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A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Argumentativeness Among Christians in France and Britain

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Abstract

This study analyzes the differences in argumentativeness between France and Britain. A total of 521 individuals in France ($n = 244$) and Britain ($n = 277$) participated in this study. Results indicate British Christians had a lower level of argumentativeness than French Christians. Religiosity was a nonsignificant predictor of total argumentativeness in France. However, in Britain, religiosity significantly predicted 37% of total argumentativeness.

Keywords: Argumentativeness, Religiosity, Cross-cultural Comparison, France, Britain

Introduction

Over the past thirty years, a plethora of research has examined cross-cultural differences in communication traits. Studies have explored cross-cultural differences in communication apprehension between Americans and East Asians (Hsu, 2007; Klopff & Cambra, 1979; Yook & Ahn, 1999; Zhang, Butler, & Pryor, 1996), in self-disclosure between American and non-American students (Chen, 1995), in verbal aggressiveness (Avtgis, Rancer, & Amato, 1998; Suzuki & Rancer, 1994), and in conflict style preference (Polkinghorn & Byrne, 2001; Wilson & Power, 2004). The overwhelming majority of these cross-cultural analyses, and other analyses, focus on differences between American and East Asian populations such as China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan (Croucher, 2006, 2008).

The present study cross-culturally examines differences in one communication trait, argumentativeness. Infante and Rancer (1982) define argumentativeness as “a generally stable trait which predisposes the individual in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues and to attack verbally the positions which other people take on these issues” (p. 72). Argumentativeness studies have been conducted primarily in the United States, with a few cross-cultural analyses (Becker, 1986; Hsu, 2007; Klopff, Thompson, & Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1991; Prunty, Klopff, & Ishii, 1990; Suzuki & Rancer, 1994). We see the lack of cross-cultural studies on argumentativeness in contexts outside of comparisons between the United States and East-Asian populations as an opportunity to expand argumentativeness literature. We should not assume conclusions drawn from research predominantly comparing Americans with East
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Asian populations are cross-culturally generalizable. While previous studies offer rewarding insights into argumentativeness, more studies into communication traits like argumentativeness must be conducted on non-American and East-Asian populations. The current study fills this research gap by specifically analyzing argumentativeness in two contexts unexplored within argumentativeness literature, France and Britain. These two nations differ on Hofstede's (2001) individualism/collectivism dimension, with Britain scoring high on individualism and France scoring in the middle of the spectrum. Furthermore, scholars argue Christians in France and Britain conceptualize religion differently and are affected in their daily lives differently by their religious faith (Croucher, Oommen, Borton, Turner, & Anarbaeva, 2010; Davie, 2007). Therefore, a cross-cultural comparison of these two nations can increase understanding of this communication trait between these two nations/cultures. Moreover, France and Britain have a long history of international relations and both are significant global economic and political powers. Currently, no studies in communication studies have compared these nations, while studies in political science and religion have compared the two and offer the most comparable analyses to communication research (Bonner, 2005; Croucher, 2006; Favell, 1998; Fetzer & Soper, 2005; Keaton, 2006; Laurence & Vaisse, 2006; Savage, 2004; Weller, 2006; Withol de Wenden, 1998).

Second, previous argumentativeness studies rely heavily on college-aged student samples (Hsu, 2007; Infante, 1982; Klopf, Thompson, & Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1991; Prunty, Klopf, & Ishii, 1990; Suzuki & Rancer, 1994). Student samples offer a convenient sample for researchers. Granted, student samples do provide interesting insight into communication behaviors/traits; however an examination of traits such as argumentativeness among non-students will more than likely increase the generalizability of results and increase the external validity of the study's findings (Hsu, 2007).

Along with sampling limitations, there are other relevant factors that have been overlooked in cross-cultural research. We intend to rectify this by considering particularly significant, yet overlooked variables. In particular, we focus on respondents' religious identification and or religiosity. Alston (1975) defines religiosity as "the degree of one's connection or acceptance of their religious institution, participation in church attendance and activities, as well as one's regard for the leaders or the religion and church" (p. 166). Geertz (1973) asserts religion is an integral part of culture, however very few studies in cross-cultural communication operationalize religion as a variable, even though religious differences could influence various psychological/cultural traits (Cohen & Hill, 2007). Rancer and Avtgis (2006) assert psychological and cultural traits have a significant influence on individuals' communication traits. Specifically, Rancer and Avtgis argue psychological and cultural background can influence how an individual approaches aggressive communication or argument. Yet, little research has examined an individual's strength of religious identification or religiosity (Allport & Ross, 1967) and argumentativeness together. Stewart and Roach (1993) found religiosity was negatively associated with level of argumentativeness. The authors assert research should examine this relationship further.

