

A STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA RAPPORT MANAGEMENT ON AL-JAZEERA FACEBOOK PAGE

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Abstract

This study investigates the dynamics of rapport management within user interactions on the official Facebook page of Al-Jazeera. Drawing on Spencer-Oatey's Rapport Management Theory, it examines the linguistic strategies employed by users to maintain, enhance, challenge, or neglect rapport in discussions spanning sensitive discourse categories, including religion, politics, gender, terrorism, and race. A corpus of 250 utterance tokens, collected between 2019 and 2021, was analysed using a combination of qualitative discourse analysis and quantitative statistical tools such as cross-tabulation and the Chi-square test. The findings reveal that rapport challenge is the most prevalent strategy, particularly within religious and conflict-related discussions, followed by maintenance, neglect, and enhancement. The prevalence of impoliteness and confrontational language is attributed to factors such as anonymity, perceived social distance, and the contentious nature of the topics discussed. The study establishes a statistically significant relationship between discourse categories and rapport strategies, thereby affirming that the nature of the discourse influences patterns of interaction. This research contributes to the growing field of pragmatics and computer-mediated communication by demonstrating the applicability of rapport theory in interpreting digital politeness, aggression, and interpersonal dynamics.

Introduction

Social media platforms have become pivotal spaces for contemporary public discourse, characterised by their immediacy, accessibility, and capacity to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. Within these digital environments, users engage in real-time dialogue, often navigating contentious or sensitive topics under conditions of anonymity and minimal social accountability. Facebook, in particular, fosters a unique communicative climate in which social cues are absent, yet emotional and ideological intensity is amplified. The official Facebook page of Al-Jazeera, renowned for its global reach and provocative reporting, serves as an apt context for examining the pragmatics of online interaction. This study extends prior theoretical engagement with politeness and rapport management by applying Spencer-Oatey's (2008) framework to digital discourse. It specifically focuses on how users construct, manage, or undermine interpersonal rapport in response to Al-Jazeera's news posts. The analysis encompasses 138 selected utterances from a total of 250, gathered across diverse discourse categories including religion, politics, terrorism, race, and gender, over a two-year period (2019–2021). Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates qualitative discourse analysis with inferential statistical testing, particularly the Chi-square test of independence, to identify patterns of rapport strategy deployment. The results illuminate how user interactions are shaped not solely by the content of news posts, but by sociocultural positioning, identity politics, and the structural features of computer-mediated communication. This research makes an original contribution to the field of intercultural pragmatics and digital discourse studies, offering insights into the mechanisms of online affinity and antagonism in pluralistic communicative contexts.

Methodology

Content Category for the Study

The content categories for the research are shown in Table 1.0.

Table 1.0: Content Category for Study

CATEGORY	CONTENTS
Content Category	a. News post b. Comments c. Reply
Direction of posts/comments/replies	a. Bald-on b. Negative c. Positive d. Off Record
Story Characteristics	a. Al-Jazeera news post b. Public comments c. Replies
Story Theme	a. Politics b. Religion c. Terrorism d. Current Affairs e. Diplomacy f. Violence/Conflict g. Gender h. Racism

Data Gathering Procedure

Over two hundred and fifty (250) utterance tokens were randomly selected, covering different human endeavours ranging from politics, education to the economy. The tokens were gleaned between 2019 and 2021 to cover a long period of communication behaviour. All the selected messages were read in their entirety and one hundred and thirty-eight (138) tokens were coded for instances of rapport management/mismanagement. This information was recorded to quantify whether instances of rapport challenge/neglect were more likely to occur within certain types of activities. Also, these categories were used to estimate the nature of online discussions.

Rapport was measured using an index, such that:

- If a message included at least one instance of rudeness/impoliteness, it was labelled impolite.
- If name-calling, aspersions, hyperbole, words that indicated non-cooperation, or vulgarity occurred, then the message was considered a rapport-challenging act.
- If other instances of impoliteness occurred that had to do with sarcasm, using all-caps (frequently used online to reflect shouting), and other types of more covert impolite behaviour, those were coded as others (neglect/maintenance/enhancing).

These categories were derived from the research of Spencer-Oatey (2008, p.32). The direction of impoliteness was also recorded and categorized as interpersonal, group, Al-Jazeera, story source, or other-oriented.

Total Population of Study and Sample Size

Table 2.0 provides a concise summary of the population characteristics for the study. The data for this study are primarily selected from Al-Jazeera Facebook page. The researcher selects from the different posts of Al-Jazeera within the period of 2019 and 2021. Then, the researcher allows comments and replies to trickle in so that they are treated alongside the theme of the posts.

Table 2.0: Population Characteristics

Aspect	Population Characteristics
Study Population ¹	Entire posts/news on Al-Jazeera Facebook page/timeline
Classification	Gender, Age, Race/Ethnicity, Religion
Age Range	16-65 years (eligible and able to use Facebook)
Gender ²	Men, Women, LGBTQ oriented individuals covered
Race/Ethnicity	People from all continents, representing every race and ethnicity
Religion	Various religions and beliefs (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Atheism)

From the wide range of the population study as shown in Table 2.0, over two hundred and fifty (250) utterance tokens were randomly selected as samples to analyse rapport management and politeness. Each sample falls under one of these theme categories (religious, political, gender, racism, diplomatic and terrorism related discourses). The reason for this categorisation is that every news post stirs different reaction due to sentiments and legitimacy of the post, all of which were further analysed under Spencer-Oatey's rapport orientation strategies which include Maintenance, Challenge, Neglect and Enhancement.

Method of Data Analysis

Spencer-Oatey & Franklin (2009) described rapport as a subjective perception of harmony or disharmony, smoothness-turbulence, and warmth-antagonism during interpersonal communication. This study analyzed interpersonal communication in computer-mediated interaction, further narrowing its focus to computer-mediated discourse on social network platforms. In the study of politeness strategies, users' comments were read in addition to the reading of the news post. Rejoinders were also read where available, and detailed notes were taken to aid the interpretation of qualitative analysis. The analysis was done on a subject basis. Hence, rapport strategies in each of the politics-related, religion-related, current affairs, and so on were examined independently. In this research, Facebook was the case study. Social network applications are ubiquitous as they are enabled on almost all types of smartphones; statistics showed that more than half of the world's population owned smartphones. According to Laricchia (2023), the global smartphone penetration rate was estimated at 67 percent in 2021, the same value since 2018.

