

# The Speech Act of Requests in Arabic Used by Saudi Facebook Users

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**Abstract**—This study investigates the direct and indirect strategies of the speech act of request in an academic online community. Grounded in speech act and politeness theory, it attempts to explore how Saudi digital interlocutors employ request strategies in terms of directness and indirectness, as well as gender differences in request formulation. While most previous studies focus on face-to-face communication, few have examined online requests. Data were collected from a public Facebook page for Saudi teaching assistants and lecturers, comprising 550 posts (300 from males, 250 from females). Quantitative content analysis revealed that direct strategies, particularly direct questioning, were predominant, supporting the preference for clarity in online discourse. Male users employed more direct strategies than females, reflecting subtle gender differences in politeness strategies. Although males also used indirect strategies more frequently, both genders equally employed query preparatory strategies. The preference for direct strategies does not indicate impoliteness but rather a need for clarity due to the lack of verbal and non-verbal cues in online discourse. Social media interactions are characterized by their informality and egalitarianism, lacking obligation statements and suggestory formulas. This study demonstrates that the use of digital platforms is revolutionizing the way Saudi users communicate, leading to greater directness while remaining attuned to politeness markers. This study enriches general perspectives on the social use of language in online environments, informing the understanding of cultural differences in language practices, providing implications for digital etiquette training, and highlighting shifts within the gendered nature of speech acts in virtual spaces.

**Index Terms**—online speech act, online request, Saudi Arabic, Facebook, social media

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the digital prosperity, social media has become a crucial arena for both communicating and developing new linguistic practices, as well as altering established interactional norms. The rise of platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram have introduced new forms of interpersonal communication in Saudi Arabia, where politeness, respect, and sometimes indirectness dictate the nature of social exchanges. This study explores the structure of requests as a type of directive speech act, which necessarily involves potential imposition on the addressee. Drawing on Searle's (1969) speech act theory and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model, it explores how Saudi users navigate direct and indirect communication styles in order to maintain the pragmatic foundations of politeness in online discourse. However, speech acts, i.e., directives and requests, which are important tools of social coordination, are heavily influenced by cultural and contextual factors. In Saudi Arabia, where social hierarchy is deeply ingrained, indirect speech combined with deference indicates respect for certain values (Alshraah et al., 2023). However, the informality of social media erodes formal boundaries, fostering an environment where minimal language achieves maximum effect. This dynamic raises urgent questions about the intersection of tradition and modernity in linguistic practices.

This study examines how Saudi Facebook users negotiate between cultural expectations and the affordances of social media. By overcoming geographical, temporal, and social barriers, social media has become a platform for exchanging academic, professional, and personal information, giving rise to hybrid communication norms. In particular, Facebook is an interactive forum where Saudi users discuss academic matters, engage in collaborative learning, share knowledge, and request information, resources, or assistance. While little empirical research has explored the extent to which Saudi users adhere to indirectness and politeness strategies in various contexts, including on Facebook, widespread beliefs persist. Addressing this gap, this study examines real-world request exchanges to identify the strategies utilized in making requests and examine the role of gender in shaping these exchanges online, regardless of the social hierarchy between interlocutors. This study is significant in that it contributes to understanding the evolution of politeness and pragmatics in the Saudi Arabian context, using a fine-grained perspective to investigate linguistic adaptation in digital spaces. Grounded within the broader frameworks of speech act theory and politeness strategies, this study not only contributes to intercultural pragmatics but also provides insights into language education, digital literacy, and cross-cultural communication in technological innovation, where Saudi social media users communicate their cultural identity in online interactions. The following questions are addressed in this study:

- 1- What types of direct request strategies do Saudi Facebook users employ?
- 2- What types of indirect request strategies do Saudi Facebook users employ?

- 3- What similarities and differences exist between male and female Saudi Facebook users in their use of request strategies?
- 4- How frequently are the types of request strategies used by Saudi Facebook users?

#### Theoretical Background

As Searle (1969) noted, speech acts accomplish communicative functions extending well beyond the transfer of information, encompassing requests, commands, and questions—forms of directives intended to prompt action from the interlocutor(s). As requests are inherently a face-threatening act (FTA), they impose on the hearer's autonomy and create an obligation for them to comply with the face saver. Consequently, speakers employ different mitigation strategies along a continuum, ranging from direct, explicit requests, to more indirect, conventionally polite forms (Searle, 1969). This study applies Searle's classification of illocutionary acts to analyze direct and indirect request strategies in digital environments, enabling a nuanced consideration of pragmatic options.

As directive speech acts, requests are fundamental to pragmatics and interpersonal communication because they represent urging the hearer to perform or refrain from an action (Almathkuri, 2021; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Searle, 1969). The way these acts are directed depends on social power, distance, and imposition levels, which determine directness or indirectness in communication (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The realization of requests shows cross-lingual and cultural variation, reflecting different politeness norms and cultural expectations. In Arabic speaking societies, social hierarchy, respect, and face-saving strategies influence language in request formulation, often leading to a preference for indirectness in high power or socially distant requests (Tawalbeh & Al Oqaily, 2012). However, the rise of digital communication has introduced new dynamics that challenge traditional pragmatic patterns, prompting further investigation into how speech acts are adapted in online environments (Al-Ageel, 2016).

Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) classification of request strategies serves as the basis for identifying the request-making strategies employed by Saudi Facebook users, focusing on directness levels that encompass direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect request strategies, as outlined in the project of Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP) framework. Direct strategies include mood derivable, explicit performative, hedged performative forms, etc. Conventionally indirect strategies include suggestory formulas and query preparatory strategies. Non-conventionally indirect strategies include strong and mild hints. Analyzing the level of directness between the two groups is crucial to understanding the similarities and differences in how high achievers and low achievers employ these strategies. Linguistic and cultural influences allow for extreme directness, particularly in interactions with individuals of lower status or close acquaintances.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media has emerged as a growing force in shaping modern speech acts. Directive speech acts dominate online communication, as users tend to use direct, clear, and unambiguous expressions for concise interaction. Hidayatillah et al. (2021) found that direct requests and explicit performatives are prevalent in X interactions, reflecting the fast-paced, high-visibility nature of social media communication.

In recent years, a growing body of research has begun to address speech acts in digital contexts with more focus on English-dominant platforms or users. For instance, Hidayatillah et al. (2021) examined speech acts on Instagram and X, highlighting the influence of platform-specific norms on politeness strategies. Despite the importance of these studies for the analysis of speech act realization in online spaces, they often lack cultural and linguistic specificity regarding Arabic users. This gap raises questions about how Arabic-speaking communities, specifically in Saudi Arabia, navigate pragmatic politeness and request strategies in digital spaces like Facebook. Directness in Arabic online discourse may not necessarily indicate impoliteness, nor do direct requests inherently constitute face-threatening acts. In line with such insights, this study provides empirical data on Saudi Facebook users to demonstrate how politeness norms change in online, low-power, and socially distant interactions within the social media environment.

Research on speech acts and politeness strategies in Saudi Arabic has primarily focused on face-to-face contexts (Alharbi & Aldaghri, 2024; Al-Ageel, 2016; Almathkuri, 2021; Moussa Farrag, 2022). Other studies have extended to cross-cultural comparisons, exploring differences between Saudi Arabic and Western communication styles (Alkhonini et al., 2024; Alzahrani, 2023; Al-Gahtani, 2017; Alqahtani, 2015; Qari, 2017; Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). Most studies have explored request strategies in Saudi Arabic in face-to-face interactions. For instance, Al-Ageel (2016) investigated the requesting behaviour of Saudi females and the influence of gender, social distance, power, status, and the degree of imposition. Their findings indicated that these variables influenced request strategies, with a preference for directness, suggesting a tendency toward positive politeness. Similarly, Almathkuri (2021) examined the influence of social power and distance on request strategies in Saudi Arabic, revealing that direct strategies were the most frequently used, while non-conventional indirect strategies were the least common. Additionally, Moussa Farrag (2022) explored how years of experience influenced Saudi female faculty members' request strategies. The study found that older faculty members used longer, more elaborate requests for two reasons: first, to minimize the perception of their social power, and second, to save the face of their colleagues. Indirectness was interpreted as a means of conveying respect between generations. Other studies have examined Saudi Arabic in a cross-cultural context, comparing it with different varieties of English.

For example, Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily (2012) examined directness and indirectness in request strategies to compare Saudi Arabic with American English. The results showed that Saudis employed various strategies based on social

variables such as power and distance, while Americans used conventional indirectness more frequently. The level of directness across the two groups, which was considered polite rather than impolite, served to express affiliation, closeness, and group-connectedness. Additionally, Alqahtani (2015) investigated the speech act of request in Saudi Arabic, focusing on the influence of imposition, social distance, and power on request structures. The research compared the results with Kuwaiti Arabic and American English, using a discourse completion test. The results revealed that Saudis used direct and conventionally indirect strategies more frequently, which were influenced primarily by the degree of imposition and social power. However, modifications in these strategies were influenced by all social factors. The results also found that Saudi Arabic was more similar to Kuwaiti Arabic than American English in the use of request strategies and modifications. Furthermore, Alkhonini et al. (2024) compared Saudis and Americans in their use of request strategies and politeness features. They found that Saudis employed more direct strategies than Americans, categorizing them as positive politeness to promote informality and minimize social distance. In contrast, Americans were less direct and tended to be more formal than Saudis, categorized as negative politeness due to not aiming to remove social borders. The study highlighted how culture shapes the construction of speech acts of request between Saudis and Americans. Other studies have compared Saudi Arabic with Australian English and British English in their use of request strategies.

For instance, Al-Gahtani (2017) compared Saudi Arabic and Australian English in the sequence organization of requests, examining pre-expansions, pre-pres (e.g., “Can you do me a favor?”), accounts within request turn, insert-expansions, and post-expansions, as well as the influence of power on these features. While both languages shared similarities in certain aspects of sequence organization, they differed in others, particularly in terms of the influence of power. Both languages used pre-expansions and multiple pre-expansions before requests to mitigate their request directness, though these were more commonly used in Saudi Arabic than in Australian English. Additionally, there was a preference for using accounts in Saudi Arabic to soften the illocutionary force of direct requests, whereas Australian English employed more indirect forms. Using pre-pres was more common in Saudi Arabic than in Australian English. Finally, insert-expansions showed no marked differences between the two languages. For British English, Qari (2017) examined the speech act of request in Saudi Hijazi Arabic, Saudi EFL learners, and British English. She found that Saudis preferred using direct strategies of requests more than both EFL and British groups, who preferred indirect strategies. Additionally, Saudis employed more modifiers, such as religious softeners and prayers, to mitigate direct requests. In another study, Alzahrani (2023) investigated requestive behavior in Saudi Arabic, Saudi learners of English, and British English. Although the results found similarities and differences in the use of strategies and supportive moves, there was strong tendency among all three groups to use the conventionally indirect strategy of query preparatory.

