

"EXPLORING POLITENESS AND FACE-SAVING STRATEGIES IN DIGITAL AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA, PAKISTANI TV SHOWS, AND PROFESSIONAL EMAILS"

¹*Hashima Khan*

MPhil Scholar, University of Management & Technology, Lahore

Email: hashimakhan14@gmail.com

²*Fatima Ali Razaqat*

MPhil Scholar, Superior University, Lahore

Email: fatimaalirazaqat@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates the application of politeness and face-saving strategies in online interactions, utilizing Politeness Theory as a methodological framework. Politeness Theory, as developed by Brown and Levinson, offers insights into how individuals manage their social image or "face" during communication by employing various linguistic and behavioral strategies. Employing a qualitative approach, this research examines real-life instances from diverse digital platforms such as social media, Pakistani TV shows, and email exchanges. In social media contexts, users often navigate interactions using indirect language, expressions of gratitude, and humor to maintain positive social relationships and avoid direct conflict. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter exemplify these strategies, where users frequently balance criticism with polite language or defuse tensions with humor. Pakistani TV shows, known for their rich cultural portrayals, offer valuable insights into face-saving practices in dramatic and comedic contexts. Characters often employ polite speech, deference to social hierarchies, and humor to negotiate interpersonal relationships and societal norms, reflecting broader cultural values and expectations. Email communication, particularly in professional settings, showcases how individuals uphold politeness through formal language, respectful tone, and expressions of appreciation. These practices help to mitigate potential face threats and maintain harmonious professional relationships. By analyzing these interactions qualitatively, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how politeness operates in digital and interpersonal communication within Pakistani culture and beyond. It highlights the dynamic nature of social norms and linguistic strategies in online environments, offering insights into how individuals navigate social hierarchies and maintain interpersonal harmony through language and behavior.

Keywords: *Politeness theory, face saving, humour, communication, language techniques.*

Research Questions

- How do users employ politeness strategies such as indirect language and expressions of gratitude in online interactions on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter?
- What role do politeness and face-saving strategies play in negotiating interpersonal relationships in Pakistani TV shows, considering both dramatic and comedic contexts?
- How do individuals maintain politeness and manage social face in email communication within professional settings, particularly concerning expressions of respect and formality?

Research Objectives

- To analyse the use of politeness strategies (e.g., indirect language, expressions of gratitude) in online interactions across diverse social media platforms.

- To examine the application of politeness and face-saving strategies in Pakistani TV shows, focusing on how characters use polite speech, deference, and humor to navigate interpersonal relationships.
- To investigate how individuals uphold politeness in email communication within professional settings, exploring the role of formal language, respectful tone, and expressions of appreciation.

Significance

This study explores the intricate dynamics of politeness and face-saving strategies across digital and interpersonal communication contexts, using Politeness Theory as a framework. By delving into real-life instances from social media, Pakistani TV shows, and email exchanges, it aims to uncover how individuals manage their social image or "face" through linguistic and behavioral strategies. Understanding these practices is crucial as digital platforms reshape communication norms globally. Specifically, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Pakistani culture, navigate social hierarchies and maintain harmonious relationships online. Insights gained from this study can inform digital etiquette guidelines and enhance cross-cultural communication competence, benefiting both individuals and organizations operating in increasingly interconnected and multicultural environments. Moreover, by highlighting the adaptability and universality of politeness strategies, the study offers valuable implications for theories of communication and social psychology in digital spaces.

Introduction

In today's digital age, communication has transcended traditional boundaries, influencing how individuals manage their social interactions and identities online. Politeness Theory, developed by Brown and Levinson, offers a robust framework to explore how people navigate these interactions by strategically managing their "face" their public self-image in various communicative contexts. This study investigates the application of politeness and face-saving strategies across diverse digital platforms, such as social media, Pakistani TV shows, and email exchanges, aiming to elucidate the dynamic interplay between culture, communication, and technology.

Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have revolutionized interpersonal communication, offering new avenues for expression but also introducing unique challenges in maintaining social harmony. Users often employ indirect language, expressions of gratitude, and humour to mitigate conflict and uphold positive relationships. For instance, criticisms are often softened with polite language or humour to lessen potential face threats and preserve social cohesion. By analysing real-life interactions on these platforms, this study seeks to uncover patterns in how politeness strategies are adapted and employed in the digital realm.