Al-Jazeera, right from its inception, had such a great impact and effect on global society, especially the way they presented headlines, presents, and caption news. On one level, the Al Jazeera Effect changed perspectives, disrupted censorship and propaganda, and sent information from the global East and South to the West. Author Philip Seib

¹ Difficulty in ascertaining the total number of posts, comments, and replies by Al-Jazeera on Facebook within the study period (2019-2021)

² Some countries (Middle Eastern) may have internet restrictions, especially for women and LGBTQ

expanded the idea of the Al Jazeera Effect even further, counting it as part of the entire system of new media, from satellite broadcasting to digital technology (Zingarelli, 2010).

Anonymity in computer-mediated communication (CMC) played a major factor in determining whether interaction between strangers who did not know each other, nor each other's social role went a long way in determining the ebb and flow of their conversation. Anonymity in CMC made participants leverage their freedom of speech. Al-Jazeera Facebook participants also had these high tendencies. Essentially, Al-Jazeera Facebook participants were more inclined to be impolite in their interactions. They tended to be easily triggered by certain topics, perhaps due to the way the Al-Jazeera team presented their reports. To properly analyze the politeness/impoliteness of Al-Jazeera Facebook page audience, Spencer-Oatey's four rapport management orientation strategies were applied. Table 3.0 summarises the key aspects of the data analysis.

Table 3.0: Key aspects data analysis

Aspect		Description				
1	Rapport Definition	• Subjective perception of harmony or disharmony • Smoothness-turbulence, warmth-antagonism in communication				
2	Analysis Scope	• Interpersonal communication in computer-mediated interaction • Further narrowed to computer-mediated discourse on social network platforms				
3	Politeness Study	• Users' comments and rejoinders analyzed alongside news posts. • Detailed notes taken to aid qualitative analysis. • Subject-based analysis for politics, religion, current affairs, etc.				
4	Anonymity in CMC	• Anonymity in computer-mediated communication analysed. • Participants leverage anonymity for freedom of speech. • Al-Jazeera Facebook participants show tendencies towards impoliteness				
5	Analysis Strategies	Spencer-Oatey's four rapport management orientation strategies applied. <table><tr><td>i. Rapport Maintenance</td><td>Routine politeness behavior. Efforts to restore relations is also exhibited</td></tr><tr><td>ii. Rapport Enhancement.</td><td>Corresponds with Leech's politeness model. Acts enhancing politeness or face, e.g., saying "please." "thank</td></tr></table>	i. Rapport Maintenance	Routine politeness behavior. Efforts to restore relations is also exhibited	ii. Rapport Enhancement.	Corresponds with Leech's politeness model. Acts enhancing politeness or face, e.g., saying "please." "thank
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ii. Rapport Enhancement.	Corresponds with Leech's politeness model. Acts enhancing politeness or face, e.g., saying "please." "thank					

			you
		iii. Rapport Neglect	Neglect of face support or redress where face threat occurred. - Lack of concern or interest in social relations
		iv. Rapport Challenge	Accommodation of impoliteness; A desire to impair harmonious relations between participants

Rapport enhancement corresponded with Leech's (1983) politeness model that accommodates acts that simply enhance politeness or face like saying "please," "thank you," or giving compliments to build social interactions/relations. One might reasonably expect that the audience on Al-Jazeera Facebook page deployed 'face-enhancing actions' like making use of subtle and kind words in the comment section as a means of creating a face-supportive atmosphere. Rapport maintenance could be simply a matter of performing routine politeness behavior where it was expected, or, in tune with Brown and Levinson (1987), a matter of restoring relations. The difference between rapport maintenance and enhancement was that without the effort to maintain rapport, rapport would be threatened; enhancement, in contrast, was a relatively free gift. Moreover, pointing out errors and suggesting corrections could be highly face threatening. Rapport neglect, as the term 'neglect' implies, had negative connotations: it was the neglect of face support or redress where face threat or loss had occurred. It was a lack of concern or interest in the quality of social relations. Spencer-Oatey's suggestion that a 'focus on self' may lead to the neglect of another's face was plausible in many situations. Rapport challenge accommodated impoliteness; it was a desire to impair harmonious relations between participants.

Presentation of Analysis

The presentation of the analysis was done in a systematic manner. This section highlights the specific aspects of the studies, findings, challenges, and the final focus on politeness strategies. This is to make the sequential progression of the presentation of data more concise. The data was obtained from overall objective of the study which is to:

- i. Analyse how Al-Jazeera observes affinity (rapport) in her general social media settings.
- ii. Describe how rapport management is deployed in the general posting on Al-Jazeera Facebook page.
- iii. Identify how Al-Jazeera followers engage in rapport in the comments and reactions.
- iv. Analyse the measure of politeness followers observes in the comments.
- v. Discuss how the perceived social distance affects rapport management.

The analysis is done under the following themes:

- a. Religious Discourse
- b. Current Affairs Discourse
- c. Politics-Related Discourse
- d. Violence/Conflict- Related Discourse
- e. Terror-Related Discourse

- f. Racism-Related Discourse
- g. Gender- Related Discourse
- h. Diplomacy-Related Discourse

Each of the above sections of analysis is examined from the perspectives of the four rapport orientation strategies identified by Spencer-Oatey.

For brevity, only two themes are presented in this seminar vis a vis religious and racism related discourses. A summary of other themes is provided from the perspective of identified strategies as per Spencer-Oatey.

