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## Handshake: A Healthy Shake For Sound Social Interaction: An Underrated

### Part of Non Verbal Communication-

#### Abstract

Non verbal language has long been recognised as the bodily cues that one gives away, unknowingly or knowingly, expressing more than what just words can say. Although most of these bodily cues are subconscious behaviours handshake has been socially accepted as a tool for interaction or a form of icebreaker between people who show inclination towards social interaction. As a social cognitive behavior, handshake is widely used by people of all regions, ages, gender and strata. It is a gesture that one observes in the formative years and adapts as one evolves in the social circles. What one doesn't realise is the fact that 'Handshake' is an

art and speaks volumes about a person's personality, status and upbringing. The art, fortunately, can be learnt and used for communicating feelings, position and intentions. It can also help one understand what others are communicating nonverbally, thereby becoming more successful in social and professional life. The fact that a simple handshake is capable of communicating great emotions can also be enumerated by the example that hands are proffered each time we want to convey the feelings of compassion, solidarity, sympathy and even pity. The present paper is an attempt to discuss handshake as a communication tool and to understand various forms of handshakes and their interpretation so as to establish a more acceptable and successful form to attain the desired result whether it's developing amicability or despicability.

### Introduction

The world woke up to the existence of something as normal as a 'Hand Shake', when President of the United States of America, withheld a handshake from Chancellor Angela Merkel during a White House photo op. The world saw it as a gesture to declare a warfare and Macron himself termed it as "Not innocent". It is a clear case of body language being used for publicly announcing displeasure. The incident became a huge topic of discussion on news channels and in social and political circles. The pervasiveness of nonverbal communication is well acknowledged, and its importance lies in the fact that only seven percent of communication takes place through the words and the remaining ninety three percent gets expressed by other than linguistic means. Touch or Haptics, being the earliest means of making contact with others finds a place of pride in the communication matrix. Researchers have cataloged twelve different kinds of touches, including "positive", "playful", "control", and "ritualistic" Some kinds of touch indicate varying degrees of aggression. Others signify types of relationships. Handshake comes in the category of Social/Polite. (Adler & Rodman, 1991)

So why does Mr.Trump feel the need to physically maneuver people like this, and what does it say about his character?

There are several possible explanations for Trump's "yank-shake". One is that Trump has an irresistible urge to bring people closer to him, to get them on side, and this expresses itself in his habit of pulling people towards him. In support of this explanation it's worth noting that

there are occasions when, having pulled someone towards him, President Trump will switch to a more intimate upright handclasp, which of course requires even closer proximity.

Another explanation for the “yank-shake” is that it enables Mr. Trump to impose himself on the situation by catching the other person unawares and doing something that they hadn’t anticipated. After all, when they’re shaking hands with the president, who would expect to have their arm almost wrenched out of its socket? It’s noticeable that Trump’s “yank-shake” has a lot in common with his political pronouncements – they’re erratic, unpredictable, and self-serving, and they don’t always conform to the other goals that he’s trying to achieve.

But the real clue is to be found in the natural, underlying logic of greetings. Physical greetings are motivated by two principles: the need to express power relations or the need to express solidarity. All power greetings – whether they involve bowing, curtsying, or prostration – are asymmetrical. In other words, the actions of respect performed by one person are not performed by the other. Greetings of solidarity, on the other hand, are defined by their symmetry. In the handshake, for example, the fact that both people perform the same actions makes them equal to each other – the symmetry in their actions reinforces the symmetry in their relationship.

There are of course ways that people can subvert the vital symmetry of the handshake – for example, by applying a vice-like grip, pumping the other person’s hand too vigorously, or rotating the wrist so that your own hand ends up on top and the other person’s underneath. These little attempts at one-upmanship – rather like the minor infractions that we witness on the playing field – are still acceptable, even though they lie outside the letter of the law. They don’t do any serious damage to the essential symmetry of the handshake.

