Social Hierarchy in Real/Virtual World settings: Final Individual Report

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Aim
The primary aim of this project report is to analyse the social hierarchy present in the real world settings and how people communicate according to the social hierarchy present in the place.

Introduction
The overall project topic, that included both: virtual and real world settings offered us a plethora of fields to chose from, some of them being Cinema, Advertisements, Print Media,etc. The fields mentioned above are generally virtual world heavy but do many a times lie on the intersection of the Virtual and Real World. Therefore, the main challenge was to figure out an important yet succinct way to gather the data from the real world.

What better way is there to gather data about people than asking them directly? This is what I intended on doing too. The options were limited obviously. I narrowed it down to two: Either make a questionnaire or hold an interview. Due to pandemic situation in place at the point, I had to go with the former option. The responses of the same will help me to reach important conclusions about the social hierarchies and their impact in the real world.

This project report will intend to establish the various factors/traits I have come to acknowledge when analyzing the responses, both individually and collectively.

Approach
The questionnaire had 389 responses in total, in the time it was up for answering. It may not seem a lot but it is surely enough to derive certain important factors that come into play in real world settings of social hierarchy. Moreover, the majority of the people that responded were people that had to encounter social hierarchy model almost on a daily basis. Therefore, the audience of the survey was more than eligible to participate in the survey/questionnaire.

After the data collection, the most challenging part is obviously to derive the concerned social factors that people take into consideration when in a social hierarchy setting. Generally, people approach a situation in two ways: either they take the common way out or go on their own path which is uncommon and even unique in some cases. The foremost challenge was to take into consideration both these cases. Therefore, I have decided to do analysis of the responses in two stages: Collective and Individual.

The Questionnaire
This section will list all the questions that have been asked from the audience. Later on, the questions will just be referred according to their question number, instead of writing the question again. For example, first question would just be called Q1. The following questions have been listed in the exact same order as they appeared in the questionnaire.
1. How do you address your seniors or supervisors in your workplace or educational institute?

2. How do you address the same seniors or supervisors in a social setting outside of the workplace or institution? For example: at a wedding or at their child's birthday party.
3. How do you address your juniors in your workplace or educational institute?
4. How do you address the same juniors in a social setting outside of the workplace or institution? For example: at a wedding or at their child's birthday party.
5. Suppose you just got a big promotion and are now in a senior position compared to your previous boss/supervisor. How would you address them now?
6. Suppose your junior just got a big promotion and is now in a senior position compared to you. How would you address them now?
7. How do you address your close friends?
8. How do you address your office colleagues or classmates?
9. How do you address your close elderly family members?
10. How do you address your siblings?
11. Are you more comfortable in holding important discussions on online electronic media or face to face meetings?

Collective Analysis

In this analysis stage, the main focus is to conclude social factors or traits that I can from the most common answers, trends in responses, or most avoided answers, i.e., selected by a negligible number of audience. Before starting with a series of new analysis let's recap the concluded factors from last mid-term report:

- Disturbance of Social hierarchy above one's position
- Relationship Intimacy

Now, we will dive a bit deeper to bring other factors to spotlight.

Formalness of relationship

Sometimes, it is possible that one is in a very close relationship with two people but has to observe a certain demeanor and level of formalness which is more than what they can observe or conduct in the other relationship. The best example is of parents and siblings. One can be very close with their parents and in some cases even call them by their first name whereas calling your siblings by their first name does not sound much of an issue, no matter what cultural background one belongs to. Generally one can give informal nicknames to their siblings but not to their parents or other elder members in the family that they are close to. Therefore, no matter how close two people are in a relationship there still might be a sense of formalness in it.

Now, if we look at the respones for Q9:

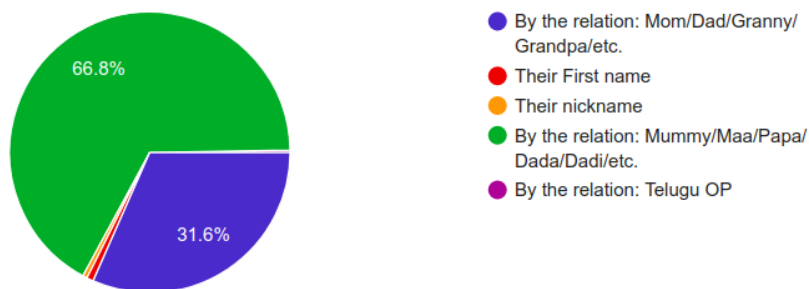## How do you address your close elderly family members?