Rapport Challenge in Religious Discourse

Religious issues are highly controversial, given Al-Jazeera's diverse audience spanning different religions and beliefs. These topics can easily trigger face-threatening acts among users, but positive rapport management is not entirely impossible. A lot of the interactions underscores the challenges in managing rapport when dealing with religious issues on Al-Jazeera's Facebook page. It highlights the diverse opinions and responses, ranging from rejection to positive strategies, and suggests the importance of effective policies to foster a respectful online discourse.

a) Sri-Lanka Anti-Muslim Riots:

Al-Jazeera posts about the Sri-Lankan government imposing a state of emergency and blocking Facebook access due to anti-Muslim riots in 2018. Comments reflect diverse opinions, with some rejecting Facebook's apologies and others suggesting apologies from all parties involved. Positive rapport strategies include some users extending an olive branch for peace, while some comments exhibit negative rapport management through sarcasm.

b) Discussion on Policy Reform:

Yasir Khan's direct and polite response highlights the possibility of disagreement while maintaining positive rapport. A user also raises a crucial question regarding Facebook's measures to reform policies on hate speech. The discussion emphasises the importance of implementing measures to curb extreme comments and promote a more respectful online environment.

Rapport Maintenance in Religious Discourse:

This section explores the intricacies of rapport maintenance and challenge in discussions related to religious discourse on Al-Jazeera's Facebook page. Here are the key points:

a) Significance of Religious Discourse:

- Ethno-religious issues are prominently discussed on Al-Jazeera's Facebook page, attracting attention due to their sensitivity and potential for generating diverse opinions.
- These discussions often lead to both instances of rapport management and challenges.

b) Example: Saudi Women Joining Military

- A post discussing Saudi women joining the military prompts various reactions.
- Rosario Marques expresses concern about women being turned into military forces, leading to diverse participant reactions.
- Merlin Emiliano adopts a neutral stance, emphasizing the semantic nature of the world to avoid taking sides and sparking further arguments.

- Ahmed Hassan's defensive comment attempts to correct a perceived face threat, showcasing the sensitivity of religious discussions.

c) Religious Diversity and Controversy:

- Religious-related discourse is the most talked-about and controversial topic on Al-Jazeera's Facebook page.
- The token presents a news post related to religious matters, with comments and rejoinders examined for rapport-building or challenging elements.

d) Rapport Maintenance/Challenge in Religious Discussions:

- James Dedes offers a friendly statement preaching peace and harmony, but Muhammed Noor disagrees, initiating a potential face-threatening situation.
- Participants who aim to start arguments often wait for initial comments, then reply with disagreements to spark debates and engage others.
- The perceived victim of face threats may choose cautious words to avoid further arguments and face threats, maintaining a neutral stance with statements like "thank God we have a god who decides such things."

Discussions on religious discourse on Al-Jazeera's Facebook page are marked by a mix of efforts to maintain rapport, diverse opinions, and occasional face-threatening challenges, highlighting the complexity and sensitivity of such topics.

Rapport Neglect in Religious Discourse

Spiteful comments are one of the major pointers to rapport threatening acts, in the posts shown in Figure 1 (a&b), three users replied to the comment of Khadr Imam Ali about Mother's Day in relation to Islam, his comment "*every day is Mom's day in Islam.... 'Paradise is under feet(sic) of your mother!'*" Muhammed peace be upon him" this comment could have easily been supported and attracted a lot of 'friendliness' which supports rapport management. Rather there is an array of several insulting, debasing and face threatening statements/words such as 'cult' (Ibrahim Mwititi) '*that's why women are slaves in Islam?*' (Kobi Litman) '*what about the 72 virgins*' (Jeevi Sunthar). These are classified under sociality rights which have been broken by these participants and are therefore a threat to rapport building and rapport management strategies.

a)



b)



Figure 1: Mother's Day Celebration

Rapport Challenge Orientation in Religious Discourse:

Rapport challenges are a common occurrence in Al-Jazeera Facebook users' responses to religious posts, often involving face and identity-threatening acts. Participants tend to make blunt and bald statements without softening the threat, given the sensitivity of religious topics.

a) Example: Muslims Pray in Hagia Sophia in Turkey:

Rapport-challenging statements, like the one suggesting the conversion of *Al-Aqsa* to the temple of Solomon, trigger tongue-lashing responses from other users.

A comment advocating that religion should be a source of peace receives zero replies and angry reactions due to the initial rapport-threatening statement.

b) Another Instance: New Zealand Faith-Based Care Abuse:

Al-Jazeera's headlines on religious issues are crafted to cause controversy in the comment section, leading to sensitive discussions. A seemingly neutral comment like "peaceful Christians" is interpreted as insinuating and capable of turning violent, leading to a clap back from another user defending their identity and saving face.

Euphemism and Interpretation:

The use of euphemism, expressing a negative statement in a neutral manner, can contribute to negative rapport strategies.

The interpretation of statements by users who do not know each other becomes crucial in determining the potential for face-threatening situations.

Identity Defense and Sociality Management:

Users engage in direct responses and clap backs to defend their identity rights and save face when they feel their sociality/identity is being threatened.

The dynamics of sociality and identity management come into play as participants navigate religious discussions on the platform.

In summary, the breakdown of rapport in religious discourse on Al-Jazeera's Facebook page often involves the careful interpretation of statements, the use of euphemism, and users' defense of their identity rights to manage sociality in an online context.

Racism Rapport Discourse

The extract delves into various instances of racism-related discussions on Al-Jazeera's Facebook page, particularly focusing on Miss Universe, New Mexico electing women of color, Canada's indigenous people, and dark-skinned dolls. It shows how racism-related topics evoke diverse reactions, ranging from efforts to maintain rapport through positive engagement to challenges and disagreements that may lead to rapport breakdown. The analysis provides insights into the dynamics of online discussions around sensitive racial issues on Al-Jazeera's Facebook page.