Thus, given the status of current argumentativeness literature, we see opportunities for expanding the literature. This study compares argumentativeness between self-identified Christians in France and Britain. To conduct this analysis, a review of literature of argumentativeness, and religiosity follows. Then, the method, results and discussion for this analysis are provided.

Review of Literature

Argumentativeness

Infante and Rancer (1982) conceptualize argumentativeness as a communication predisposition. Individuals tend to vary in their degree of argumentativeness. High argumentatives have great confidence in their abilities to argue, whereas low argumentatives have little confidence (Infante & Rancer, 1982). Martin and Anderson (1996) found assertive communicators to be more argumentative. In their study the researchers found argumentative communicators keenly approach argumentative situations. It should also be noted that highly argumentative individuals feel excited while approaching arguments and display no desire to avoid arguments.

To describe argumentativeness, Infante and Rancer (1982) outline two factors – tendency to approach argument ARG_{AP} and tendency to avoid argument ARG_{AV} . An individual's overall argumentativeness or ARG_{GT} is ARG_{AP} minus their ARG_{AV} . Thus, the greater the tendency to approach argument and the lesser the tendency to avoid argument, the higher an individual's overall argumentativeness. High argumentatives are high on ARG_{AP} and low on ARG_{AV} . On the contrary, low argumentatives are low on ARG_{AP} and high on ARG_{AV} . A moderate argumentative would have the same levels of ARG_{AP} and ARG_{AV} (Infante & Rancer, 1982).

Argumentativeness has been linked to many traits in past research. Substantial research has linked argumentativeness to leadership and competent communication (Infante, Anderson, Herington, & Kim, 1993; Limon & La France, 2005; Martin & Anderson, 1996; Schullery, 1998), religion (Stewart & Roach 1993), age (Schullery & Schullery, 2003), and one's gender (Schullery, 1998). Past research has shown argumentativeness is positively associated with relationship outcomes because argumentative people are more competent communicators and are more capable of handling conflict without being verbally aggressive (Infante, Anderson, Herington, & Kim, 1993; Martin & Anderson, 1996).

Religiosity

Shafranske and Malony (1990) assert religiosity is how much one accepts and performs beliefs and rituals of an established church or religious organization. Level of religiosity has been shown to be a significant predictor of multiple behaviors and traits. High religiosity is linked with positive self-descriptions, certainty, and self-knowledge (Blaine, Trivedi & Eshelman, 1998). Religiosity is linked to emotion (Fuller, 2006). Croucher, Oommen, Turner, Anarbaeva, and Borton, (2008) found religiosity to be positively correlated with ethnic identity among Muslims in France and Britain. Religiosity also partially predicts conflict

style (Croucher, Borton, Oommen, Anarbaeva, & Turner, 2008) and media use preference among Muslims in France and Britain (Croucher, Oommen, Borton, Turner, & Anarbaeva, 2010). In a test of the predictive influence of religiosity/religiousness on argumentativeness among Americans, French, and British participants, Principal Investigator et al. (2010a) found religiosity significantly tempered argumentativeness ($r = -.57, p < .01$). When taking into consideration the interactions between national culture, religiousness, and self-construal, the effect of religiousness diminished but was still statistically significant.

The aforementioned studies on religiosity add to those of Stewart and Roach (1993), who found high argumentatives argued more than low argumentatives about religious than about nonreligious issues. While Infante and Rancer (1982) restricted their definition of argumentativeness to “controversial” issues only, Stewart and Roach (1993) found high argumentatives also valued non-controversial issues over controversial issues. Less religious individuals were found to show more desire to argue than highly religious individuals. The relationship between whether an individual is highly religious (high religiosity) or less religious (low religiosity) and the level of argumentativeness reveals the link between religiosity and argumentativeness. Thus, combining research on religiosity, with previous research on age and education concerning argumentativeness, we propose the following research questions comparing individuals in France and Britain:

RQ1: Is there a significant difference between British and French Christians in terms of total argumentativeness?

RQ2: To what extent does religiosity predict total argumentativeness between these two groups?