Pakistani TV shows provide a rich cultural tapestry where politeness and face-saving practices are prominently displayed. Characters navigate complex social hierarchies and norms through polite speech, deference to authority figures, and strategic use of humour. Whether in dramatic narratives or comedic sketches, these shows offer valuable insights into how politeness serves as a tool for negotiating interpersonal relationships and reflecting broader cultural values. By examining these portrayals, the study aims to deepen our understanding of cultural-specific manifestations of politeness and their implications for social interaction.

Email communication, particularly in professional settings, represents another important context where politeness is crucial. Formal language, respectful tone, and expressions of appreciation are common strategies employed to maintain professionalism and interpersonal

harmony. Understanding how individuals uphold politeness in these environments contributes to insights on organizational communication practices and the role of etiquette in digital correspondence.

By employing a qualitative approach, this research delves into real-life instances to capture the nuances of politeness strategies in action. Qualitative methods allow for a nuanced exploration of the contextual factors influencing communication choices and the subtle variations in politeness across different digital and interpersonal contexts. Through in-depth analysis of language use and behavioural strategies, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how individuals manage their social image and navigate interpersonal relationships in diverse communication settings.

Overall, this introduction sets the stage for a detailed exploration of politeness and face-saving strategies in digital and interpersonal communication, highlighting their significance in shaping social interactions across cultural and technological boundaries. By examining these dynamics, the study not only contributes to theoretical advancements in communication studies but also offers practical insights for enhancing digital communication practices and fostering cross-cultural understanding in an increasingly interconnected world.

Literature Review

The concept of "face," integral to theories of linguistic politeness, signifies a universally recognized social value in interactions across cultures and languages (Watts, 2003). Goffman (1967) defines face as the positive public image individuals uphold during social interactions. Participants in conversations maintain and enhance each other's face through verbal and nonverbal cues, a process known as face-work. For instance, declining a birthday invitation indirectly using apologetic language or gestures illustrates how individuals manage face in communication. This concept is pivotal in understanding the interpersonal dynamics of language use, encompassing all expressions that affirm one's social standing. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) presents unique challenges due to its constraints on contextual cues, leading to potential ambiguity and misunderstandings. Park (2007) emphasizes the importance of effective interpersonal communication in enhancing group collaboration in online educational settings. Radford (2006) highlights those relational aspects significantly influence clients' perceptions of successful face-to-face interactions. Similarly, Ruppel and Fagan (2002) found that interpersonal qualities such as friendliness and politeness are crucial for the success of instant messaging chat reference services. **(Park, 2008)**

The study investigated the phenomenon of friends' phubbing, defined as using a cell phone in the presence of a relational partner, through the perspective of politeness theory. Both quantitative and qualitative data gathered from 404 participants showed that while many participants accepted this behavior without considering it a threat to their face, some viewed it as face-threatening, especially to positive face, resulting in various negative emotional responses. Behaviors like frequently checking the phone or engaging in solo phone activities scored highest in terms of threatening positive face. Most participants chose not to react to this behavior. Findings suggested that those who perceived phubbing as face-threatening were more likely to respond with politeness strategies, although no single preferred strategy for response emerged from the data. **(Lynne Kelly, 2019)**

The concept of "face" and politeness in linguistic pragmatics still revolves around the theoretical framework outlined by Brown and Levinson (1987). Extending Goffman's (1967) definition of "face" as a desirable social image, the authors suggested the elaborate typology of communicative strategies including bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies (indirect). Such strategies are used as redressive acts against Face