Rapport Maintenance in Racism Discourse

- i. **Miss Universe Racism Rapport:**
 - Users engaged in discourse about Miss Universe, showcasing different views and perspectives.
 - Examples of rapport maintenance orientation, emphasizing compliments and appreciation to promote harmony.
 - Certain users express disagreement, with varying tones from aggressive to face-saving.
- ii. **New Mexico Elects "Women of Color":**
 - Al-Jazeera's headline generates controversy, leading to differing opinions in the comments.
 - Disagreement on the term "women of color" with some seeing it as racist and others supporting it.
 - Users engaged in a mix of rapport maintenance, challenge, and neglect, expressing their viewpoints.
- iii. **Canada's Indigenous People:**
 - News about racial social media posts about Canada's indigenous people prompts a heated discussion.
 - Negative insinuations and comparisons heightened tensions, resulting in condescending remarks and further discord.
 - Users employ face-saving strategies to address the conflict and attempt to maintain a civil tone.
- iv. **Dark-Skinned Dolls:**
 - Discussion on dark-skinned dolls involves cautious comments and face management to handle potential disagreements.
 - Users express preferences for locally handmade toys, emphasizing cultural and emotional significance.

v. **Floyd Trial Testimony:**

- Issues relating to racism as shown in Figure 2.0 often generate various opinions among Al-Jazeera users, when a group of interlocutors think alike and have the same views they usually get involved in a conversation where they demonstrate support and agreement. This act of unison minimizes the social distance among the interlocutors as well as mitigates the possibilities face threat.

a)

b)

c)

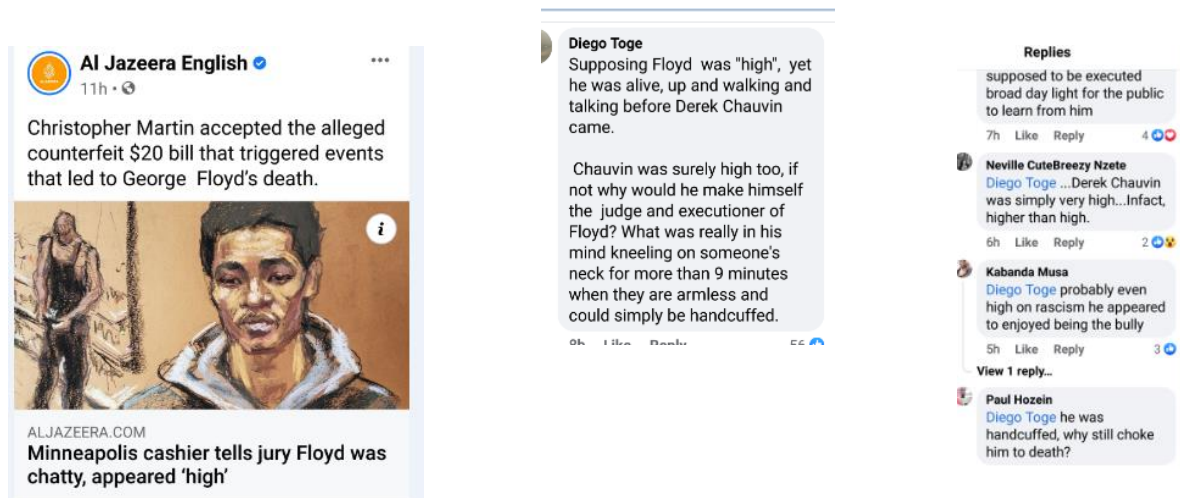


Figure 2: Cashier testifies that Floyd appeared to be on Drugs.

As shown in Figure 2 (b), although Diego Toge (DT)'s comment is not directed at anyone in particular, he employs the use of rhetorical question when he/she says: '*Chauvin was surely high too if not why would he make himself the judge and executioner?*'. This question in particular and DT's comment in general paved the way for similar responses from other interlocutors. All the responses directed at DT's comment are proof that the interlocutors have similar opinions like DT especially that of Neville: '*Derek Chauvin was simply very high....*' Which answers the rhetorical question in DT's comments.

Rapport Enhancement in Racism-Based Discourse

On racial related discourse (like the news report in the above extract) some Al-Jazeera audience are usually careful about the things they say and their choice of words in order not to sound discriminatory and offensive. Failure to employ the careful use of words in racial related discourse, often results in participants using insulting words at each other thereby mitigating the chances of building rapport. The comment in Figure 3.0 will examine the rapport enhancing strategy used by some participants.

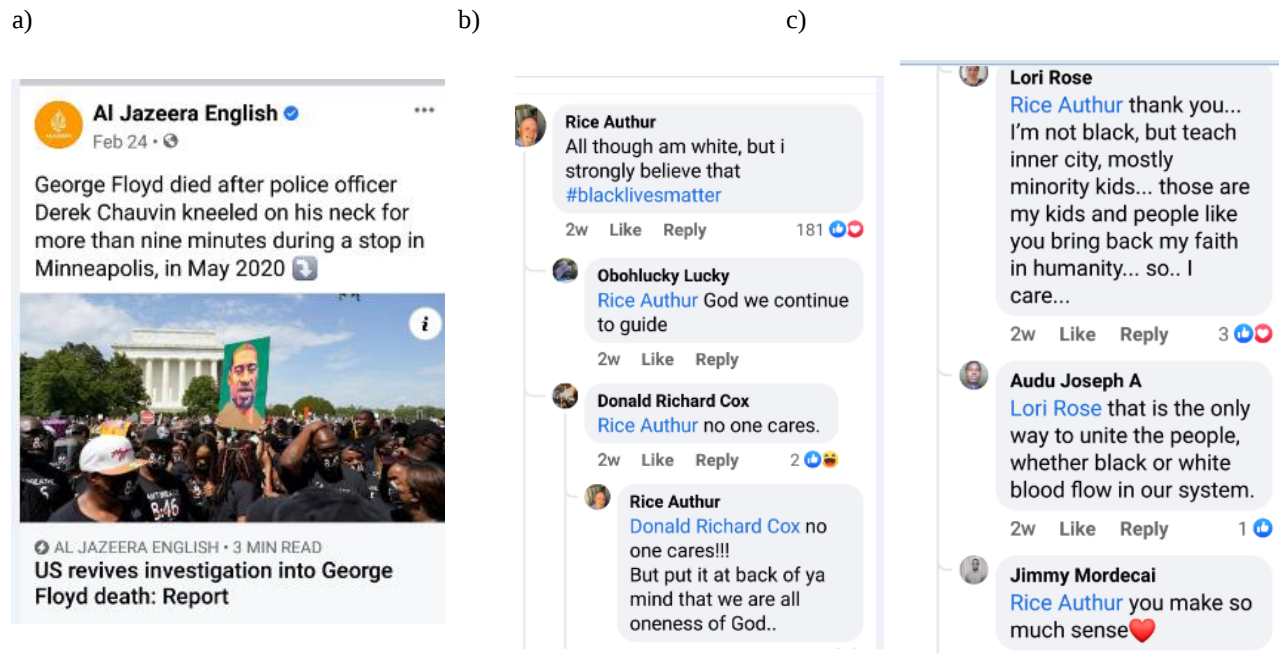
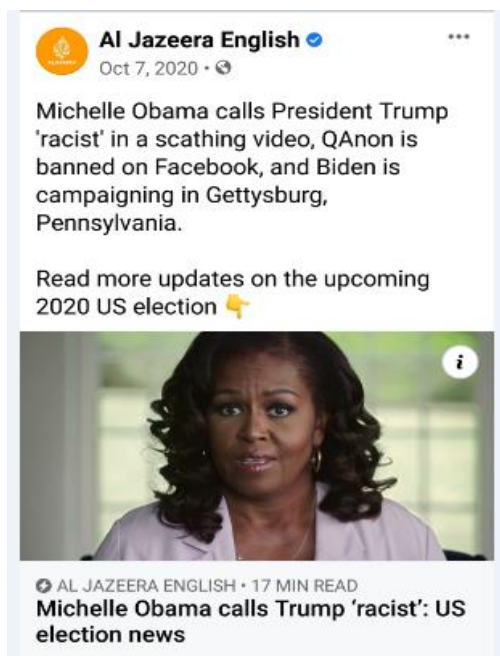