It’s hard to escape the conclusion that Trump’s attachment to it lies in the fact that it enables him to take control and impose himself on the person whose hand he’s shaking. However, by doing so he displays his disregard, possibly even his contempt, for the sacred symmetry of the handshake and the precious opportunity that it offers us to treat each other as equals. There’s no way that Trump can yank people’s hands and still claim to uphold the principles of egalitarianism.

## Review of Literature

Handshake has always been an integral part of introduction. Handshake is amongst the most critical nonverbal behaviors in the initial stage of any business relationship, such as the job interview or a meeting with a potential client. The professional handshake requires more than simply extending your hand. It requires that you practice so that you are prepared for any situation. As per New neuroscience research strangers form a better impression of people who extend a friendly handshake. The study was based on the theory of approach and avoidance behaviors in social interactions. (Dolcos, Science reveals the power of handshake, 2012)

In another study, handshakes were evaluated of several men and women. It was concluded that people with firmer handshakes were more extroverted, open to experience and less neurotic compared to those who had shaky handshakes. (Chaplin, et al., 2000) "

There is another very interesting scientific study that establishes a link between handshake and Chemosignaling, mainly found in animals, which is signified by the smelling of each other's odor to form a connect. (Semin & Farias, 2015)

In 'The Amy Vanderbilt Book of Etiquette' a guide to contemporary living, the author has described the importance of hand shake that accompanies the smile and warm tone of voice at the time of introductions. For best impact, your grip should be a firm one, a handshake of substance- but not a bone crusher or too long lasting, either. Two or three seconds is long enough to hold someone's hand in greeting. Don't let your handshake be a dismissal, lifeless one, for people tend to think that character matches a handshake. (Baldrige, 1983)

Whether you are a man or woman, extend your hand. The old days are gone, of a man's having to wait until a woman extends her hand first before he can put out his own. Whoever gets there first puts out his or her hand.

In his article, 'Limp wrists and tight fists: What your handshake says about you'

Jesse Bering emphasised on the fact that handshake is as important part of personality as the way one walks is a reflection of one's personality. (Bering, 2010)

One should avoid appearing rude, wimpy, aggressive, or just plain gross, Shital Kakkar Mehra in her book *Business Etiquette – a Guide for the Indian Professional* has listed out the many tips for creating a positive and assertive first impression. (Mehra, 2012)

Handshake, like any other thing on the planet, has evolved too. What was earlier stated as a royal practice has now become the most common gesture for all. There may have been certain reservation regarding who one should shake hands with, but, that is not the question to ponder anymore. As the society is headed towards more genderless equation between man and woman, handshake between man and woman has also become a common practice.

#### Handshake- an Acquired Skill

With a little practice and awareness, a handshake can help in creating a good first impression on the other person. It is believed that continuous self reminder and practice may help the individuals both in the professional and social interactions

#### Harmony with Other Forms of Communication

A good handshake is important but it still remains a cog in the wheel of the overall process of communication. It is a part of the coordinated effort with other non-verbal initiatives on the one hand and the verbal communication on the other. The effectiveness of the overall message lies in the harmony between the two as well as the sub components of the nonverbal communication. There is a need for a perfect match between words, paralanguage, and various components of body language including handshake. For example, while congratulating a person, the pitch, & volume will be higher, duly supported by a firm handshake, but it should be much controlled at the time of offering condolences. In fact, the handshake in the latter scenario would feel more like holding hands.

#### Time it Right

Many a time, people are in a hurry to pass on their business cards, especially those who are in sales or other promotional ventures, thus compromising on the quality of handshake. The right way would be to wait until some kind of conversation has taken place after a handshake followed by a brief introduction. For better impact,

hand shake should be considered a central activity to be complemented by a direct eye contact and a smile. (Castro, 2017)

#### Handshake and women

Women often find themselves at an uncomfortable situation during a handshake. It is almost always they need to use their discretion before taking a proffered hand or before proffering their own hand for a shake. Although, at workplaces and urban areas, handshake is getting acceptance between genders, one is still not sure how one particular individual is programmed about the same.

