considered to be success oriented and driven (The Hofstede Centre, 2015). Furthermore, in masculine societies men tend to be powerful, assertive and they desire to contribute to social values. On contrary, in a feminine society higher dominant values are caring for others and quality of life. Standing out of the crowd is not admirable. Subsequently, these traits can cause higher ratings of expressivity by the respondents for Greek men in contrast to Dutch men.

Furthermore, based on the conclusions of this research, it is worth mentioning that women and Greek people

perceived higher levels of expressiveness. In the former case, an explanation might be that women -in general- are regarded as more open, emotional, soft, sensitive, and less critical people than men. In the latter case, the fact that Greek people are expressive in their daily basis interaction with other people, can affect the way of evaluating expressiveness. Moreover, as Matsumoto (1991) underlines, collectivistic cultures foster more emotional displays, that maintain and facilitate group cohesion and cooperation, than individualistic countries. Therefore, Greek people could have become more sensitive and open in their non-verbal communication, as non-verbal cues consist an integral part of their daily interaction with other people.

Taking all the above into consideration, the results of the present study contribute to the understanding of cultural differences in non-verbal communication. Notwithstanding, there are some limitations which should be taken into account for possible future research. First of all, the amount of selected clips with Greek and Dutch men was limited, due to deficiency of clips displaying males' participation. Additionally, the clips were selected by two popular television shows. Both shows were aired recently on television and some respondents of our study might have recognized candidates or even, they could have remembered the entire funny scenes. Hence, it might be the case that some participants relied their first judgment on their knowledge of the program. Furthermore, a noteworthy restriction could be the deliberate selection of clips by the production crew of the television show itself; probably, in terms of commercial reasons, primarily the most interesting and attractive fragments, or only clips obtaining the permission of the participants, are selected to be aired. Another limitation can be considered that the participants had to fill in only one question of the survey after watching the fragments. Initially, the survey consisted of two questions, but for the sake of respondents' time it was determined to have one question. Finally, an overall restriction is the low amount of participants.

Future research could focus on countries with high and low levels of uncertainty avoidance, other than Netherlands and Greece, to explore whether or not the results will be verified. It would be even interesting to develop the present research into an experiment and verify these results. Another interesting study could be to investigate non-verbal communication in a different type of TV program, such as a news report.

## Conclusion

The overall results of this study are in line with the results and theory reported in earlier study by Hofstede (1983). First of all, our participants found that Greek people in this study are more expressive concerning non-verbal communication than Dutch people. Thus, these results are also in line with H1.

In addition, our participants found that women, both Greek and Dutch, were more expressive than men (Greek and Dutch).

Besides that, our study shows that there are differences in rating the clips among the participants of different gender and nationalities. Our female participants rated the level of expression higher than our male participants, and our Greek participants gave higher ratings on the clips than our Dutch participants.

### **References**

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