389 responses

Figure 1. Responses to Q-9

We can see that about 2/3rd of our audience addresses their close elder family members like parents and grandparents according to the relation name in code-mixed Hindi-English with terms like Mummy, Papa, Dada, etc. About 30% of the audience chose the similar way, i.e., addressing them by the relation but using English terms like Mom, Dad, Granny, etc. Therfore, the total number of people that chose to address their close elderly family members by the relation is well over 98% which is an overwhelming majority.

Now, let's take a look at the responses for Q10:

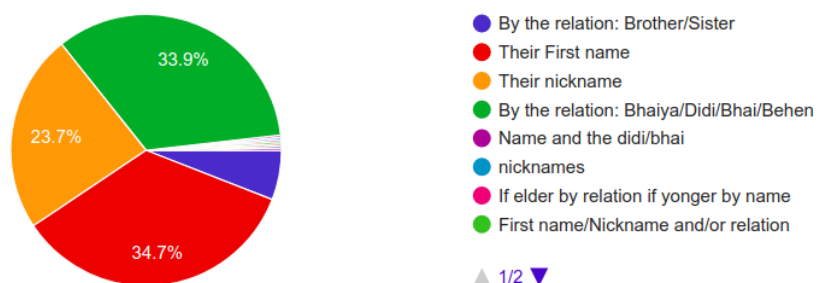## How do you address your siblings?

389 responses

Figure 2. Responses to Q-10

A weird yet important break in trend has occurred here. Now, only about 1/3rd of the audience addresses their siblings using the Hindi term for the relation and a mere 5.9% of the audience address their siblings using the English terms for the relation. The total percentage of people using the relation as a guideline for addressing their siblings is not even half of the earlier percentage, when they used the relation for addressing their close elderly family members. The majority half of those votes have gone to two different options, i.e., the sibling's first name or their nickname.
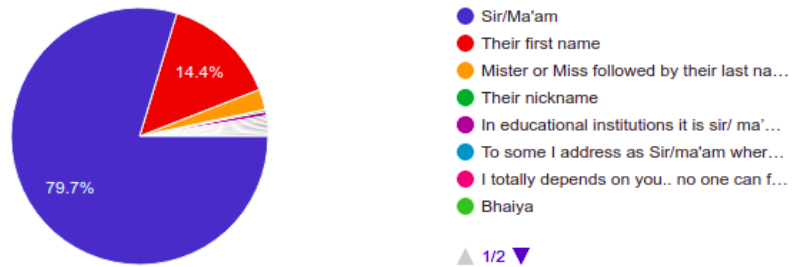
This helps us to prove one of our major hypothesis that **the formalness of a relationship in a social hierarchy setting directly affects how people communicate with each other or address each other in the hierarchical setting.**

Location or Social Setting

Sometimes, people also take into account the location of the place or the social setting of the place when they indulge in communication with other fellow members of their social hierarchy. They might choose different terms to address their colleagues in different social settings. For instance, let's take the responses the audience gave for the first two question:

How do you address your seniors or supervisors in your workplace or educational institute?

389 responses

- Sir/Ma'am
- Their first name
- Mister or Miss followed by their last na...
- Their nickname
- In educational institutions it is sir/ ma'...
- To some I address as Sir/ma'am wher...
- I totally depends on you.. no one can f...
- Bhaiya

△ 1/2 ▽

14.4%
79.7%

How do you address the same seniors or supervisors in a social setting outside of the workplace or institution? For example: at a wedding or at their child's birthday party.
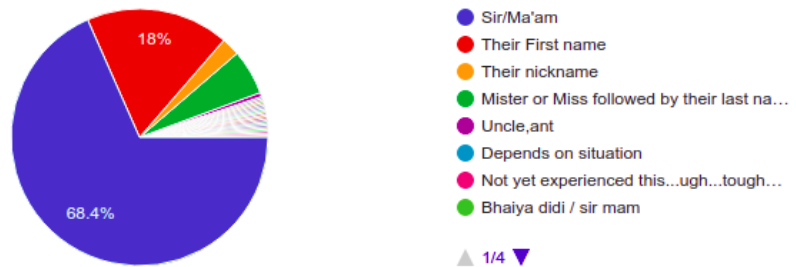
389 responses

