

# The Influence of Body Language on First Impressions – A Study

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**Abstract:** *In daily life people use their body language sub-consciously and effectively. Some research findings have suggested that two thirds of communication and at least 75% of all classroom communication is nonverbal. Therefore, body language makes a great difference in helping people to make and maintain a solid first impression in front of others. This study tries to explain various body movements, gestures and facial expressions that could help people to leave a good impression on others and to decode behaviors correctly and behave accordingly..*

**Keywords:** Body Language, Communication, First Impression, Non-Verbal communication

## I. INTRODUCTION

Nonverbal communication, also called manual language, is the process of sending and receiving messages without using words, either spoken or written. Similar to the way that italicizing emphasizes written language, nonverbal behaviour may emphasize parts of a verbal message.

The term nonverbal communication was introduced in 1956 by psychiatrist Jurgen Ruesch and author Weldon Kees in the book "Nonverbal Communication: Notes on the Visual Perception of Human Relations."

Nonverbal messages have been recognized for centuries as a critical aspect of communication. For instance, in "The Advancement of Learning" (1605), Francis Bacon observed that "the lineaments of the body do disclose the disposition and inclination of the mind in general, but the motions of the countenance and parts do not only so, but do further disclose the present humour and state of the mind and will."

Types of Nonverbal Communication

"Judee Burgoon (1994) has identified seven different nonverbal dimensions:"

Kinesics or body movements including facial expressions and eye contact;

Vocalics or paralanguage that includes volume, rate, pitch, and timbre;

Personal appearance;

Our physical environment and the artifacts or objects that compose it;

Proxemics or personal space;

Haptics or touch;

Chronemics or time.

"Signs or emblems include all of those gestures that supplant words, numbers, and punctuation marks. They may vary from the monosyllabic gesture of a hitchhiker's prominent thumb to such complex systems as the American Sign Language for the deaf where nonverbal signals have a direct verbal translation. However, it should be emphasized that signs and emblems are culture-specific. The thumb and forefinger gesture used to represent 'A-Okay' in the United States assumes a derogatory and offensive interpretation in some Latin American countries." (Wallace V. Schmidt et al., *Communicating Globally: Intercultural Communication and International Business*. Sage, 2007)

What is Body Language and How is it Important?

Body language encompasses nonverbal cues such as our posture, hand gestures, and movements. According to experts, nonverbal communication, including body language, constitutes a significant portion of overall communication, estimated to range from 70% to 93%. This implies that while we employ verbal communication, our words, to express our thoughts and opinions, our body language often conveys even more information to our audience than we may realize. Body language plays a crucial role when engaging in public speaking or addressing audiences of various sizes.

It serves to augment and emphasize the verbal message by utilizing hand signals, gestures, and postures, allowing us to convey emotions and intentions that words alone may not adequately capture.

In essence, body language provides a means to interpret a person's true thoughts and feelings beyond their spoken words. It offers additional insights into unspoken emotions, which can be particularly valuable in a professional setting. In the workplace, effective utilization of body language can help express enthusiasm for projects, show support for one's team and their achievements, or convey friendliness towards new team members. Leveraging body language can make it easier to engage in conversations with colleagues and team members, ultimately aiding in the achievement of workplace goals and objectives.

#### Objectives

- To understand the importance of Body Language in human beings
- To determine how Body Language, as nonverbal communication, influences first impressions.

## II. UNDERSTANDING FIRST IMPRESSIONS

In psychology, a first impression is the initial encounter between two individuals, where one forms a mental image of the other. The accuracy of this impression varies based on both the observer and the person, object, or scene being observed. First impressions encompass a wide array of attributes, such as age, race, culture, language, gender, physical appearance, accent, posture, voice, group dynamics, economic status, and the time available for assessment. These initial judgments significantly impact how individuals are treated and perceived in various aspects of daily life. Remarkably, it takes just one-tenth of a second for people to form these swift conclusions when meeting someone for the first time. First impressions represent nearly instantaneous assessments we make upon encountering someone new. Individuals swiftly gauge factors like trustworthiness, physical strength, and potential harmful intentions based on subtle facial and vocal cues. These traits may exhibit slight variations across different cultures. First impressions wield substantial influence in diverse settings, but their significance is particularly pronounced in the professional realm. This is due to the fact that making a favorable first impression can have a profound impact on one's career. Whether attending job interviews, meeting with clients, or engaging in sales, comprehending the value of creating a positive initial impression is crucial. When you succeed in making a positive first impression, people are far more likely to remember you, setting you apart as a unique individual in comparison to those who leave little to no impression at all.