Figure 3: George Floyd Death by US Police

One of the ways Al-Jazeera users enhance rapport with other participants is by identifying with them, as shown in the comment of Rice Arthur especially in the hash tag #blacklivesmatter used in his comment which is a commonly used tag on social media by black individuals when speaking about racial discrimination, he further buttresses his point in his reply to Donald which gave his comment a more rapport enhancing tone. The comments that follow are shown in the excerpt in Figure 3.0 (b&c). Drawing on the last comment by jimmy Mordecai, 'you make so much sense' the use of the heart emoji in the comment emphasizes on the positive impact of Rice's comment in the interaction. Also, the comment of Lori Rose shows similarity with that of Rice especially when she says "...I care", this shows kindness and like mindedness which altogether enhances rapport among participants.

Rapport Neglect in Racism Discourse

a)



b)



Figure 4: Michelle Obama Labels Trump a Racist

Rapport neglect strategy is sometimes identified among Al-Jazeera Facebook when there is a unison in the comment of more than two participants in response to another user's comment especially when the comment is perceived by the majority to have a negative meaning or impact and there is a collective attempt to clam up such comments. An instance of such comment is seen in excerpt shown in Figure 4.0(b). The comments in excerpt c above are the replies that followed the comment of Joshua Efebor (JE). Although these comments were not planned, they are in alignment and are all aimed at one thing, which is to point out the inappropriate use of words in JE statement. This is done without regard for mutual relations among each other.

Rapport Challenge in Racism Related Discourse

a)



b)

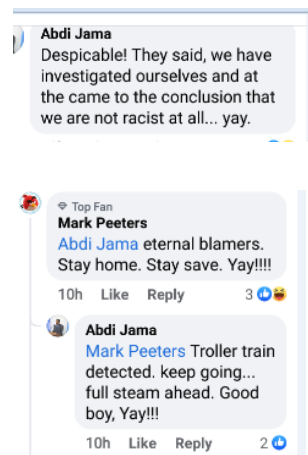


Figure 5: UK Report Denies Systematic Racism (2)

Whether or not a speaker makes a negative statement, the responses and reactions from other participants cannot be predicted hence, rapport challenge strategy recurs when an interlocutor deliberately makes a negative comment under to another participant, when this happens, the speaker in turn attacks back in the same vein, hence impeding the possibilities of having quality relations among participants. As shown in Figure 5.0 (b), Mark Peter (MP)'s comment is the first instance of rapport challenge in the above extract when he/she says '*...eternal blamers....*' The Abdi Jama's reply is a response to MP's attack: '*troller train detected...*' Instead of improving the mutual interaction between these interlocutors, this dialogue increases further the social distance between them.

General Discussions

Through discourse analysis and classification, we may better understand, and model social media interactions around various subjects. Critical exploration is done to discover behavioural patterns, such the inclination to challenge or maintain rapport in certain discussions. Thus, this kind of structured data analysis offers thorough insights into the extracted interactions, while validating any qualitative assertions made through quantitative and statistical analysis. This section will elaborate and discuss data obtained, in relation to the specific objectives of the study.

The Degree of Politeness on Al-Jazeera Facebook Page

The outlook and manner of presentation of information on Al-Jazeera's Facebook page cannot be said to be entirely courteous, as it frequently discusses contentious themes that elicit harsh responses. Occasionally, their posts are incisive and frequently spark conflict. Sometimes, racial messages with political overtones are updated; other times, headlines trigger the followers thereby sparking debates and opinions in the comment section. Furthermore, it is important to note that the most frequently discussed topics on Al-Jazeera's Facebook page are usually ethno-religious related as they tend to strike a chord within the followers as well as contentious thereby provoking unpleasant outbursts. There is usually a sense of judgement in the overall Al-Jazeera Facebook media environment.

Rapport Management Deployment on Al-Jazeera Facebook Page

After careful observation of the data gathered in this study, it indicates that all four rapport strategies are commonly employed by the participants across all eight discourse categories. The challenge in rapport appears to be more prominent in religious-based discourse, violence/conflict/terrorism and social discourse as shown in Table 4.0. Participants use this avenue to initiate confrontations; when participants disagree on an issue, they typically attack one another which usually results in name calling, thereby impairing cordial relations among participants. From the data gotten from Al Jazeera Facebook feed, the frequency of each strategy has been organised within each discourse category as shown in Table 4.0.