If one evaluates the etiquette quoted in earlier days, handshake was supposed to be only between male members and it was a woman's prerogative to decide if she wanted to extend her hand or not. But as we are becoming more genderless at workplace this particular rule appears archaic and discriminative. In a recent news paper article it was very clearly stated that women who are more accepting towards handshakes enjoy better affinity and success at workplace. It may be true to some extent but it is also true that women who shake hands indiscriminately are often snubbed by some male members and are greeted with folded hands instead.

#### Gender and Cultural Sensitivity

As brought out earlier, the gender is gradually becoming a non- issue once we come to different sets of etiquette. It all boils down to mutual respect and courtesies. The handshake between persons of different genders need not be merely touching the fingers, in fact it can send wrong signals as it may be perceived that a person is being treated as a female rather than a business associate. However, a gentleman needs to be observant to be able to optimize response keeping in view the comfort level of the other person.

In most of the international business settings, the handshake has become an accepted touch between business people when they first meet, replacing, or complementing traditional greeting rituals, but the type of handshake varies widely. Generally speaking, the westerners prefer a firm handshake, which is seen as a symbol of strength and character. But even within Europe some differences are noticeable. The French have a much softer handshake as

compared to the Germans or Americans. There are other variants too, for example in the middle east, the men place their free hand on the forearm of other person, a trend also seen in India, often an indicator of their patronizing behavior. (Beamer & Verner, 2011)

When to shake hands:

There can be several occasions when it is customary to shake hands. Apart from the time of the greeting, we also shake hands when we are introduced to somebody, when saying goodbye, as a gesture of appreciation or felicitation and also when one is offering condolence. It simply reiterates the fact that handshaking is a mean to convey amicability and support.

Are you offering a dead fish?

A limp handshake leaves a lot for imagination for the one who receives it. Amy Castro called it a weak handshake but it is not just that; it can also convey disgust, distance, unwillingness and a lot more. A firm handshake, on the other hand, can convey positive emotions and bonding.

How many pumps?

Too many pumps can make the situation awkward for both. Not more than two to three pumps are needed for the friendly gesture. Too many shakes can also be physically uncomfortable and cause pain to some. Also, no matter how aggressive and active you are, the shake should be from your elbow and not the shoulder.

Some may decide that handshake is the right time to display the show of strength by crushing the poor receiver's hand; not really a good idea, though. It makes you look aggressive and unprofessional.

Some people, on the contrary want to give a soft, ladylike shake, especially when dealing with women. This kind of a handshake is not advisable for women, leave alone men. A firm but not crushing hand shake conveys just the right amount of friendliness and shouldn't go beyond that.

### The right sequence

In case of a first meeting, when exchanging business card is also the demand, make sure you shake hand first, exchange some pleasantries and then dig out the business card. If not followed in that order, handshake will appear more like a parting shot than a greeting gesture.

Do we need to use both the hands?

One might think that using both hands will show more warmth and affection. Whether to use one hand or two will depend a lot on your personal equation with the person you're shaking hands with. If it is a first time handshake, avoid using both hands. In professional scenario also it is advisable that only one hand is used.

### Handshake and culture

Although, a handshake is an accepted global norm, it differs across boundaries owing to the sensitivities attached to a particular culture. Americans prefer firm handshake like their German counterparts who also prefer a slight bow with the handshake. French like a soft handshake and Japanese go for an extended arm with a slight bow. People in Asian countries like to place the free hand on the forearms.

(Beamer & Verner, 2011)

### Conclusion

It is an undisputed fact that handshake is not only a reflection of a personality, it also reflects background, intellect, upbringing and amongst other person's confidence level. Thus it becomes inevitable for professional behavior and acceptance to understand the nuances of 'Handshake'.

Human sensitivities are a significant aspect of etiquette and therefore it also has its effects on handshake. Every enthusiastic handshake needs to address sensitivities whether it's about gender, emotional or cultural so that the end result of the gesture is pleasant.

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