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# Facebook vs. Face-to-Face Discourse in English: A Gender-Based Study of Conversational Styles

**Abstract:** *The study highlights the major differences between Face-to-face and Facebook conversations while considering the gender-based patterns in the respective conversational styles. The authors have used an open-ended questionnaire to conduct qualitative research to make it possible. The sample consisted of 12 people aged 18-25 from different universities in Pakistan who used Facebook daily. The study finds out that face-to-face conversations are the preferred mode of conversation mainly by women as being on Facebook gives them a degree of lenience which face-to-face conversations lack. The comfortable environment on Facebook makes it more comfortable for them to be more expressive. Facebook has broken the cross-gender barriers and has made people aware that having cross-gender conversations while staying within a limit is possible, and society is slowly accepting it. The study has far-reaching implications for social media researchers as they can have further research probes into socio-cognitive dimensions of the issue from a behavioural science perspective.*

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## Introduction

Conversations have been an inevitable part of human interaction and a major way to contribute to the communication processes in everyday life. Not since always, but the conversation has been given its due rank in linguistics now, opening up more decorum for its research. From the complex process of turn-taking to the subtleties of 'repair' in conversation, it is a complete package and comes up with its own properties and distinct characteristics.

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## Background

Social media platforms are used for various communicative purposes, such as business deals, surveys, announcements and informal conversations. The recent increment in usage and access to the Internet has flooded these platforms more than before, and all these factors contribute to making conversations a casual practice between users worldwide.

Indeed there are thousands of apps and tools which are being used all over the world but the top position is occupied by tools used for communication over the whole globe. On February 4, 2004, a Harvard intellectual colossus named Mark Zuckerberg embarked Facebook, a social media website that he had established in order to link all the students of Harvard together but after 24 hours it became so much popular and began to be used by the people outside Harvard too. Six Degrees was the initial site in the world of communication which was established in 1997 but now thousands of websites and apps are in this race of artificial world. Facebook became the immense social media network in the world, with nearly 5 billion users as of 2022, and about half that number were using Facebook on a customary ground.

Students of the present era are so much indulged in different social and communicative apps and websites, especially Facebook. This has made all of their aims and goals incomplete without its presence. According to the studies of Pempek et al. (2009) it was founded that students had made it their routine to waste at least 30 minutes on Facebook as making it their part of routine. Some studies also indicated that youngsters use social networks to create and maintain friendships. Among youngsters, 07% of teens use Facebook while 26% of them use it once a day and 29% check it several times per day.49% use social network sites to develop new friendships, and 91% to carry on the existing friendship.

Media users are goal specific and they go through different apps and websites to meet their desires. Prior research has also indicated that females use social apps to keep themselves up-to-date and to be linked with the outside world just by a single click. A ten-year follow-up study showed that females are more into using different communication as well as social apps as compared to males. Females use these sites to keep their relations intact. Males spend more time on these sites for entertainment purposes. In a report from 2012, it was reported that males have a greater interest in Internet usage for gaming and entertainment. The platform brags 2.96 billion functional users every month. This makes it the most used social media platform worldwide. In 2022, Facebook's total ad remuneration amounted to 113 billion dollars.

These sites link people online by inter-communicating ranges like text status, images, videos, and exterior ties like blog posts and critiques. According to digital marketing from OPTIFY, the audience Facebook mostly has stalkers, baby boomers, fledglings, oversharers, brand expounders, nervous users, and gamers. In Pakistan, statistics show that Facebook has 37.30 users, and the justification behind this is that Pakistan is a showcase of multi-cultures, and people of different cultures of Pakistan, irrespective of their gender, interact with one another on this platform.

## Statement of the Problem

Due to the increasing saturation of social media platforms, drastic behavioural changes have been observed. A major upheaval has been seen in the patterns of discourse. Major conversations seem to occur on these platforms, and even unprofessionally, a major portion of the population is indulged in social media conversations. The research probe into this issue from conversational analytical lenses has the potential to seek the solution of this growing social problem before it gets too complex and out of control, Conversational analysis itself has been a neglected field for a long period, and it is high time to focus on the new emerging modes of conversation. Preferences of common people are to be viewed as they change over time. This study is a necessary step which needs to be taken to

open new avenues in the domain of language research.

Certain factors limit and delimit this research. Firstly, the research is of qualitative essence as it merely incorporates non-numerical data to comprehend the sentiments of distinct people. The subjective direction of our research constitutes a minor tier of measurement. It equips insight into the individual's feelings or experiences regarding the exact forte.