Table 4.0: Cross Tabulation of Rapport Management Strategies by Discourse Categories

Discourse Category	Enhancement	Maintenance	Neglect	Challenge	Total
Religious	4	6	1	10	21
Political	3	6	2	8	19
Current Affairs	2	5	1	6	14
Violence/Conflict	1	2	5	10	18
Terrorism	1	2	3	9	15
Racism	5	4	3	8	20
Gender	2	3	1	4	10
Diplomacy	2	7	5	7	21
Total	20	35	21	62	138

From Table 4.0, it is obvious that religious discourse often faces a great number of challenges, indicating a high level of contention and conflict in this category. Occasionally, these confrontations directed at Al-Jazeera or Facebook as a means for some users to express their displeasure. Aspersion and name calling are two methods frequently used by participants in the categories. Other forms of rudeness and impoliteness that fall under the category of rapport challenge are mockery and ridicule of people, places and beliefs. Again, it is most prevalent in religious discourse, due to the sensitive nature of religious issues and the automatically defensive nature (almost reflex) displayed by participants when such issues are discussed. Maintenance efforts are moderate, but there is minimal neglect, suggesting that the topic is actively engaged in the Al Jazeera Facebook. Political discussions are heavily maintained and challenged, reflecting their dynamic and often contentious nature. The moderate enhancement indicates efforts to positively engage in political discourse, though challenges remain significant.

Noticeably, Current affairs tend to have a slight tendency noticed towards challenge and maintenance. Enhancement and neglect are low, indicating less effort is made to positively influence these discussions. Violence and Terrorism discourse are contentious and often avoided topics as seen in the frequency of challenge and neglect respectively. Gender discussions show a balanced approach with relatively heightened challenge discourse comparatively, suggesting constructive engagement and efforts to maintain positive discourse, while being moderately controversial. Diplomatic discourse is highly maintained and challenged, reflecting its importance and the effort to handle it constructively. The distribution is shown in Figure 6.0.

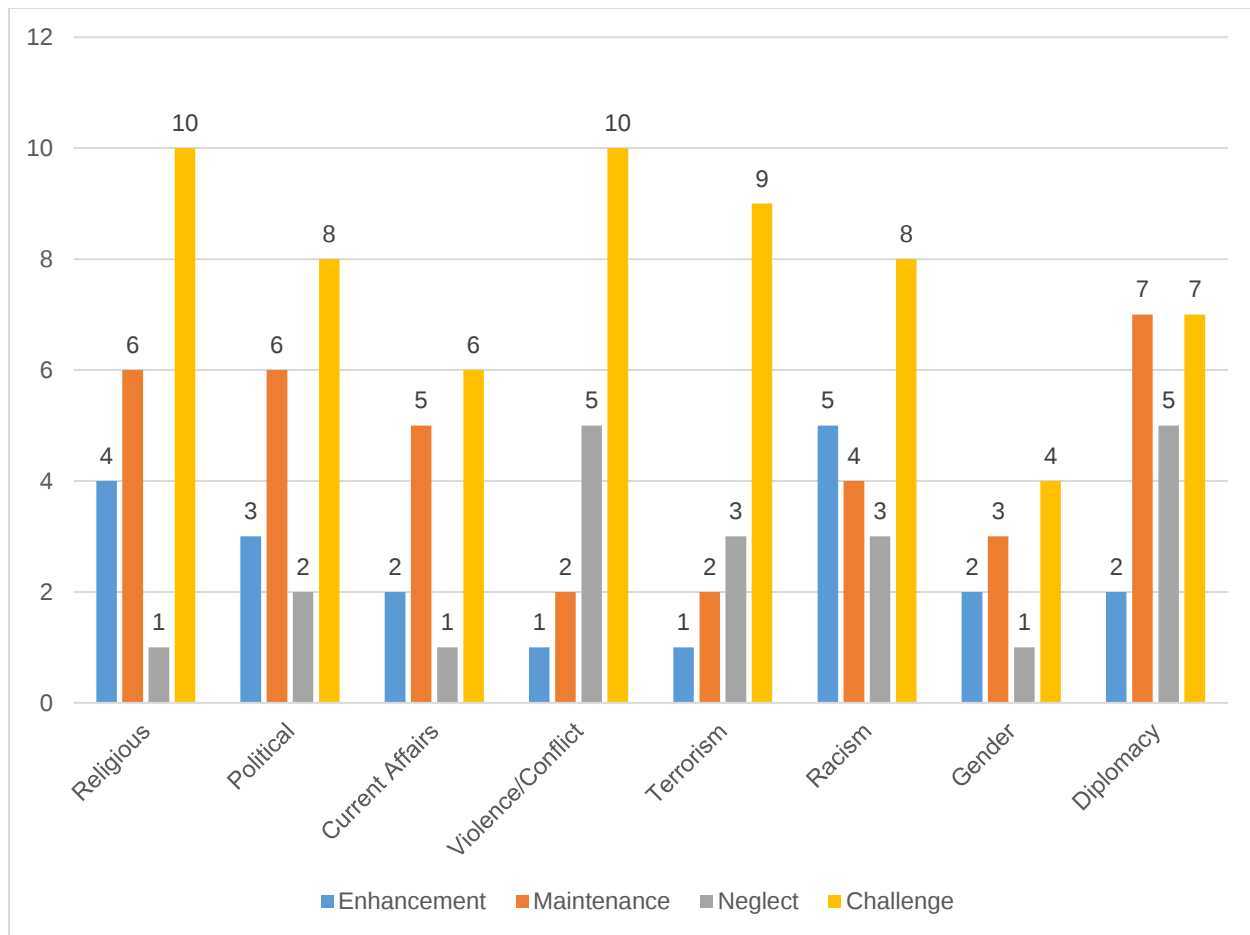


Figure 6.0: Distribution of Various Rapport Management Strategies

The percentage analysis in Table 5.0, Rapport Challenge is the most frequently used strategy, particularly in religious, violence/conflict, and terrorism discourse accounting for half of the strategies.