These findings align with the broader politeness and CCSARP frameworks (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), where speech acts are seen as culturally contingent, and indirectness is interpreted as a signal of deference and formality. While such studies have contributed to our understanding of how politeness and request strategies are affected by cultural norms, they generally overlook the digital realm of communication. This study aims to fill this gap.

Alharbi and Aldaghri (2024) compared face-to-face communication with WhatsApp text-based interactions in terms of the number of words and the types of modification devices used by Saudi females. The researchers found that more words were used in WhatsApp than in face-to-face communication. Additionally, external modifiers were used more frequently than internal ones. Grounders were the most common external modifier, while interrogatives and politeness markers dominated as internal modifiers, which were interpreted as obligatory and not optional in Saudi culture. Although the study focused on WhatsApp, the data were collected using a discourse completion test.

This leaves a significant gap in understanding how native Saudi Arabic speakers perform speech acts in casual online environments outside of hierarchical contexts. This gap is addressed by the present study, which examines interactions in a public Facebook group—a real public group where social power dynamics are minimal, and interactions are peer-to-peer. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of gendered differences, direct and indirect strategies, and how public digital spaces shape politeness and pragmatic choices, providing a more holistic understanding of Saudi Arabian digital discourse.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Data Collection

This study aims to identify the request strategies used by Saudi Facebook users and explore gender differences in their employment. Data were collected from a public Facebook page for Saudi teaching assistants and lecturers from different fields at Saudi universities. The page serves as a platform for members to exchange experiences, solve problems, and respond to inquiries related to academia in general and MA and PhD programs abroad. This Facebook page is public and anyone can access the page and view the members and their posts. It means that permission or membership are not required to access the data. The page was created in 2011 and includes more than 8,000 members, mostly in their mid-twenties and thirties. The researcher manually collected 550 posts (300 from males and 250 from females) in November 2021, with posts dated from January to November of the same year. The collected posts contained 19 571 words with an average word count of 35.58 per post. The data were transferred to an Excel sheet for coding. IRB approval was obtained from the university to conduct this study. The collected data were analyzed using quantitative content analysis to identify patterns in request strategies. Finally, the types of strategies used by male and female participants were analyzed and compared using simple statistical measures, such as frequency counts and percentage distributions.

### B. Data Analysis

The researcher adapted Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) model of request strategies through the directness scale to examine how Saudi Facebook users manage these variables when making requests in a public, low-power, and low-distance environment. Two new categories were added to the model to accommodate Saudi online requests: questions and nominal requisites. Several rounds of coding were conducted to categorize the request strategies, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Microsoft Excel was used for coding the data and extracting the frequency counts. Finally, no changes were made to the spelling mistakes in the Arabic examples used in the results. Table 1 provides a detailed discussion of the levels of directness, including direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect strategies.

TABLE 1  
THE LEVEL OF DIRECTNESS FOR REQUEST STRATEGIES (BLUM-KULKA ET AL., 1989)

Strategy	Definition	Example
<b>Direct strategies</b>		
1. Mood derivable	The request is indicated by the grammatical mood of the verb.	Help me with my computer.
2. Performative	The request is explicitly named.	I am asking you to move this chair.
3. Hedged performative	The request is modified by hedging.	I would like to ask you to give me more time to submit my assignment.
4. Obligation statement	The hearer's obligation to carry out the task is explicitly stated.	You will have to come on Monday.
5. Want statement	Indicates the speaker's desire that the hearer perform the task.	I really wish you'd postpone the exam.
<b>Conventional indirect strategies</b>		
1. Suggestory formula	The speaker makes a suggestion for the hearer to perform the task.	How about typing this letter?
2. Query preparatory	The speaker inquires about the possibility of carrying out the request by the hearer.	Can you open the window?
<b>Non-conventional indirect strategies</b>		
1. Strong hints	Explicit reference to an object necessary for completing the task is made.	You left the door open.

## IV. RESULTS

This section shows the results of the different types of request strategies used by Saudi Facebook users, divided into three sub-sections. The first illustrates the total number of request strategies in terms of directness and indirectness, as well as their types across all strategies. The second outlines the types of direct strategies. The third discusses the types of indirect strategies.

### A. Types of Direct and Indirect Strategies

Based on the analysis of 550 Facebook posts, it was observed that some users employed more than one request strategy in the same post. As a result, a total of 654 request strategies were identified, as shown in Table 2. The analysis of these 654 strategies revealed a strong preference for direct over indirect request strategies (see Figure 1). Additionally, male users tended to employ more direct strategies than female users. Similarly, male users employed more indirect strategies than female users.