- Sir/Ma'am
- Their First name
- Their nickname
- Mister or Miss followed by their last na...
- Uncle,ant
- Depends on situation
- Not yet experienced this...ugh...tough...
- Bhaiya didi / sir mam

△ 1/4 ▽

18%
68.4%

Figure 3. Responses to Q-11

In the first question, 79.7% of the audience chose to address their seniors as Sir/Ma'am but in the second question, 68.4% people chose to call them by Sir/Ma'am in a more open social setting. This drop of more than 10% in the number of audience was distributed between other answers like using their first name, using Mister, etc. This change was reduced to about 4% for Q3 and Q4 but at the same time it is not a proper pair to judge this factor as majority of the audience already used to call their juniors by their first name in their workplace, so no major change was expected anyway.

Nevertheless, the idea remains the same that **the location or the social setting of the place people are in influences the way people involve in communication with other members of the same hierarchical model.**

Introversion/Extroversion

Although this consideration might come across as more of a personality trait, we still need to consider its candidacy for being a possible factor that might influence the way people communicate in a social hierarchy setting. For starters consider the responses to Q11:

Are you more comfortable in holding important discussions on online electronic media or face to face meetings?

389 responses

- Online media
- Face to face meeting
- Either of them, doesn't matter
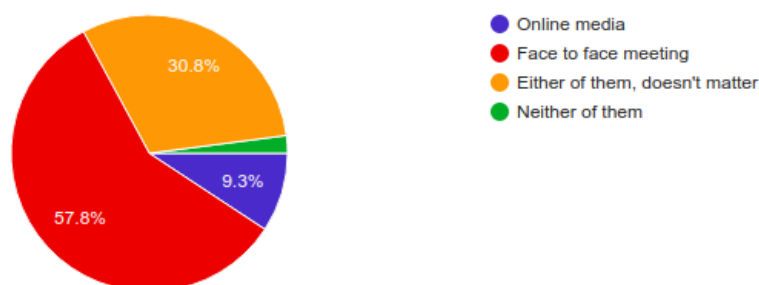- Neither of them

30.8%

9.3%

57.8%

Figure 4. Responses to Q-11

It is general consensus that people who don't like to participate in large face-to-face meetings are inherently shy and introverted by nature. Therefore, the 9.3% of the audience in our case falls into that category as they would prefer an electronic/online media to hold discussions rather than face-to-face meetings. Another important statement that can be concluded about introverts from a general experience is that they tend to resist changes in their social environments. This in our case of social hierarchy setting would mean that they will tend to communicate using the same terms to the respective people regardless of the position they carry later on in the social hierarchy or the location. For the analysis now, please bear in mind through Q1 to Q6.

Now, consider the responses of fellow 'introverts', i.e., they selected online media as their answer for Q11, for Q1 to Q6:

Table 1. Response Nos-222, 215, 211, 209, 121, 73, 70, 66, 44

Question-No	Response	Factor ignored
Q1	Sir/Ma'am	-
Q2	Sir/Ma'am	Location or Social setting
Q3	Their first name	-
Q4	Their first name	Location or Social setting
Q5	Sir/Ma'am	Disturbing social hierarchy below them
Q6	Their first name	Disturbing social hierarchy above them

The above stated response numbers had the exact same answers for Q1 to Q6 as shown in the table above. This shows that introverts can be expected to behave or communicate in a rigid sort of way in their social hierarchy setting, no matter the location or the changes being done to the hierarchy.

There were also other introvert responses that used just one term for all the Questions from 1 to 6:

- Responses 33 and 317 only used the first name to address their colleagues, no matter senior or junior.
- Responses 187 and 385 only used Sir/Ma'am term to address their colleagues, both senior and

juniors.

Another important conclusion that can be made here is that introverts would generally use either Sir/Ma'am or First name to address other members of the hierarchy. On the other hands, the extroverts, the people that chose 'Face-to-face meeting' or 'Either of them' as their answer for Q11, they had more variety in their answers and trends than the introvert group. They were more affected by the factors like Location or Social setting and disturbing the hierarchical model above them.