Threatening Acts, namely actions that could possibly harm a listener's need for respect and approval (positive face) or his/her autonomy (negative face). Conversely, it should be stated that bald on-record or off-record strategies (like irony and rhetorical questions) are employed more often when there is an involvement of comedians or informal guests since they act as humorous tools rather than means of creating social distance. It reflects the tendencies observed within media linguistics, according to which, as suggested by Bartłomiejczyk (2020), cultural and political considerations influence the discourse of target audiences. Hence, the usage of linguistic devices under discussion in Pakistani media serves as a reflection of the complicated process of balancing social appropriateness and entertaining character of the "exhibitory" talk show genre. **(Shafi et al., 2025)** Politeness acts as an important redressive mechanism in these interactions. Based on Brown & Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, academics have found that both hosts and guests deal with Face Threatening Acts (FTAs). Within the realm of South Asian media studies, this consists of an intricate interplay of positive face, which refers to the desire to be liked, and negative face, which is linked to the need for freedom. According to Blum-Kulka (1989), these processes are inherently rooted in culture, and in Pakistan, politeness is shown by being indirect and using honorifics when discussing sensitive subjects. Moreover, the notion of identity on digital talk shows is considered more dynamic and less static since identity construction is regarded as "discursive production" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The notion of "discursive production" can be understood in the context of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor, according to which participants play the role of vulnerable beings while positioning themselves in both "frontstage" and "backstage." The process of performing identity becomes even more complicated because of the issue of context collapse; speakers should be oriented toward many audiences at once (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Thus, it can be stated that the reviewed literature suggests that digital talk shows are arenas of linguistic performance. **(Ishfaq et al., 2025)** However, recent sociopragmatic analyses of the politeness concept in Pakistan have been more inclined to criticize the application of Western-based politeness theory and propose conducting community-based investigations that would account for indigenous values. Thus, according to Kazim and Bhatti (2025), politeness in Central Punjab is a socially constructed practice based on such notions as izzat (honor), kinship indexing, and community-based solidarity. Contrary to the universally applicable 'face saving' paradigm presented by Brown & Levinson (1987), pragmatic competence in Punjabi culture centers on preserving harmony and social obligations rather than personal freedom. The results of fieldwork indicate that indirectness is the major politeness strategy used by the speakers in performing speech acts, such as requestives and refusals. The use of kinship indexing (chacha, baji, ustad) and honorifics can be considered as a significant marker of politeness as well. Age and hierarchical structure are recognized as major factors influencing linguistic behavior since younger people tend to apply significantly higher degrees of mitigation and hedging when addressing elderly people. Moreover, the pragmatics competence in this particular case would not only refer to the grammatical knowledge but also include the aspects of cultural competence and multimodal competence, such as tone and body language. Recent studies reveal that the above-mentioned native conventions have become so much ingrained within the native speakers that they tend to be carried even in multilingual settings and help Punjabi speakers deal with English and Urdu. Overall, the move towards ethnography is vital in order to capture the sequential and interactional process of being polite in the Punjabi language. **(Kazim & Iqbal Bhatti, 2025)**

The management of words related to delicate topics such as death, body excretions, and religion constitutes a crucial issue in communication that calls for the application of politeness

strategies. The fundamental principle of negotiation in the case of taboo words is the concept of "face," according to Goffman (1967). It refers to a person's image that he or she wants to portray before others. Komiljon o'g'li (2025) observes that taboo language necessarily constitutes a Face-Threatening Act (FTA), which may offend a person's positive face by rendering him or her unsophisticated and hurt his or her negative face by causing embarrassment and intrusion. Redressive actions, as suggested in the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), enable people to achieve social harmony in dealing with taboo words. Important strategies employed by people in this regard include euphemization, in which one substitutes coarse words with more indirect expressions, such as "passed away." Hedging constitutes another essential strategy used in communication to convey an apology ("excuse my language"). These techniques' effectiveness is dependent on the culture itself. According to Erkinov, while high-context cultures including Japan prefer indirectness and subtlety in order not to offend anyone, low-context cultures such as the United States prefer being straightforward. This difference makes sociopragmatic competence important in areas such as translation and diplomacy. It can be concluded from the literature that dealing with taboo discourse is all about balance: through the use of face-saving techniques, one can make his/her message clear but not offend others. (Komiljon o'g'li, 2024)

Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach to investigate how individuals employ politeness and face-saving strategies in online interactions, grounded in Politeness Theory. Real-life instances from diverse digital platforms social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), Pakistani TV shows, and professional email exchanges are analyzed to explore these strategies across different contexts. Data is collected through **purposive sampling** across the mentioned platforms, ensuring a broad representation of online communication scenarios. This includes capturing social media posts, scenes from Pakistani TV shows, and samples of professional emails. The selection aims to capture a wide range of linguistic and behavioral strategies used by individuals to manage their social image and navigate interactions. **Thematic analysis** is employed to examine the collected data. This involves systematically categorizing the qualitative data to identify recurring and repeated themes related to politeness strategies such as indirect language, expressions of gratitude, and humor. The analysis focuses on understanding how these strategies are adapted, adopted and employed in digital and interpersonal communication contexts or settings. **Politeness Theory** is being as a methodological framework. **Brown and Levinson** developed the Politeness Theory which actually offers insights into how individuals manage their social image or "face" during communication by employing various linguistic and behavioral strategies. Utilizing a **qualitative approach**, this research examines real life instances or scenarios from diverse digital platforms such as social media, Pakistani TV shows, and email exchanges. In social media contexts the users play the most important role as they often navigate interactions using indirect language, expressions of gratitude, and humor to maintain positive social relationships and avoid direct conflict.