Table 5.0: Percentage Distribution of Rapport Management Strategies

Discourse Category	Enhancement (%)	Maintenance (%)	Neglect (%)	Challenge (%)
Religious	2.90	4.35	0.72	7.25
Political	2.17	4.35	1.45	5.80
Current Affairs	1.45	3.62	0.72	4.35
Violence/Conflict	0.72	1.45	3.62	7.25
Terrorism	0.72	1.45	2.17	6.52
Racism	3.62	2.90	2.17	5.80

Discourse Category	Enhancement (%)	Maintenance (%)	Neglect (%)	Challenge (%)
Gender	1.45	2.17	0.72	2.90
Diplomacy	1.45	5.07	3.62	5.07
Total Percentage	14.48%	25.36%	15.19%	44.94%

From Table 5.0, Rapport Maintenance comes second with 25.36 percent usage, indicating attempts to maintain politeness and social harmony. This characterised by support, agreement, and the use of positive statements between users. This method is frequently used in gender, politics, current affairs, and racial related discussions. Participants' use of this strategy mitigates the possibility of all kinds of traits which arises during interaction between participants. Essentially, the method ensures that the interaction/dialogue between participants flows smoothly and coherently, regardless of the presence of an agreement or disagreement. Rapport Neglect accounts for just over 15.19 percent, which is the second least used strategy across all categories, despite its dominance in violence/conflict and social discourse. Rapport neglect is a deliberate lack of concern and interest in the quality of relationships between participants, as demonstrated by participants' off-the-record/off-topic comments and a lack of enthusiasm for the news/post. Participants who employ the rapport neglect strategy are simply unconcerned about the effect of their comments on the other participants. Occasionally, participants express their opinions using asperse language, which may irritate other participants who perceive it as an attack on them.

The least used strategy is Rapport Enhancement across all categories, which is slightly lower than neglect accounting for over 14.48 percent. This is possibly because Al-Jazeera participants are unwilling to invest the time and effort necessary to foster harmonious relationships among users. The most plausible explanation for this lack of effort is the anonymous nature if Facebook users. There are only few instances of this strategy being used on Al-Jazeera Facebook page and among participants. The strategy of enhancing rapport entails the use of endearing words and compliments to convey familiarity between participants. Sympathy/empathy is another common trait demonstrated by participants and it has been shown to facilitate rapport-building strategies. Thus, this method has been shown to significantly reduce the social distance between participants. It is shown in the data that religious discourse, and issues involving violence/conflict are the most contentious, both accounting for 7.25 percent challenge rapport of the total data, while being closely followed by Terrorism related discourse, with significant engagement despite varying levels of maintenance and neglect. Summarily, challenge accounts for close to half of the strategy employed. In contrast, topics like gender and diplomacy exhibit more balanced discourse with moderate challenges and efforts to enhance and maintain positive interactions.

Generally, maintenance is a consistently employed strategy, showing a consistent effort to engage across categories, whereas neglect is less frequent but notably high in violence/conflict and terrorism, pointing to areas where discourse might be avoided or insufficiently addressed. This analysis highlights the differing nature of discourse across various themes and the varying strategies employed to manage rapport within these interactions.

The Manner of Followers' Rapport Management in Comments and Reactions

Most users appear to be non-conservative while expressing their message(s), most comments contain coarse language. However, few users employ rapport maintenance strategies when trying to quench a heated debated or when a user agrees with a line of argument but does not wish to become too involved in the debate. When users identify with one another and demonstrate familiarity in the comment section, rapport is enhanced.

The Nature of Followers Politeness

The presence of negative politeness in all the eight categories of discourse indicates that followers usually impolite and do not employ rapport enhancing strategies during interactions. Due to the lack of familiarity and social relations between followers and participants negative politeness is the most prominent strategy used. Politeness on Al-Jazeera's Facebook page is usually taken for granted probably because it is believed that its primary responsibility is to inform, it could be argued that Al-Jazeera Facebook page employs a bald on record strategy that is quite effective when the speaker is powerful or when little face is at stake. This directness may still be construed as a manifestation of politeness.

Social Distance and Rapport Management

Social distance and anonymity are the major factors that affect rapport management this is because, participants in computer-mediated discourse and in this case social media share no familiarity or sameness, also, there is a seemingly obvious distance between participants as their level of closeness does not go beyond seeing each other's comments. On one hand, this makes it easy for participants to get away with negative comments and impoliteness and other face threatening acts. On the other hand, social distance increased the lack of effort required to maintain and enhance rapport; most users simply do not care enough about people they do not know to make polite comments, use endearing words or give compliments in order to maintain and enhance rapport.

The data analysis reveals that the frequency with which language is used indicates a lack of or insufficient effort to build rapport among participants, which could be explained by the user's religious and social backgrounds. This corroborates Morand and Ocker's (2003) assertion that face-threatening behaviours are an unavoidable part of Computer-mediated communication.

Chi-Square Test of Independence

We also performed Chi-Square test to determine if there is a significant association between two categorical variables. This test was to see if the distribution of rapport management strategies is independent of the discourse categories. Essentially, the analysis tested the association between discourse categories and rapport management strategies (enhancement, maintenance, neglect, challenge). The following hypothesis formulation was adopted:

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no association between discourse categories and rapport management strategies.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is an association between discourse categories and rapport management strategies.

To perform the Chi-Square analysis, we created an expected frequency table as shown in Table 6.0. To do that we calculated the expected frequency using Table 4.0, extracting the row total and the column total.