### RELATION OF BODY LANGUAGE AND FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Initial impressions always carry significant weight because they form quickly and are challenging to alter once established. The saying, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression," underscores its importance. According to experts, people form judgments about new situations within the first thirty seconds, highlighting the substantial role of nonverbal signals in creating a favorable first impression. Body language, often overlooked, is a crucial element in establishing a positive initial impression and serves as our primary means of communication and transcends language barriers. It conveys specific messages and intentions through physical gestures, without the need for words.

Body language is instrumental in helping us discern the underlying motives behind our words, delivering a more direct message, and understanding how others perceive and interpret our communication. Additionally, it can provide valuable insights into how people feel in new situations. The advantages of employing positive body language are manifold as it reinforces the consistency of the positive message an organization aims to convey. Nonverbal cues play a pivotal role in performance, influence, and how individuals connect with an organization, ultimately influencing their decision to return.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND THEIR IMPACT ON SOCIAL INTERACTIONS AND DECISION-MAKING

Initial judgments in social interactions and decision-making are of paramount importance, serving as the foundation on which people base their opinions and evaluations of others. First impressions are valuable because they provide a quick and effective means for individuals to assess others in various contexts, impacting personal and professional outcomes

and shaping subsequent behaviors. It is crucial to recognize the significance of first impressions while also acknowledging their limitations and the potential for bias and misjudgment. First impressions aid us in making quick judgments about a person's trustworthiness, likability, and competence, which is essential for our everyday interactions. These initial perceptions tend to leave a lasting impact and can significantly influence long-term interactions and relationships. First impressions wield substantial influence, particularly in situations like hiring, dating, or choosing business partners. Cultural norms and personal biases play a significant role in molding these initial judgments, as what constitutes a positive first impression can vary widely among different cultures and individuals. While first impressions hold considerable power, it is possible to overcome negative ones through sustained positive interactions and consistent behavior that contradicts the initial assessment.

### **IMPROVING BODY LANGUAGE FOR STRONG FIRST IMPRESSIONS**

1. Maintain consistent eye contact when someone is talking to signal your attentiveness. Your facial expressions also have a significant impact on how the person perceives your response.
2. Cultivate proper posture, as it is often linked to self-assuredness. The more upright your posture, the more confidence you convey to others.
3. Appropriately smile in various situations. Seek opportunities to share a friendly smile with others. This not only signifies your willingness to assist but also your positive outlook on the matter.
4. Refrain from unnecessary fidgeting or movements. Restless behavior can be distracting and divert the person's focus from the subject at hand.
5. Maintain an open stance, as even this seemingly minor detail can enhance your approachability.
6. Be Mindful of your tone, as it can significantly shape how your message is perceived. It's crucial to control your tone, especially when dealing with challenging support cases.
7. Speak confidently, loudly, and clearly. The volume and clarity of your voice can convey your confidence in your response. Avoid mumbling and pay attention to your speaking pace, as speaking too quickly can lead to confusion.
8. Actively engage as a listener. Besides maintaining eye contact, use other physical cues during virtual meetings, such as nodding to indicate understanding or agreement and leaning in when appropriate.