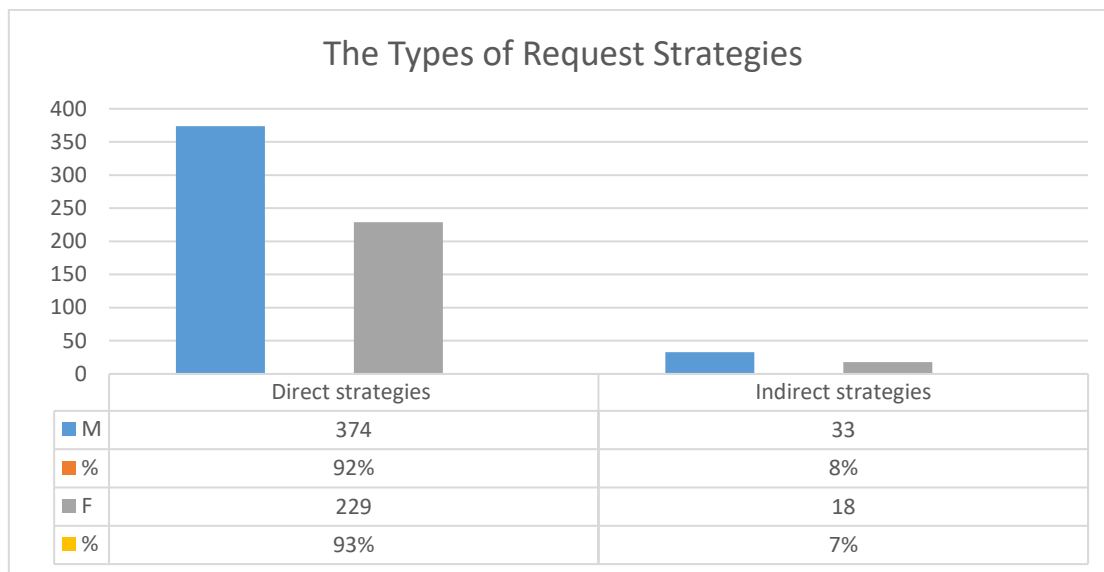


Figure 1. The Frequency of the Types of Request Strategies

As shown in Table 2, male and female users employed direct questioning more often than any other form of request, which aligns with the online preference for a direct and straightforward approach. Conventional indirect strategies, such as query preparatory forms, were used less frequently, while non-conventional indirect strategies (hints) were the least used. Notable gender differences were observed in all categories, except for the use of explicit performatives and query preparatory forms. Explicit performatives were used exclusively by female users, while both male and female users used query preparatory forms equally.

TABLE 2  
THE FREQUENCY OF TYPES OF DIRECTNESS AND INDIRECTNESS ACROSS ALL STRATEGIES

Directness/Indirectness	Strategies	M	%	F	%	Total	%
Directness	Mood derivable	22	5%	16	6%	38	6%
	Explicit performative	0	0%	1	0%	1	0%
	Hedged performative	23	6%	8	3%	31	5%
	Obligation statement	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Want statement	70	17%	39	16%	109	17%
	Question	255	63%	163	66%	418	64%
Conventional Indirect	Nominal requestives	4	1%	2	1%	6	1%
	Suggestory formula	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Non-conventional Indirect	Query preparatory	14	3%	14	6%	28	4%
	Strong Hint	15	4%	3	1%	18	3%
	Mild hint	4	1%	1	0%	5	1%
<b>Total</b>		407	100%	247	100%	654	100%

According to Table 2, direct questioning was the dominant strategy. It shows that 255 requests by males (63%) and 163 requests by females (66%) involved direct questions, making it the most commonly utilized strategy for both genders. This indicates a preference for clear, explicit communication when making requests. Want statements were the second most common form of directness, with males using this strategy 70 times (17%) and females 39 times (16%). This suggests that users often expressed requests through desire-based statements, showcasing a direct but polite approach to request-making. Hedged performatives show notable gender differences: males used them 23 times (6%), while females used this strategy only eight times (3%). This suggests that male users slightly favored softening their requests with hedges more frequently than female users. Mood derivable forms were used sparingly. This strategy was used 22 times (5%) by males and 16 times (6%) by females, reflecting direct commands. This indicates that explicit directive language was relatively uncommon, but slightly more frequent among females. Non-conventional indirect strategies were rare. Strong hints were used by 15 males (4%) and only three females (1%), suggesting that men may rely more on indirect implications than women. Mild hints were infrequent across both groups, totaling only five instances (1%) overall. For conventional indirect strategies, only query was used, and it was employed equally by males and females (14 times each). Explicit performatives and nominal requestives were minimally used. Only one explicit performative (less than 1%) by a female and six nominal requestives (1%) were observed overall, indicating that these strategies were not favored by either gender. No obligation statements or suggestory formulas were found in the data, suggesting that direct requests were preferred over obligation-based or suggestion-driven strategies. This summary further validates the predominance of

direct request strategies in focus group research, with these strategies being used more frequently by male users than female users.

### B. Direct Strategies

To further explore the specific request strategies used, it is necessary to summarize the results for each type. This section provides an overview of the direct strategies. Table 3 shows the frequency of the different types of direct strategies.