This research covers the two genders (male and female) based on their Facebook usage and tries to uncover any gender-related patterns. Conversational analysis reveals the major differences between Facebook and Face-to-face conversations. In conversational analysis, we introspect day-to-day communication according to certain paragons. It is an organized and functional study that explores the surface material and goes in-depth to know what happens inside the mind while interacting with someone. Furthermore, the study of conversational analysis is quite crucial because it offers an in-depth dive into routine communication, which is a basic part of the lives of human beings. Conversational analysis has its roots in ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967). Levinson (1983 p 287) claims that "the strength of the CA position is that the procedures employed have already proved themselves capable of yielding by far the most substantial insights that have been gained into the organization of conversation".

The researchers learn about the outcomes of power, culture, ethics, and morality applied to social interactions by analyzing the different imprints of talking styles. Conversational analysis has been applied to many dimensions, like education, medicine, and judiciary, where communication quality is a concern. Conversation analyzers can stem new routes to make communication easy and smooth. The conversation is substantial as it gives a deep knowledge of the threshold that daily communication has a huge role in human life in diverse settings.

## Aim, Objectives and Research Questions

This study aims to bring out, if not all, some of the major differences between Face-to-face conversations and Facebook conversations while considering the gender-based patterns evident in conversation. The authors use a questionnaire to conduct qualitative research to make it possible. The research methodology further elaborates on the method and tools used.

The research objectives are as follows:

1. To find out people's preferred mode of conversation and the reason behind it.
2. To find any gender-related patterns when conversing on Facebook and Face-to-face.
3. To find the advantages and disadvantages of both modes.
4. To find the impact Facebook has on traditional Face-to-face conversation.

There are four following research questions which are to be answered.

1. Is there any mode people prefer for conversation, and what is the reason behind it?
2. What are the gender-related patterns when conversing on Facebook and Face-to-face?
3. What are the potential advantages and disadvantages of both modes?
4. What are the impacts of Facebook on traditional Face-to-face conversations?

## Literature Review

Social media helps in the formation of new and diverse identities of individuals. Interaction and inclination towards new emerging factors play a great role in shaping identity through conversations. In "Introduction: Social Media Discourse, (Dis)Identifications and Diversities", Leppänen, Sirpa; Kytölä, Samu; Westinen, Elina; Peuronen, Saija, (2017) focus on (dis)identifications and diversities of social media communication, show approaches to identities on social media in which subjects participate and stick to the resources provided by language(s), discourse(s) and other linguistics elements, engage in identification

work, discursively observing their (lack of) similarity, sense of connection and groupings with others. The empirical studies in the book are comprised of, on the one hand, social media happenings centring on identifications and misidentifications compared to others and identifications of the very self, often by using either explicit or implicit optionality vis-à-vis the specific identification in question. On the other hand, the effectiveness and sensitivity of sociolinguistic and ethnographic, discourse analytic and socio-semiotic analyses in unravelling the dynamics of identity speculations in social media are also considered by the book.

Conversational analysis (CA) is a great tool for studying and analyzing how conversations occur, the difference between conversations happening on different platforms and more. Conversations' positive and negative effects can be studied by digging deep into their roots. In Conversation Analysis and online interaction, Meredith (2019) opines that there is an extensive amount of research has already been done on CA and online interaction resulting in a better understanding for us of some of the basic elements of online interaction, such as turn-taking, sequence organization, repair and opening sequences. The incremental access to the Internet for institutional work, such as for counselling or helplines, has shown the ultimate effect of conducting a study of aforementioned interactions using CA. However, what is known about the management of online communication tends to be based on multi-party public interaction, and there needs to be more research into modern social media phenomena, such as Twitter, Facebook and Snap chat and so on.

Since the 19th century, the perspective of men and women speaking different languages has become a burning question for most linguists and theorists. According to books like Men Are from Mars and Women Are from Venus by John Gray (1992), talking is of women, whereas men prefer action to words. Women talk for connecting with others, emotionally, whereas conversation is treated as a practical tool or a competitive sport by men. Women have listening as a vital characteristic, for building rapport with others and avoiding or defusing conflict; men confront each other more directly and are less affected by either their own or others' feelings (Gray, 1992, p. 21).