### **III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Ashley Tulio, Communication Specialist, in his article 'The Role of Body Language in Interpersonal Communication and First Impressions, nonverbal communication, the role of facial expressions, gestures, and posture in conveying information' opines that body language encompasses the utilization of physical actions, facial expressions, and personal mannerisms as a means of conveying messages without words. Non-verbal behaviors have the potential to establish comfort, foster trust, and establish connections with others. Conversely, they can also lead to confusion, generate tension, and create uncomfortable atmospheres. In the author's own words, he says, "Personally, I've always been intrigued by the ability to interpret someone's body language because I've found myself in situations where a person's non-verbal cues convey something different from what they are saying, or vice versa." Non-verbal communication can influence our spoken language by either emphasizing our message, contradicting our words, strengthening our statements, altering the intended meaning, or complementing our verbal communication. Body language is typically instinctual and automatic, rather than consciously controlled behaviour.

Body Language draws upon various non-verbal elements, including:

Facial expressions - Individuals utilize their facial features to express fundamental emotions like surprise, happiness, anger, fear, sadness, and disgust, and these expressions significantly impact conversations by allowing others to interpret the emotional context. The human face is incredibly expressive, capable of communicating a wide range of emotions without uttering a single word. Unlike some forms of nonverbal communication, facial expressions are universally understood. Whether it's happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, fear, or disgust, these expressions remain consistent across different cultures. Through the use of their eyes, eyebrows, mouth, and facial muscles, individuals can effectively convey messages. When someone smiles, frowns, rolls their eyes, or scowls, we can often glean additional meaning, especially when these expressions accompany spoken words. Facial expressions serve to underscore key

points or express emotions that may be challenging to articulate verbally. However, they can also introduce complications in communication as they are prone to being misinterpreted or misunderstood.

**Body Movement and posture** - Body movements encompass gestures, posture, head and hand motions, as well as entire body actions. They can serve to strengthen or underscore what someone is conveying and also provide insights into a person's emotions and attitudes. However, there's potential for body movements to contradict spoken words.

**Body language** enhances and amplifies the verbal message through the use of hand signals, gestures, and postures. It enables us to convey emotions and intentions that might not be adequately expressed through words alone.

**Gestures** - A gesture constitutes a non-verbal or non-vocal mode of communication, wherein visible bodily movements convey specific messages, either as a substitute for or in conjunction with spoken language. These movements can involve the hands, face, or other body parts. Unlike non-verbal actions that lack explicit messaging, such as pure expressions or spatial relationships, gestures enable individuals to convey a range of emotions and thoughts, encompassing disdain, hostility, approval, and affection. Often, they complement spoken words with body language. Gesticulation and speech operate separately but can combine to enhance and clarify the intended meaning. Gestures encompass actions such as waving, pointing, and hand movements during speech.

**Eye contact** - Maintaining eye contact during a conversation is crucial as it demonstrates one's attentiveness and genuine interest in the ongoing discussion. This visual connection in a conversation resembles a rhythmic exchange between individuals engaged in a dialogue or chat. However, it's important to avoid excessive staring. It's easy to become engrossed in a narrative, eagerly awaiting the next punch line or hanging on to every spoken word, inadvertently sending unintended messages through your eye contact. Prolonged staring can make both the speaker and the listener feel uneasy, making it challenging to strike the right balance of maintaining just the right amount of eye contact without overdoing it. Visual cues, especially through eye contact, are crucial in non-verbal communication. The eyes reveal a wealth of information, including honesty, hostility, attraction, and affection. Maintaining eye contact is vital in conversations, as it demonstrates empathy, interest, and engagement in the discussion.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This research paper has explored the fascinating relationship between body language and first impressions, shedding light on the significant impact that non-verbal cues have on our initial judgments of individuals. Our brains are hardwired to quickly interpret and respond to non-verbal signals, making body language a powerful tool in the formation of first impressions. From the way we stand and gesture to our facial expressions and eye contact, every aspect of our body language plays a crucial role in shaping how we are perceived by others. Social situations effectively, and ultimately create more meaningful and positive relationships. In a world where first impressions can have a lasting impact on our personal and professional lives, it is crucial to recognize the vital role that body language plays in shaping these initial judgments. By continuing to study and understand the dynamics of body language and first impressions, we can enhance our ability to connect with others and navigate.

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