Discussion and Findings

Politeness Strategies in Online Interactions: Social Media Platforms

In the realm of online interactions, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have become integral to how individuals manage their social interactions and identities. Politeness Theory provides a lens through which we can understand how users employ various strategies to maintain positive relationships and avoid conflict. Users often utilize **indirect language** on

social media to express opinions or critique without appearing confrontational. For example, instead of directly stating disagreement, users might say "I see your point, but have you considered..." This indirectness helps in softening potentially offensive remarks and preserves social harmony. Another common politeness strategy is **expressions of gratitude**. Users frequently use phrases like "Thank you for sharing" or "Appreciate your insight" to acknowledge contributions and maintain a supportive atmosphere. **Humour** plays a crucial role in diffusing tensions and fostering camaraderie on social media. Users often use memes, gifs, or witty remarks to lighten the mood and avoid conflicts. By injecting humour, individuals can navigate sensitive topics playfully, reducing the risk of face threats. On social media platforms, it can be determined that through various means and in various contexts different linguistic expressions could be determined. Keeping in the fact that how people use the theory of politeness or save their face through multiple means and ways of usage.

Insights from Pakistani TV Shows

Pakistani TV shows offer a unique cultural perspective on politeness and face-saving strategies in both dramatic narratives and comedic sketches. These shows reflect broader societal norms and values, showcasing how characters manage their social image through linguistic and behavioural cues. The characters in Pakistani TV shows often use **polite speech** to show respect and maintain interpersonal harmony. This includes addressing others with honorifics and using courteous language, which aligns with cultural expectations of deference and respect. Respect for social hierarchies is evident in how characters interact with **authority figures** such as elders or employers. Politeness is displayed through deferential language and gestures, reinforcing societal norms of hierarchy and respect. The **strategic use of humour** is skilfully employed in Pakistani TV shows to navigate complex social situations. Characters use wit and satire to address sensitive topics indirectly, thereby avoiding direct confrontation and potential face threats. According to different Pakistani comedy shows or political talk shows or morning shows, they exhibit different kinds of strategic figures. The shows like Mazaq Raat, Good Morning Pakistan, Gup Shup, Khabar Naak, Dunya Kamran Khan kay Sath and many more use the above elements to intricate and imply the politeness theory or face-saving theories for better communication.

Email Communication in Professional Settings

Email communication in professional settings underscores the importance of politeness in maintaining professional relationships and managing social face. Politeness strategies in emails are essential for conveying professionalism and respect. **Formality** in professional emails is crucial to uphold organizational etiquette and professionalism. Individuals use formal language to set the tone and convey seriousness in business communications. Maintaining a **respectful tone** is essential to mitigate potential face threats and uphold harmonious relationships. Expressions like "Please," "Thank you," and "Best regards" are commonly used to convey politeness and goodwill. Acknowledging others' contributions through **expressions of appreciation** fosters positive rapport and strengthens professional relationships. Appreciative language in emails demonstrates gratitude and reinforces mutual respect. Email communication play a significant role in the formal or professional settings. The writing style, formality of the language, expression of goodness & appreciation are the parts of it. If one doesn't structure his/her email by keeping in consideration these valuable points then the essence of a professional email would be lost and then of course it is no more a professional email or a email of standard.

Cross-Contextual Insights

Across these diverse contexts' social media, Pakistani TV shows, and professional emails the application of politeness and face-saving strategies reveals both commonalities and variations. The underlying goal across all platforms is to manage social interactions effectively, preserve interpersonal harmony, and uphold cultural norms of politeness.

Practical Implications

Understanding how individuals navigate politeness and face-saving strategies across different digital and interpersonal communication contexts has practical implications: Awareness of politeness strategies can enhance individuals' **communication skills**, enabling them to navigate diverse cultural norms and digital platforms effectively. Recognizing **cultural-specific manifestations** of politeness fosters cross-cultural understanding and competence in global communication. Organizations can develop **communication policies** that promote respectful language and behaviour across digital platforms and professional settings.