TABLE 3  
THE FREQUENCY OF THE TYPES OF DIRECT STRATEGIES

Direct Strategies	M	%	F	%	Total	%
Mood derivable	22	6%	16	7%	38	6%
Explicit performative	0	0%	1	0%	1	0%
Hedged performative	23	6%	8	3%	31	5%
Obligation statement	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Want statement	70	19%	39	17%	109	18%
Question	255	68%	163	71%	418	69%
Nominal requestives	4	1%	2	1%	6	1%
Total	374	100%	229	100%	603	100%

From the analysis of 550 posts, it was found that 603 direct strategies were employed, with both male and female users showing a strong reliance on direct questioning. This reinforces the preference for clear and direct communication in Saudi online interactions. Among the strategies, questions were used most frequently, far more than want statements, mood derivable forms, or hedged performatives. Gender differences were observed across all strategies, with males using them more frequently than females, except for explicit performatives, which were used only by female users. The absence of obligation statements reflects the nature of relationships between Saudi social media users, where there is no power hierarchy.

Direct questioning was the dominant strategy, with 255 instances (68%) by males and 163 instances (71%) by females, indicating that asking direct questions was the preferred approach across genders. This aligns with the study's focus on the balance between traditional politeness and online directness. Direct questioning was the most commonly utilized strategy by Saudi participants, a phenomenon not included in Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) classification. This result is consistent with Qari's (2017) findings. The Facebook users employed different types of questions (See Examples 1-18).

Question	Arabic Examples	Transliteration	Translation
Example 1	هل أحد عنده علم	hal 'aḥad 'indah 'ilm	Does anyone know that?
Example 2	كيف تتم الترقية؟	kayf tatim al-tarqiyah?	How to upgrade?
Example 3	كم العدد المناسب للعينة؟	kam al- 'adad al-munāsib lil'ayyinah?	What is the appropriate number for a sample?
Example 4	ما هو البرنامج المناسب لتحليلها	mā huwa al-barnāmaj al-munāsib liḥalīlīhā	What is the appropriate program to analyze it?
Example 5	كم عادة يستغرق تحليل البيانات؟	kam 'ādatan yastaghriq ḥalīl al-bayānāt?	How long does it usually take to analyze data?
Example 6	كم تأخذ وقت عادتنا	kam ta'kuth waqt 'ādatan	How long does it usually take?
Example 7	أي موقع يعلم اساسيات البحث العلمي؟	'ay mawqi' yu'allim 'asāsiyyāt al-baḥṭh al-'ilmi?	Which website teaches the basics of scientific research?
Example 8	هل ممكن تواجهني مشكلة	hal mumkin tuwājīhni mushkilah	Would I face a problem?
Example 9	مين يعرف اذا ...	mīn ya'rif 'ithā... .	Who knows if...
Example 10	هل تنصحوني أرجع ولا لا؟	hal tanṣaḥūni arja' walla la?	Do you advise me to come back or not?
Example 11	كيف اعرف ان المشرف راح ينفعني خلال مرحلتي	kayf 'a'rif 'inna al-mushrif rāḥ yinfacni khilāl marḥalati	How do I know that the supervisor will benefit me during my study?
Example 12	هل في مبتعثين من الجامعه طلوعوا لغه و ماستر في أمريكا	hal fī mubta'athīn min al-jāmi'ah ṭala'u lughah wa mastar fī 'amrīkā	Are there students on scholarship from the university who have obtained a language and master's degree in America?
Example 13	هل إرساله بالبريد آمن؟	hal 'irsālih bilbarīd 'āmin	Is it safe to mail it?

Example 14	كم يحق لعضو هيئة التدريس اجازة اضطرابية؟	kam yaḥiq li'ūdu hay'at al- tadrīs 'ijāzah 'idtirāriyyah?	How much is a faculty member entitled to emergency leave?
Example 15	متى يتم احتساب المكافئة	matā yatim 'iḥtisāb al- mukāfa'ah	When is the allowance calculated?
Example 16	ماذا اعمل في هذه الحالة؟	māthā 'a'mal fī hāthihi al- ḥālah?	What should I do in this case?
Example 17	ايش الطريقة عشان اخذ ضمان مالي	aysh al-ṭarīqah 'ashān 'ākhuth ḍamān māli	What is the way to get a financial guarantee?
Example 18	وشلون كانت الاجراءات وها الامور	wishlaw'n kānat 'alijrā'at wa hal'umūr	What were the procedures and things like?

Want statements reflect a polite form of directness. Males used this strategy 70 times (19%), while females used it 39 times (17%), suggesting that expressing desires was a common yet less dominant form of direct communication (See Examples 19-21).

**Want statement**

Example 19	أحتاج نصائحكم 'aḥtāj naṣā'ihkum I need your advice
Example 20	اتمنى منكم توجيهه او نصحه 'atmanna minkum tawjīhīh 'aw nushīh I wish you can guide or advise him
Example 21	باليت تعطوني تجاربكم yā layt ta'tūni tajārubkum I hope you give me your experiences

Mood derivable requests were sparingly employed. There were 22 instances (6%) by males and 16 instances (7%) by females, indicating that direct commands are used but remain secondary to questions and want statements (See Examples 22-27).