More recently, observations and differences have been linked by popular scientific writings about the working of male and female brains. (Baron, 2003; Brizendine, 2006). The famous myth prevailing in this society is that gender influences language use. However, the reason behind it is, above this fact, that both males and females and naturally different persons. Various factors force a specific gender to use a particular language structure society constructed for them. As Cameron (2000) claims, language and gender hold a complex relationship between them. Montgomery (1995) suspects a sense of variation in speech happening between men and women. One sociological point to be remembered, he states, is that 'speech differences are not clear-cut' and a collection of universal sort of differences does not exist. (p.166).

The connectivity between age and language has been a subject matter for rigorous research for a very long time, and it is studied under two aspects; one is the age-concise use of language, and the Second is the Generation's particular use of language. The former is given more priority than the latter one. Labov (1994) states that individuals preserve their speech patterns throughout their lifespans. Then the study of language in relation to generation crucially involves the study of language change. The importance of different age groups may vary from society to society. Ota, Harwood, Williams and Takai (2000, 34) found that for 18-19-year-olds, a formation of group identity in terms of age was more intense for Americans than for Japanese. Sealey (2000) provides a new approach to child language, analyzing the language used to represent and 'construct' children in contemporary British culture and exploring how the social status of being a child is represented in the language used by and to children. This pattern of research is presumed

to be the normal pattern for stable sociolinguistic variables. However, it cannot be assumed that it will be applied universally, especially, Chambers and Trudgill say (op. cit., 79), if social conditions differ.

Conversational analysis also uses various tools to check the level of interaction between individuals. The modes of conversation, the use of language, expressions and the interest in conversation can always be different and affect the findings of the analysis.

Analysis of the levels of interaction among the phone of two different areas, South England and South India, was done to know the nature of interactions. (Daniel Miller and Shriram Venkatraman, 2018). Strong social parameters (of gender and class) were seen in India, while social relationships were valued more in England. Relationships of asymmetry and reciprocity were considered to find out who interacts more on the social media platform Facebook. This research concluded with clear findings, and it was seen that people tend to behave differently on social media according to their regional, social and personal preferences.

Social media platforms have also been used to interact freely with people of different cultures and explore existing diversity. People sometimes interact with others to spend their leisure time and other times for academic or professional reasons. Such research was done, and the intercultural barrier between Hong Kong and US students was removed. (Carolin Fuchs, 2020). The studies were conducted on Facebook, and the behaviours of both parties were observed. Previously mentioned research suggested that the ability of perspective to be changed and the intention to communicate and engage are important factors for learning about different cultures. It was found that learners from Japan relied on the discourse analytic method of exchange structure analysis to note group changes and that the values of groups differed and were slightly influenced by the number of participations and by internal group norms; some groups were found to be able to generate a structure that eased learning between

cultures and let them move to perspective changes from knowledge changes.

Moreover, it was found that Hong Kong and US students were made to communicate in English by using positive words, better socially accepted alleviating terms, and more light statements with each other to continually confirm the validity of their communication and harmonious relationships. Similarly, the Facebook talking and analysis in this study gave students a chance to attain knowledge about the target language culture by minutely observing online participation. Lastly, proficiencies for intercultural knowledge further revolved around the acknowledgement and the use of online cultural and discourse tools (e.g. netiquette) and contributors' reflection on their affiance and joining in.

## Research Gaps

Social media platforms have become a crucial element in the current epoch. People of all ages have become a part of it, irrespective of their geographical background. Parallel is the case in Pakistan, with more individuals indulging in using Facebook, and no research is done to keep track of its use.

Facebook is an app commonly used for daily conversations, personal or professional, and people from different backgrounds can join it freely. While other social websites have specified functions other than conversation merely, for instance, Instagram is used for showcasing photos and videos, LinkedIn is used for browsing jobs, YouTube is used for streaming videos, and Twitter is mostly used for uploading your status in tweets. Moreover, research has yet to be done regarding the difference in the conversational styles on Facebook (online) and face-to-face (in person).

## Theoretical Framework

The authors have tried to depict the interactional/conversational differences between face-to-face and Facebook communication. The research takes support from the Conversation theory by Gordon Pask, who has done detailed and commendable

work explaining the connection between knowledge and conversation. Moreover, the most applicable theory is the Conversational Analysis given by Harvey Sacks and some facets of this theory. According to Harvey, "Conversational analysis is the analysis of talk produced with human interactions." While going in more depth, the approach of CA, which conforms to our research, is Interactional Linguistics(IL).In conversations, people try to make their conversation better by making it understandable for each other.

Conversational analysis has also been used in ethnomethodology. Communication is a mutual action consisting of one act of a speaker presenting some words and one act of a speaker identifying and recognizing what is being said.

