

Cultural differences and expectancy violations theory



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Accommodating Culture with the Expectancy Violations Theory

Communication is filled with non-verbal messages and cues that play an important role in defining and interpreting messages sent from the communicator to the receiver. The relevance of these underlying messages is especially significant when communicating across cultural boundaries. A thorough understanding of the impact our mannerisms, proximity, style, and body language has on the observer can greatly aid the communicator in their effort to provide a clear and unambiguous message. Previous attempts at quantifying these messages have often found themselves grounded in a particular culture and measured from that culture's perspective, which limits the accuracy of the anticipated outcome of a cross-culture encounter.

However, Judee Burgoon's Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT), with its emphasis on positive and negative valence, is perhaps the most appropriate theory available to explain and account for cultural differences as they relate to our understanding of communication.

Burgoon's EVT does not root itself in specific cultural transgressions and therefore does not limit itself in its effort to measure perceived positive and negative reactions to the unspoken message. Some emotions and traits can be readily transferred universally across different cultures. Aggression, happiness, laughter and fear are generally recognized around the world.

However, some actions and messages are interpreted differently by various cultures with unique social traditions. Eye contact, movement, and posture all have symbolic meaning unique to various cultures. Touching is a symbol that has wide-ranging and varied meaning in different settings. By

understanding the meaning of touching to a given culture, EVT can evaluate its impact and measure the positive or negative effect it may have. As with <https://assignbuster.com/cultural-differences-and-expectancy-violations-theory/>

touching, other actions also demand a thorough knowledge of the cultural significance of the action. The hidden meaning behind the non-verbal communication may also be dependent on the social setting in which it occurs. Burgoon's EVT accommodates these differences when it measures the variables in terms that do not specify given actions, but rather the value of the action.

Ethical considerations may arise when we attempt to evaluate a communication setting in an attempt to gain an advantage for our position. However, clear and concise communications techniques require us to present an unambiguous message. Deceit is one trait that may be communicated in a manner that is culture based. Advertisers may attempt to exploit this knowledge or educators may use it to everyone's mutual benefit. By understanding the cues that lead to an indication of deceit within a culture, the communicator can consciously measure their actions to portray the desired meaning. Entertainment programming or art may use EVT to exemplify an emotion or indicate a deeper meaning behind the subject matter.

As with any good theory, EVT is only as valuable as the application it is put to. EVT can measure and project the effect of non-verbal messages, predict anticipated patterns of communication, and quantify the positive and negative reactions of the communicator and the receiver. However, EVT requires the use of extensive background knowledge of the culture it is being used in. If these are taken into account and properly assessed, EVT can be used in any culture and social setting. It is not limited by hard and fast rules of appropriateness, distance, or expression. EVT can be tailored to each

individual context that it is to be utilized in and is very useful across culture barriers.