**Mood derivable**

Example 22	شاركونا تجاربكم Sharikunā tajarubkum Share your experiences with us
Example 23	افيدونا مشكورين لتجاربهم وأرائكم 'afidunā mashkurīn litajarubkum wa 'arā'ukum Please advise us with your experiences and opinions
Example 24	عطوني تجاربكم 'aṭūni tajarubkum Give me your experiences
Example 25	انصحوني 'inṣaḥūni Advise me
Example 26	طمنوننا ṭamminūnā Let us know
Example 27	عطوني نصايح 'aṭūna naṣāyiḥ Give me advice

Hedged performatives were used less frequently than mood derivable requests. Male users employed 23 instances (6%), while females used only eight instances (3%), suggesting that men may prefer to soften their requests more often through indirect phrasing (See Examples 28-33).

**Hedged performative**

Example 28	فضلا أتطلع لكريم مشاركتكم في هذا الاستبيان faḍlan 'ataṭalla' likarīm mushāratikm fī ḥathā alistibyān Please, I look forward to your generous participation in this survey
Example 29	انا بسأل الان 'ana bas'al al'ān

Example 30	I'm asking now اود اسأل 'awad 'as'al
Example 31	I want to ask حاب أسأل hāb 'as'al
Example 32	I would like to ask حاب اعرف hāb 'a'rif
Example 33	I would like to know حببت استفسر hābbayt 'astafsir
	I would like to inquire

The use of explicit performatives and nominal requestives was minimal. Only one explicit performative was used by a female, while six nominal requestives (1%) were used more frequently by male users than females, highlighting that these direct strategies were rare (See Examples 34-37, respectively).

#### Explicit performative

Example 34	أنت مدعو للمشاركة في دراسة بحثي 'anta mad'ū lilmushārahah fī dirāsah baḥṭhi You are invited to participate in my research study
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#### Nominal requestives

Example 35	اقتراحاتكم 'iqtirāhātikum Your suggestions
Example 36	رأيكم ra'yukum Your opinion
Example 37	نصائحكم naṣā'ihkum Your advice

Obligation statements were entirely absent. This absence reflects a tendency to avoid authoritative or imposing language, emphasizing the polite nature of requests even in direct communication.

These results indicate that while directness was a key feature of requests among Saudi Facebook users, there was also a preference for strategies that combine clarity and politeness. This aligns with wider pragmatic strategies involving politeness and respect prevalent in Saudi communication norms.

#### C. Indirect Strategies

Various types of indirect strategies occurred in the collected data. Table 4 shows the frequency of these indirect strategies.

TABLE 4  
THE FREQUENCY OF THE TYPES OF INDIRECT STRATEGIES

Indirectness	Strategies	M	%	F	%	Total	%
Conventional Indirect	Suggestory formula	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Query preparatory	14	42%	14	78%	28	55%
Non-conventional Indirect	Strong Hint	15	45%	3	17%	18	35%
	Mild hint	4	12%	1	6%	5	10%
Total		33	100%	18	100%	51	100%

Further, users employed 51 indirect request strategies, showing a clear preference for conventional indirectness. Among these, 28 instances of query preparatory forms stood out, indicating a preference for structured, polite requests over vague or ambiguous hints. This strategy was used equally by both male and female users, with 14 instances each.

The highest frequency of non-conventional indirect strategies was observed in the use of strong hints, which were employed 15 times (45%) by males compared to three times (17%) by females. Overall, mild hints (10%) were infrequently used by both genders, and suggestory formulas were completely absent. This pattern aligns with the pragmatic tendency to reduce imposition while maintaining clarity, which is consistent with the broader sociocultural emphasis on respect and politeness in Saudi communication.

Query preparatory strategies dominated indirect requests, with 14 instances (42%) by males and 14 instances (78%) by females. This reveals a strong preference for polite, conventionally recognized forms of indirectness, reflecting a structured approach to softening requests (see Examples 38-45).

**Query preparatory**

- Example 38      ممكن تشاركوني اذا رجعتو قريب وغيرتو الفيزا  
 mumkin tshārkūni 'ithā raja<sup>tu</sup> qirīb wa ghayyartū al-fīzā  
 Can you share with me if you have come back recently and changed your visa?
- Example 39      ممكن تدلوني اش الجامعة او الكلية المناسبة  
 mumkin tudullūni 'aysh al-jāmi'ah 'aw al-kulliyah al-munāsibah  
 Can you tell me which university or college is suitable?
- Example 40      اذا قدرتوا تساعدوني  
 'ithā qadartū tsā'dūni  
 If you can help me
- Example 41      من يستطيع ان يحصل عالبحث هذا  
 man yastaṭī' an yahṣul 'alā al-baḥth hāthā  
 Who can access this research paper?
- Example 42      ممكن احد يفيدني عن متطلبات حضور مؤتمر ثاني لطالب الدكتوراه  
 mumkin 'ahad yifidni 'an mutataḥabbāt ḥudūr mu'tamar thāni  
 liṭālib al-duktawrah  
 Can anyone tell me the requirements for attending a second conference for a doctoral student?
- Example 43      ممكن احد يوصلني ضروري بقروبات مدينه فلادلفيا  
 mumkin 'ahad yuwassilni darūri biqrūbāt mad īnat flādilfiyā  
 Can anyone connect me to groups in Philadelphia?
- Example 44      ممكن تساعدوني في ترجمه هذه المناصب  
 mumkin tsā'iduni fī tarjamat hāthihi al-manāshib  
 Can you help me in translating these positions?
- Example 45      ممكن اتواصل مع احد يدرس في (اسم الجامعة)  
 mumkin 'atwāṣal ma' 'ahad fī ('ism al-jāmi'ah)  
 Can I communicate with someone who is studying at (name of university)

Strong hints were more frequently used by male users, who employed them 15 times (45%) compared to only three instances (17%) by females, suggesting that men may be more inclined to rely on implicit or context-driven indirectness (see Example 46).