## Conceptual Framework

The authors strive to understand the public preferences and conversational changes brought up due to the advent of Facebook and modern social media apps. Although this research mainly focuses on Facebook interactions, it also gives a brief glimpse of differences found recorded in face-to-face vs all online conversations. Clark ([1996](#)) describes communication as a joint action consisting of one act of a speaker presenting an utterance and one act of an addressee identifying and recognizing what is said. This theory combines an interest in linguistic phenomena and structures and conversational analysis.

This research focuses on notions that help determine modern man's choices and reasoning. A thorough analysis of subjective opinions and answers helps us finalize a coherent behaviour towards conversational practices. Moreover, the author also wants to know which conversation medium people find more feasible and comfortable.

## Research Methodology

This research was qualitative to understand the gender-based differences between males and females. The sample consisted of 12 people aged 18-25 from different universities in Pakistan who used Facebook daily. The research was conducted virtually by using a questionnaire which had open-ended questions. Moreover, Google Docs forms and links were given to the research participants.

## Research design

This research is explanatory and comprises a standardized retaliation from the onlookers under consideration. A mixed-method analytical approach with used to extricate the conclusion. The analytical framework of this research was enacted by uncovering perennial concerns in the feedback given by the public in contact. This study is rooted in an intricate aim that Conversational Analysis may have within the domain of Critical Discourse Analysis. CDA regards discourse as a form of social practice (Sameen et al., 2021). By doing the CDA of mass media, we come to know how humans communicate and interact with one another via verbal and nonverbal resources, which concerns communication which necessarily happens through a medium (channel) (Wimmer & Dominick, 2012; Devito, 2011).

On the other side, the theoretical framework of this research is the coalescence of Conversation theories given by Harvey Sacks and Gordan Pask. Qualitative and quantitative analysis was applied to the interview feedback for Faultless evaluation. This study is descriptive and has much significance in real-time.

## Sample

The interview was electrically conducted with 12 people based on their gender. Out of 12, 6 are females, and 6 are males. There is very from 18 to 25 years. The number of interviews was limited to keep the result as precise as possible to reduce the chances of error. Our sample, however, is not restrained within the boundaries of region, language, or culture; rather, responses were collected from both genders.

## Instrument

A hybrid interview was an essential means used in this research for some of the

participants' feedback centring on their perspective about online communication versus physical one. The interviews were conducted digitally on WhatsApp chat and phone calls. Our interview consisted of open-ended questions confirming that it would derive people's points of view about the subject matter to give a firm and beneficial conclusion.

## Data Analysis

Multiple open-ended questions were asked of the participants to know their subjective opinions to find the current conversation trends. A summary of the interview is as follows. When talking about their preferred mode of conversation, 7 out of 12 participants chose Face-to-face conversations over online or Facebook conversations. However, 1 participant chose no mode to call it their preference. When asked, "Are there any specific reasons to choose one mode over another?" the participants replied with varied answers. Many revealed that they interact with people Face-to-face more because no matter how advanced Facebook becomes, it needs to deliver the message in the right tone, and intimacy cannot be maintained. On the other hand, the minority claimed that Facebook made it easier for them to be with like-minded people and made them feel comfortable, as it is hard for them to express themselves in face-to-face conversations. A participant also said, "The main reason I chose Facebook conversation over Face-to-face conversation is that I do not feel awkward while talking this way and can speak my mind freely without looking the person in the eye or worrying about embarrassing myself by saying something stupid".

Furthermore, when participants were asked to quote some differences between both the modes, they mainly pointed out the facial expressions, body language and nonverbal cues. It was mentioned that Face-to-face conversations make communication more effective because everything is crystal clear, and messages can not be misinterpreted. On the contrary, Facebook conversations were said to be more carefree and promised

comfort, which Face-to-face conversations lacked. Participants who preferred Facebook conversations said that it was easier to talk to people on Facebook because the risk of judgment is low, while in Face-to-face conversations, your body language and all other communicative factors are being noticed. Lastly, another difference was said to be there in both modes: Facebook conversations do not reveal the whole truth, and people benefit from being whomever they want, increasing the risk of encountering fake people.

When inquired about gender-related patterns or differences in conversation styles on Facebook VS Face-to-face, participants said that on Facebook, it was easier to talk to the opposite gender as it allows every sort of discussion and communication easy. A participant said that she felt timid when she had to talk to males in Face-to-face conversations, although it was easy for her to do the same on Facebook. Flirting and abusive behaviour is also common on Facebook by males towards females. Participants also said there were many differences in both modes because of the online anonymity, behaviour, self-preservation and expression. Moreover, even on Facebook, one participant said, women tend to present themselves as more emotional beings, using more emoticons and trying to be polite.

