

ETHICAL ISSUES IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS
OF JAPANESE AND US STUDENTS

by

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(ABSTRACT)

This study compared Japanese and US students' intended beliefs and behaviors relating to ethical business decisions. The study assessed the extent to which three of Hofstede's (1984) cultural indexes related to three ethical classifications of Vitell, Nwachukwu, and Barnes (1993). Participants were 79 US and 33 Japanese students attending West Virginia colleges and universities, representing a response rate of 30.7%.

A set of six vignettes were written to portray subtly unethical business situations. The vignettes were reviewed by two expert panels, and pilot tested on students similar to those participating in the study. Quantitative techniques were used to analyze survey results. Some moderate correlations were found when determining the nature and degree of relationships among Belief and Behavior scores. A chi square analysis was used to determine significant differences between US and Japanese students' demographic characteristics. Means and standard deviations revealed higher scores for Japanese students on all measures for Belief and Behavior questions. These scores indicated that they believed each vignette portrayed a more ethical situation, and that they would more likely engage in such behavior than would US students. ANOVAs were used to examine differences between Japanese and US students' responses to the vignettes, revealing significant differences between groups, but not as Hofstede's dimensions predicted.

Findings on Hofstede's (1984) Individualism versus Collectivism dimension indicate that the theory that members of Japanese cultures will be more willing to work for organizational than personal gain, may not be true, particularly for students. Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance dimension, suggesting that members of the Japanese culture will be less comfortable with uncertainty than will members of the US culture, was not supported either. Finally, Hofstede's Masculinity/Femininity dimension, theorizing that members of the Japanese culture are more comfortable with traditional masculine values, was supported.

The major finding of this study is that present-day students did not react to Hofstede's assumptions as expected. Use of different subject groups than Hofstede's and the span of thirty years between his study and this one may have impacted the outcomes. Educators and members of the business community involved with training may find the results of this study helpful. The findings encourage educators and trainers to avoid stereotyping learners' abilities based upon culture or the specifications of cultural typology models.

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