Method

Participants and procedures

A total of 521 individuals in France ($n = 244$) and Britain ($n = 277$) participated in this study. French participants ranged in age from 18-63 ($M = 31.13, SD = 8.71$) and British participants ranged in age from 18-45 ($M = 26.72, SD = 6.62$). In France, men made up 58.2% of the sample and the sample in Britain consisted of 56.3% men. All participants were asked their citizenship and only self-declared citizens of France and Britain were included in the analysis. Individuals self-identified their religious faith; based on this self-identification, the 521 self-identified Christians emerged for statistical analysis. Individuals voluntarily filled out the survey without offers of compensation. Unlike the overwhelming majority of previous studies in cross-cultural research and communication studies, this sample consisted of less than 10% students. The remainder of the participants were college graduates, individuals who did not attend college, professionals, and miscellaneous laborers who were recruited through social networks held by the principal investigator. See Table 1 for more in-depth information on participant demographics. Surveys were completed at various locations, including cafés, bus stops, train stations, at universities, in hotel lobbies, and in individuals' homes. In some cases, a snowball sampling of participants

took place. Granted, this sampling design does not involve random probabilistic sampling; it represents a case of “sampling to” as opposed to “sampling from” a population. Sampling to a population represents a hypothetical population, whose nature can to a certain extent be understood only based on the socio-demographic characteristics. However, it does represent a larger group to which results may be generalized (DeMaris, 2004). The diversity of the sample, while still a convenience sample, should limit the potentially negative effects on generalizability and external validity of using only a student sample.

Table 1
Demographic Information for Participants in France and Britain

Variable	France		Britain	
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>
Gender				
Male	142		156	
Female	102		121	
Age		31.13		26.72
Highest Education Completed				
Grade School		2		
Some High School		4		
High School Grad.		7		15
Some University		85		97
Completed Bachelor's		63		101
Some Grad. Education		45		25
Completed Grad. Ed.				77

Instruments

Argumentativeness scale. The argumentativeness scale is a twenty-item scale utilizing 5-point Likert-type questions that measure argumentativeness in individuals. The items range from “1” *almost never true*” to “5” *almost always true*. Sample items include: “I enjoy avoiding arguments” and “I have the ability to do well in an argument.” The scale consists of two components – the tendency to approach argument and the tendency to avoid argument. When combined the latter components provide the sum measurement of one’s general tendency to argue (Infante & Rancer, 1982). Thus, positive scores point to high argumentativeness, and negative scores show low argumentativeness. Reliability for the total argumentativeness scale was .88 in Britain and .86 in France.

Measure of religiosity. To ascertain the level of religiosity, the 25-item Measure of Religiosity (MOR) was used (Croucher, Oommen, Turner, Anarbaeva, & Borton, 2008). This scale was developed to effectively measure religiosity cross-culturally and across different religions. Of the 25 items on the MOR, 10 items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging between *never* to *very often*. Sample items include: “I attend regularly scheduled religious services” and “I attend religious services held on religious holidays.” The remaining 15 items are also on a 7-point Likert scale ranging between *not at all important* to *very im-*

portant. Sample items include: “Religion is important when I choose what books to read,” and “Religion is important in who I vote for in elections for political offices.” In this study, the alpha was .91 in the French sample and .90 in the British sample.

Bilingual translation and reliability

Back-translation was used to develop the French-language questionnaire. The MOR and the argumentativeness scale were both translated into French by the author and then independently translated back from French to English by two independent bilingual French speakers. If items were not identical, the items were revised to fit into common conversation.

Analysis

To assess the difference between French and British Christians, a t-test was conducted using argumentativeness as the test variable and country (France or Britain) as the grouping variable. To evaluate the predictive power of religiosity on argumentativeness in France and Britain, regression analysis was computed. Argumentativeness served as the dependent variable, and age, education, and religiosity served as independent/predictor variables.

Results

RQ1 asked whether there was a significant difference between French and British Christians in terms of argumentativeness. Results revealed French Christians ($M = 29.42$, $SD = 10.80$) are more argumentative than British-Christians ($M = 24.54$, $SD = 11.77$); ($t = 4.91$; $df = 521$; $p < .0001$).

RQ2 asked to what extent religiosity predicted argumentativeness. Religiosity was a nonsignificant predictor of total argumentativeness in France ($b = .02$, $R^2_{adj} = .003$). In Britain, religiosity was a significant predictor of total argumentativeness ($b = -.54$, $R^2_{adj} = .37$). See Table 2 for the unstandardized regression coefficients, standard error, standardized regression coefficients, and t-values.

Table 2

Regression Model for Total Argumentativeness

Independent Variables	France				R^2_{adj}
	B	S. E	β	t	
Religiosity	.02	.04	.04	.64	.003
	Britain				
Religiosity	-.54	.04	-.61*	-12.55	.37

Note: * $p < .0001$.