**Strong Hint**

- Example 46      انا ادور قبول دكتوراه في ادارة الاعمال في امريكا التخصص الدقيق ادارة عامة او ريادة الاعمال في أمريكا  
 'anā 'adawwir qabūl duktawrah fī 'idārat al-'a'māl fī 'amrīkā al-takhaṣṣus al-daḡīq 'idārah 'āmmah aw riyādat al-'a'māl fī 'amrīkā  
 I am seeking a PhD admission in business administration, with a specialization in public administration or entrepreneurship in America.

Mild hints were infrequent for both genders. There were used in only four instances (12%) by males and once (6%) by females, making mild hints the least favored form of indirectness, indicating that subtlety was less effective or preferred in the online context (see Example 47).

**Mild hint**

- Example 47      نزول المكافأة في الحساب 😊  
 nuzūl al-mukāfa'ah fī al-ḥisāb 😊  
 The allowance is credited to the account 😊

The use of suggestory formulas was not found in the data. The absence of suggestory formulas (0%) on both genders highlights a lack of reliance on indirect suggestions, reinforcing the preference for clearer, more structured forms of indirect requests.

V. DISCUSSION

Analysis of Saudi Facebook users' request strategies highlights the complex interrelation between directness and indirectness in online communication, reflecting broader sociocultural politeness and pragmatic norms. The findings suggest that a preference for direct request strategies—especially direct questioning and want statements—is consistent with the theoretical assumption that digital platforms generally favor more explicit communication (Hidayatillah et al., 2021). This preference for directness is consistent with previous studies on Saudi Arabic in face-to-face communication (Alkhonini, 2024; Almathkuri, 2021; Al-Gahtani, 2017; Qari, 2017; Al-Ageel, 2016; Alqahtani, 2015). The tendency of Saudis to use direct strategies in face-to-face interactions may influence their online communicative style, alongside the need for clarity in digital interactions. This trend aligns with Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) speech act theory, which asserts that when making a request—a type of directive speech act—there is a propensity to adopt a direct approach to accomplish the intended goal. However, our results do not align with Moussa Farrag's (2022) findings, which found a preference for indirect strategies to convey respect between older generations and younger colleagues in the workplace. This discrepancy may stem from contextual differences, particularly the motivation behind using indirect strategies. Despite the directness apparent in this corpus, the nuanced usage of hedged performatives and mood derivable forms by Saudi users suggests that, instead of being straightforward, Saudi performatives are often softened with polite modifications. This aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The duality between Saudi traditional beliefs—such as respect and hierarchy—and the more informal nature of web discourse is reflected here.

A major finding is the extensive use of direct questioning (69%) as the primary request strategy, regardless of gender. Similar results were obtained by Hidayatillah et al. (2021) on Instagram and X, highlighting a tendency toward clearer, less ambiguous expressions in online communication to avoid misunderstandings. The predominance of questioning in Saudi online discourse shows that instructions in social media occur as questions or in imperative structural forms. However, Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily (2012) suggested directness is typical in face-to-face Saudi interactions and is not considered impolite in Arab culture when used for direct requests (Umar & Majeed, 2004). This may suggest that the digital context lowers barriers to direct communication. Ultimately, this is indicative of broader patterns beyond online platforms, where a heightened sense of implicit and explicit urgency shapes interactions, and elaborate indirect strategies are less encouraged.

The use of hedged performatives (6% of male requests, 3% of female requests) suggests that women use less cautious or mitigated language than men in online settings. However, in this study, Saudi women showed strong preference for straightforward direct questions (71%), consistent with Al Sulaiti and Baker's (2009) observation that Arab women use digital platforms for open, clear communication. Women now seem to use more direct speech, perhaps indicating a redefinition of gender norms of politeness in online spaces, where the immediacy and accessibility of digital interactions reduce the need for elaborate verbal negotiation.

Where it matters most, the absence of obligation statements and suggestory formulas highlights the lack of strategies designed precisely to impose on the addressee. According to Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily (2012), in offline contexts, obligation statements in Saudi Arabic are rare and typically reserved for hierarchical and formal interactions. The absence of such strategies in this study reflects the egalitarian ethos inculcated by social media platforms, where users coexist as peers and not as superiors and subordinates.

Less frequent but noteworthy are indirect strategies, which show interesting gender-based distinctions. Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of negative politeness and the prevalence of query preparatory strategies (female indirect requests: 78%) share common ground, as women tend to use polite, conventionalized forms of indirectness to maintain social harmony. Similarly, Aditiya et al. (2021), found that female pre-service teachers in online learning environments frequently used query preparatory forms to make requests less direct. On the other hand, male users rely more heavily on strong hints (45%) than female users, aligning with Hidayatillah et al.'s (2021) findings that men on social media tend to prefer implicit cues requiring contextual interpretation. While directness remains the dominant style, these findings suggest that men feel more comfortable with ambiguity than their female counterparts.