Regarding acting differently on Facebook due to gender-related factors, the participants provided valuable feedback saying that men and women both tend to follow online trends, which they do not while engaging in Face-to-face conversations. People are also more comfortable doing Taboo talk as Facebook preserves their identity, and they can ignore the verbal damage. Online identity construction also plays an important part in behaving a certain way according to gender, according to a participant. "Men are expected to be assertive and dominant, women nurturing and emotional…" a participant commented while explaining gender roles evident in conversations.

In answer to "How comfortable do you feel expressing your thoughts and emotions on Facebook as compared to Facebook conversations?" participants said that they were more comfortable expressing themselves on Facebook than in Face-to-face conversations. One participant mentioned that they never really thought about it, while some also said the comfort level depended on the person they were talking to. Many participants said that when genders are concerned, women tend to be more comfortable expressing themselves because men are generally taught to be strong and not practice their right to express emotions. Nevertheless, the participant said that men also have grown to present themselves more openly on Facebook.

Most participants did not use a specific strategy when asked about gender-based communication strategies. A participant said that they use boundaries as their strategy, while others deemed being polite an important strategy for heart-to-heart conversations. A participant said that based on their observations, men did not care about saying no or being blunt much, but women tend to be more agreeable.

"What impact, if any, do you think Facebook conversations have on traditional Face-to-face conversations in terms of gender-based conversation styles". The question was answered by the participants with varied inclinations. Some said there is no impact, while others talked about both the positive and negative impacts. They said that Facebook conversations have made the masses aware that it is okay to develop an understanding of the opposite gender. However, it impacts negatively, too, because a person who used to converse on Facebook more can find Face-to-face unentertaining and dry. Always indulging in Facebook conversations can also cause you to lose confidence in Face-to-face conversations, participants mentioned. A participant also said that Facebook conversations have made people aware of things they were unaware of, which is good and bad, as ignorance can sometimes be bliss.

Finally, when participants were asked to pen down the advantages and disadvantages of both modes of conversation regarding gender-based communication styles, they said that Face-to-face conversations have the advantages of being more collaborative, intimate, efficient and meaningful. Disadvantages were listed as time-consuming, requiring much confidence, and fearing judgement. However, Facebook conversations were called advantageous because they are more convenient, easily accessible, more comfortable and less time-consuming. Their disadvantages were being less personal and immediate, and fear of manipulation is more evident in Facebook conversations.

## Findings

After conducting the research, it was found that Face-to-face conversations are the preferred mode of conversation for most people. The reason behind this is the raw encounter which enables people to observe the person they are talking to. It also helps them read people's expressions and thus helps to create better understanding and efficient relationships.

The gender-related patterns observed while conversing on Facebook and in Face-to-face conversations are that women and men both deem to fit in their traditional gender roles; however, being on Facebook gives them a degree of lenience which Face-to-face conversations lack. The comfortable environment on Facebook makes it more comfortable to express oneself there, although women tend to do that better than men.

Both Facebook and Face-to-face conversations have their pros and cons. Facebook conversations are comparatively more private, easily accessible and versatile. However, Face-to-face conversations are time-consuming, interrupted by outside factors and can be uncomfortable for shy and introverted people. Moreover, Face-to-face conversations can provide better access to someone's feelings and expressions and be more intimate and eye-opening. Furthermore, Facebook conversations can be less personal, asynchronous and less conducive.

Facebook conversations have impacted traditional Face-to-face conversation positively and negatively. Facebook has made people aware that having cross-gender conversations while staying within a limit is possible, and society is slowly accepting it. On the other hand, Facebook conversations have created a utopian version not available in Face-to-face conversations, so people might find it dry too.

## Conclusion

This study evaluated the responses of Facebook users to get aware of the current trends and understand people's points of view when they choose a certain mode of conversation. Moreover, it focused on gender-based patterns observed when conversing on Facebook or face-to-face. The following conclusions were drawn from the study:

- Most people prefer face-to-face conversations, while Facebook conversations are the choice of introverted people.
- Most people tend to play their traditional gender roles even when they converse on Facebook and Face-to-face.
- There are various advantages and disadvantages of Face-to-face and Facebook conversations; both modes tend to have pros and cons.
- Facebook conversations have impacted traditional Face-to-face conversation both positively and negatively.

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