To Calculate Expected Frequency (E_{ij}):

$$E_{ij} = \frac{R_i \times C_j}{n}$$

Where E_{ij} = expected frequency

R_i = Row total

C_j = Column total

n = Number of observations

Applying this formula for each cell:

Table 6.0: Expected Frequencies Table

Discourse Category	Enhancement	Maintenance	Neglect	Challenge
Religious	3.04	5.35	3.20	9.43
Political	2.75	5.52	3.00	8.73
Current Affairs	2.03	5.26	2.15	6.35
Violence/Conflict	2.61	4.61	2.75	7.89
Terrorism	2.17	3.79	2.31	6.72
Racism	2.90	5.13	3.08	8.89
Gender	1.45	2.56	1.53	4.47
Diplomacy	3.04	5.35	3.20	9.43

Thereafter, the **Chi-Square Statistics** was computed using the formula:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O_{ij} - E_{ij})^2}{E_{ij}}$$

where O_{ij} is the observed frequency from Table 4.1 and E_{ij} is the expected frequency from Table 6.0. The Chi-Square statistics table is shown in Table 7.0.

Table 7.0: Chi-Square Table Statistics

Discourse Category	Enhancement	Maintenance	Neglect	Challenge
Religious	0.29	0.26	2.13	0.26
Political	0.04	0.25	0.23	0.07
Current Affairs	0.00	0.12	0.49	0.13
Violence/Conflict	1.06	2.82	2.77	3.00
Terrorism	0.66	0.86	0.43	1.85
Racism	2.76	0.09	0.00	0.72
Gender	0.29	0.33	0.02	0.11
Diplomacy	0.34	0.77	1.94	2.82

From Table 7.0, the total sum of χ^2 was found to be 32.87.

The next stage was identifying the **Degrees of Freedom**.

The degrees of freedom (d_f) in the context of the chi-square test denote the quantity of independent data points that are available for estimating a statistical parameter.

$$d_f = (r - 1) \times (c - 1)$$

Where:

r = number of rows in the contingency table.

c = number of columns in the contingency table.

$$d_f = (8 - 1) \times (4 - 1) = 7 \times 3 = 21$$

Referring to the Chi-Square Distribution Table:

At the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ and $d_f = 21$, the critical value of χ^2 is around 32.67. As $\chi^2 = 32.87$ is significantly greater than 32.67, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that significant association between discourse categories and the distribution of counts across Enhancement, Maintenance, Neglect, and Challenge categories.

Findings

After careful analysis of data, this research finds that:

1. Al-Jazeera Facebook page itself is strategic in its postings and employs contentious and highly debatable and sentimental topics/news.
2. Judging by the tone and outlook of Al-Jazeera Facebook page it is safe to say that a percentage/fragment of Al-Jazeera's page represents a certain degree of biasness.
3. Al-Jazeera followers frequently employ rapport challenging, neglecting and threatening acts than maintenance and enhancing strategies.
4. Al-Jazeera Facebook followers are often impolite in their comments and usually do not make use of rapport enhancing strategies during interaction with other users
5. Perceived social distance affects rapport in a negative manner as it breeds a "nonchalant" behaviour among participants which often lead to rapport neglect.
6. Statistically, enough evidence is found to draw the conclusion that there is a relationship between discourse categories and the distribution of frequencies in the given data, based on the Chi-Square Test of Independence, with the null hypothesis rejected.
7. This implies that it is improbable for the observed discourse category frequencies in any of four operational categories—Enhancement, Maintenance, Neglect, and Challenge—to result from pure chance.

Summary

This study is an assessment of rapport management in Al-Jazeera Facebook communication using the politeness approach. Five research questions were developed in accordance with the study objectives to guide the research's progression. The study is situated within the discipline of pragmatics. Although not all pragmatic issues were examined in this study, politeness/rapport management issues, as proposed by Spencer-Oatey, are examined in Al-Jazeera computer-mediated communication with emphasis on Oateys four rapport strategies. Rapport management is

a politeness theory which examines how people maintain, enhance or threaten harmonious relationship with others by managing three elements: face, sociality rights and obligations, and interactional goals. This study examined rapport management in computer mediated communication using Facebook as case study; 200 token utterances were randomly selected from Al-Jazeera Facebook page, taking into consideration the subject/topic of discourse. These utterances were analysed under Oatey's four rapport management orientations. According to the study, social media facilitates conversation and interaction among followers by allowing them to create, comment, and share content. It enables anyone communicate and become a source of information, allowing followers share their perspectives, insights and experiences. It is from these that analysis based on the four rapport orientations are drawn.

As expected, and as revealed by collected data, primary posts on the majority of issues would likely divide followers into three groups:

1. Those who support the post.
2. Those that oppose it and
3. Those that are indifferent.

Occasionally, because of the polarity in their philosophical, political, religious, racial and social orientations, followers became personal and resorted to abuse or relationship neglect.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study from the general discussion and analysis conducted reveal that politics, social-related and violence/conflict discourses employ all the four-rapport orientation identified by Spencer-Oatey (2008). Rapport challenge and maintenance strategies are found to be the most frequently used strategies by Al-Jazeera Facebook users due to the nature of CMC which does not promote face value since users may not be personally confronted. It is then followed by rapport neglect and lastly rapport enhancement. Information from the data analysis also shows that several strategies such as rapport neglect, challenge and enhancement used by Al-Jazeera Facebook participants in their conversation on a religious post such as a particular comment from a user under a religious based news which states "where are the apologies from Muslims? All those killings the days before!!!!" shows less or low effort towards rapport building among participants, perhaps, due to the religious and social background of users. This indicates that most Al-Jazeera Facebook participants in a religious discourse are less concerned about the importance of building good rapport.

Majority of the users do not seem to be conservative in expressing their message as coarse language is replete in most of their comments. However, few users employ rapport maintenance strategy when the purpose of communication is to quell a harsh discourse; or when a user concurs with a line of argument, and probably does not want to be too involved in the discourse. Rapport enhancement occurs when users identify with each other and exhibit public display of closeness/familiarity. In the case of Al-Jazeera Facebook communication, the strategy is used without recourse to the social distance among the interlocutors. The inability to meet users in person appears to be the factor that encourages bald-on record. In summary, the Chi-Square Test of Independence offers strong evidence that the distribution of frequencies in the Enhancement, Maintenance, Neglect, and Challenge categories in the given data are related to discourse categories. This discovery advances our knowledge of how various discourse kinds may correspond with various attentional or engagement patterns within these operational categories.

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