Discussion

Individualism/collectivism and argumentativeness (RQ1)

The first conclusion concerns French-Christians being more argumentative than British-Christians. A traditional perspective would expect more arguments in cultures valuing the individual, regardless of whether the argument is about the issue or the person. Furthermore, group harmony and cohesion are generally considered to be important in more collectivistic cultures, which would equal less argumentativeness. Yet, we propose France's tendency toward higher argumentativeness is more in line with a functional view of argumentativeness (as a benefit to the collective good). France falls closer to the middle than Britain who is securely placed on the individualistic side of Hofstede's individualism/collectivism dichotomy (Croucher, 2006, 2008; Hofstede, 2001; Croucher, Oommen, Borton, Turner, & Anarbaeva, 2010). Therefore, it stands to reason that in a slightly more collectivist culture like France, arguing and attacking the issues rather than the other person's self concept would be more common than it would be in a more individualistic culture like Britain (Infante & Rancer, 1996). Moreover, what could be occurring in the two nations is a potential interaction between argumentativeness, national culture, and religious identification. Interactions between these variables could be at work; this is a situation Croucher et al. (2010) in another research project among Muslims and Christians in France and Britain observed. A similar pattern may be emerging here, where various variables have interacted to affect an individual's overall argumentativeness.

Argumentativeness and religiosity (RQ2)

Results of this analysis reveal religiosity to be a significant predictor of argumentativeness (approach, avoid and total) in Britain but was nonsignificant in France. In Britain, religiosity tempered an individual's total argumentativeness ($\beta = -.54, p < .0001$). The status of religion in each nation is more than likely the reason for these results. France has a staunch history of secularism, separation of church and state; in Britain, the Church of England is the official state sponsored church (Croucher, 2006, 2008; Fetzer & Soper, 2005). While church attendance in Britain and Europe continues to plummet (Croucher, 2008; Fetzer & Soper, 2005), an independent samples t-test reveals religiosity among the British sample ($M = 40.73; SD = 18.16$) was still significantly higher than among the French sample ($M = 29.89; SD = 13.13$); $t(424.59) = 7.64, p < .001$. The differing levels of religiosity due to the different political and cultural perspectives on religion in each nation affect the predictive influence of religiosity on argumentativeness.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study adds to research on argumentativeness in the following ways. First, this study reveals the significant influence of cultural-level variables such as religion and national culture. Religion is an understudied variable in social scientific analyses of communication traits (Oetzel, Arcos, Mabizela, Weinman, & Zhang, 2006; Croucher et al., 2010), yet, the effects of religion on communication traits is undeniable (Croucher, Oommen, Turner, Anarbaeva, & Borton,

2008). Moreover, the influence of national identification/culture is also a significant predictor of individual psychological and communication traits. Thus, these two variables, in collaboration with other variables, can reveal significant results about our behaviors and traits.

Second, the examination of religiosity in this study demonstrates how an individual-level variable neglected by communication scholars profoundly influences our aggressive communication. Religion and faith significantly influence an individual's argumentativeness. However, as this study reveals, few studies have empirically tested this relationship. The results of this study offer religiosity as an additional individual-level variable to add to our understanding of aggressive communication, which includes among many: argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, and conflict styles.

Limitations and Conclusion

This study has two limitations. The first limitation of this study is the use of self-report measurements. Self-reports are regularly used in communication research (Oetzel, 1998) to evaluate various traits such as argumentativeness, and other personality traits related to argumentation and conflict such as verbal aggressiveness (Infante & Wigley, 1986), and conflict styles (Rahim, 1983). However, given the nature of questions on the argumentativeness scale, individuals may have the tendency to answer questions in ways to make themselves appear less disagreeable or argumentative. This social desirability tendency was observed during data collection. Multiple participants asked the principal investigator how the research team would know if they were lying in their responses. Nicotera (1996) asserts use of the argumentativeness scale in view of the potential effect of social desirability is something researchers should consider. As Hsu (2007) asserts, a peer-rating measure could be used in the future in conjunction with self-report measures to test argumentativeness.

The second limitation or area of future research is the addition of a qualitative element to this and other argumentativeness studies. Studies into argumentativeness need to branch out into qualitative analyses. Schullery (1999) echoed this call and asserted future studies could include interviews, videotapes of interactions and ethnographic observation. Such studies would add to our understanding of argumentativeness and aggressive communication.

Ultimately, the findings of this study begin to extend our understanding into the differences in argumentativeness between the British and the French. The effects of national identification and religiosity on argumentativeness suggest individual culture influences this trait. Further communication studies should be conducted examining the interactions between these and other variables in these cultures that have been under represented in the communication literature.

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