In conclusion, this study provides insights into how individuals employ politeness and face-saving strategies in online interactions, drawing from real-life scenarios on social media, Pakistani TV shows, and professional emails. By applying Politeness Theory, the study highlights the dynamic interplay between culture, communication, and technology, offering practical implications for enhancing communication strategies in diverse cultural and technological environments. As digital platforms continue to shape communication norms globally, understanding and applying effective politeness strategies are crucial for fostering positive interactions and maintaining harmonious relationships.

Conclusion

In this study, we have explored how individuals employ politeness and face-saving strategies across diverse digital and interpersonal communication contexts, using Politeness Theory as our guiding framework. Through the analysis of real-life instances from social media platforms, Pakistani TV shows, and professional email exchanges, several key insights have emerged.

Politeness Strategies in Online Interactions: Social Media Platforms

On social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, users adeptly navigate interactions through indirect language, expressions of gratitude, and humour. These strategies serve to maintain positive social relationships while avoiding direct conflict. Indirect language allows individuals to express opinions tactfully, ensuring discussions remain constructive. Expressions of gratitude play a crucial role in fostering a supportive atmosphere, where acknowledging others' contributions strengthens community bonds. Additionally, humour serves as a powerful tool for diffusing tensions and addressing sensitive topics in a light-hearted manner, thereby preserving social harmony.

Insights from Pakistani TV Shows

Pakistani TV shows provide a cultural lens through which we observe the application of politeness and face-saving strategies. Characters employ polite speech, deference to social hierarchies, and strategic humour to negotiate interpersonal relationships and societal norms. Politeness in these shows reflects broader cultural values of respect and hierarchy, illustrating how language and behaviour are used to manage social image effectively.

Email Communication in Professional Settings

In professional email communication, maintaining politeness is essential for upholding professional relationships and managing social face. Formal language, respectful tone, and expressions of appreciation are standard practices that contribute to effective communication.

These strategies not only convey professionalism but also mitigate potential face threats, ensuring harmonious interactions in organizational settings.

Cross-Contextual Insights and Practical Implications

Across these contexts' social media, Pakistani TV shows, and professional emails—the application of politeness and face-saving strategies underscores their adaptability and universality. Whether navigating online discussions, cultural narratives, or business correspondence, individuals employ these strategies to manage social interactions effectively and uphold cultural norms.

Understanding these dynamics offers practical implications for enhancing communication skills, promoting cultural sensitivity, and developing organizational policies that foster respectful communication across diverse environments. By recognizing and applying effective politeness strategies, individuals and organizations can navigate digital and interpersonal interactions with greater competence and success.

Future Directions

As digital platforms continue to evolve, future research could delve deeper into the impact of emerging technologies on politeness strategies. Additionally, comparative studies across different cultural contexts could enrich our understanding of how cultural values influence communication practices. Such investigations will contribute to advancing both theoretical insights and practical applications in the dynamic field of communication studies.

Bibliography

- Ishfaq , A., Sultan, N., & Healy, D. (2025). TURN-TAKING, POLITENESS, AND IDENTITY: A CONVERSATIONAL STUDY OF SPEAK YOUR HEART. *JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL*.
- Kazim , S., & Iqbal Bhatti , D. (2025). POLITENESS STRATEGIES AND PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN PUNJABI SPEECH COMMUNITIES: A COMMUNITY-BASED STUDY OF EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS IN CENTRAL PUNJAB, PAKISTAN. *JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL*.
- Komiljon o'g'li, E. (2024). POLITENESS THEORY AND FACE-SAVING STRATEGIES IN ADDRESSING TABOO WORDS. *Russian-Uzbekistan Conference*.
- Lynne Kelly, A. E.-O. (2019). Phubbing friends: Understanding face threats from, and responses to, friends' cell phone usage through the lens of politeness theory. *Communication Quarterly* .
- Park, J.-r. (2008). Linguistic Politeness and Face-Work in Computer-Mediated Communication,. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*.
- Shafi , S., Ahmed , T., Khalid, N., & Rahim , A. (2025). The Dynamics of Politeness and Face-Threatening in Pakistani TV Entertainment Talk Shows: Analyzing Host-Guest Interactions. *Bulletin of Multidisciplinary Studies*.