Regarding the limited use of mild hints (10% across both genders), it seems that subtlety is not highly effective in online discourse. Holtgraves (2021) argued that the use of emojis and visual cues in digital platform speech acts inherently reduces linguistic subtlety. This trend may reflect a preference for pragmatic efficiency in online interactions, where clarity favored over elaborate politeness. At 18%, want statements strike a balance between stating needs directly while maintaining a level of politeness. This finding is comparable to that of Aditiya et al. (2021). Together, these strategies enable users to express their wants while avoiding face-threatening acts, supporting Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) claims that speech acts are inherently goal-oriented but context dependent.

This study's findings indicate a hybrid model of communication, where directness is the primary strategy but is mitigated and supported through politeness markers such as hedging and preparatory forms. This aligns with the hypotheses of Brown and Levinson (1987) and Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), which suggest that politeness is adaptive but conditioned by cultural norms. Additionally, this hybridization illustrates how the affordances of digital platforms influence cultural communication norms. Gender, social media norms, and traditional politeness expectations intertwine, highlighting the evolution of Saudi discourse as it navigates between cultural heritage and modern online interaction.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the researcher investigated the pragmatic and politeness strategies utilized by Saudi Facebook users when making requests in Arabic. It was found that Saudi Facebook users have a preference for direct language, particularly through direct questioning and want statements. The results highlight how social media platforms can provide flexibility for politeness strategies, such as hedged performatives and query preparatory forms. A gender-based analysis showed that female users favor conventionally indirect strategies, while male users tend to use non-conventionally indirect strategies, such as strong hints. These differences reflect wider sociocultural dynamics, as online communication occupies a hybrid space that combines formal Saudi politeness norms with the informal, egalitarian nature of social media. Ultimately, this study reaffirms that digital platforms are fundamentally changing communication practices, fostering more direct conversations that are less hindered by hierarchy.

The prevalence of direct requests is nonetheless accompanied by findings that reaffirm the importance of politeness strategies, reflecting Saudi Arabia's deeply respectful and socially harmonious culture. The data indicate that users pay attention to the face-threatening potential of requests, even in a public, informal online space, employing strategies such as hedging and query preparatory to minimize imposition. This pattern aligns with established speech act theory and politeness models, indicating that cultural values persist even in the modern context of social media. However, the absence of obligation statements and suggestory formulas suggests a conscious effort by users to avoid the formal approaches that other types of formal communities would pursue as an obligation—maybe because the community emerged informally, such as an online community. These results contribute to a broader understanding of how speech acts adapt in digital environments and reinforce the idea that the relationships among culture, technology, and communication are dynamic.

Based on these findings, the researcher proposes several recommendations. First, teachers and trainers of communication must emphasize the balance between directness and politeness strategies, especially in professional and academic online communication. Users can be trained to craft requests that are clear but respectful, fostering improved online collaboration. Additionally, the findings can inform educators, digital platform designers, and policymakers regarding challenges and opportunities in online communication that shape digital relationships. This insight can support the development of more inclusive and culturally appropriate digital environments. Future research could extend this study by including other social media channels, such as Instagram, X, or LinkedIn, as communication styles may differ based on platform-specific social norms. Further exploration of internal and external modifications is also recommended. Furthermore, cross-cultural comparisons—such as between Saudi Arabia and other Arab or non-Arab countries—could provide deeper insights into how cultural values shape contemporary online discourse. Longitudinal studies on changes in request strategies over time would also be valuable, offering a perspective on how digital politeness norms evolve in response to shifting societal and technological trends.

## APPENDIX. TRANSLITERATION SYMBOLS FOR ARABIC VOWELS AND CONSONANTS

Arabic Letter	English Symbol	Arabic Example	English Equivalent
ا	a	amal	hope
ب	b	bāb	door
ت	t	tibn	chaff
ث	th	tha <sup>l</sup> ab	fox
ج	j	jamal	camel
ح	h	hubb	love
خ	kh	khubb	bread
د	d	dubb	bear
ذ	dh	dhahab	gold
ر	r	rabb	Lord
ز	z	zayt	oil
س	s	sabt	Saturday
ش	sh	shams	sun
ص	s	sayf	summer
ض	d	dayf	guest
ط	t	ṭin	mud
ظ	z	zuhr	noon
ع	ʿ	ʿabd	slave
غ	gh	gharb	west
ف	f	famm	mouth
ق	q	qalam	pen
ك	k	kitāb	book
ل	l	layl	night
م	m	makr	guile
ن	n	nawm	sleep
هـ	h	hudhud	hoopoe
و	w	ward	rose
ي	y	yawm	day
ء	ʾ	dāʾ	disease
اَ (فتحة)	a	kataba	he wrote
اُ (ضممة)	u	kutub	books
اِ (كسرة)	i	sinn	tooth
مد طول الـاِ	ā	kātib	writer
ضممة طويلة و	ū	fūl	beans
كسرة طويلة ي	ī	fil	elephant
أصوات مدغمة	aw	mawt	death
أصوات علة مركبة	ay	bayt	house

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