The general consensus that introverts don't like changes in their social environment or are immune to them is very much in line with our conclusion, i.e., **the introverts can be expected to remain immune to important factors or changes in their social hierarchical model, in turn making being an introvert in a social hierarchy model a factor itself.**

Individual Analysis

There is no doubt that Collective analysis has the numbers to backup its conclusions, but important factors can be overlooked in that stage of analysis. Therefore, the responses should also be looked at individually as even though the questionnaire was largely objective, an empty field was also provided for the audience to put in their opinions or considerations about any answer. Therefore, it becomes very much necessary that the analysis is also done individually, as it may reveal some more important factors that people might consider when communicating in a social hierarchy.

Before beginning new analysis, let's recap the factors already explained and analyzed in the previous mid-term report:
- Cultural background
- Respect

Now, we can dig deeper in Individual analysis:

Age

This is also one of the main factors people considered when communicating with other people in a social hierarchy. Especially, in cultures like India where children are taught from a young age to respect their elders because they are older than them age becomes a very important factor when communicating within social hierarchies. For example, see Response no-22:

How do you address the same seniors or supervisors in a social setting outside of the workplace or institution? For example: at a wedding or at their child's birthday party. *

◯ Sir/Ma'am

◯ Their First name

◯ Their nickname

◯ Mister or Miss followed by their last name

◉ Other: Depends on age

Figure 5. Response no-22

The person clearly considers age to be a major factor when deciding upon how to address their seniors in places or settings other than their workplace. Now, look at response no-299 as well:

How do you address your juniors in your workplace or educational institute? *

○ Sir/Ma'am

○ Their first name

○ Mister or Master followed by their last name

○ Their nickname

● Other: Depends on age.

How do you address the same juniors in a social setting outside of the workplace or institution? For example: at a wedding or at their child's birthday party. *

○ Sir/Ma'am

○ Their First name

○ Their nickname

○ Mister or Miss followed by their last name

● Other: According to their age it differs

Figure 6. Response no-299

This person considers the age of his juniors a major factor when deciding how to address them, regardless of the location or setting. Therefore, there is no doubt that **the members of a social hierarchy also consider age of other members they are communicating with as a factor which influences how they communicate in a social hierarchy.**

The general Norm
Sometimes, people don't take much effort or consideration to decide their communication process in the social hierarchy. This is due to the fact that there are already certain ethics and norms in place in that hierarchical model. The ethics and norm at the place may have been decided very much in the past, but they would still serve as a helpful and easy-way guide for such situations as hinted at Q5 and Q6 where the freshers generally won't have much idea on how to act. Generally, people take part in such norms in social hierarchies, especially their workplace hierarchies. These norms would also help people to save face in conversations and be polite as they won't make the mistake of choosing an addressing term the other person might feel offended by. For example, take a look at response-189:

Figure 7. Response no-189

As you can see in the image, the person lets age and workplace norms take the front-seat when deciding how to address their newly promoted juniors. If they are older than them, they would obviously go with Sir/Ma'am but won't hesitate to go down the same lane as others in their workplace when addressing them.

Many a times, norms are not just what exists in workplace social hierarchies. For example, in a friend circle too, friends give each other nicknames all the time, making those names the norm for addressing their friends. A similar case arises in response no-223:

Figure 8. Response no-223

Response no-145 also states that they would address their close friends according to the names given in their friend circle. Therefore, **people tend to use the norms or ethics of a social hierarchy as a guideline to how they should communicate in that hierarchy and thus completely influencing their communication process.**

Pronunciation of name
In rare cases, people find difficulty in pronouncing their fellow hierarchy member's name and this might become an important factor that will decide how they communicate with or address that fellow member in the hierarchy. The foremost considerations are obviously to save face and not sound rude to that member. Therefore, sometimes this factor, although nominal may override

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workplace norms and cause the person to call them using certain respectable term rather than just their name. For example, consider response no-357:

How do you address your juniors in your workplace or educational institute? *

○ Sir/Ma'am

○ Their first name

○ Mister or Master followed by their last name

○ Their nickname

◉ Other: Depends upon easiness of their name or surname and adding Ji with name or surname

Figure 9. Response no-357

As you can see the person weighs the easiness of pronouncing someone's name as an important factor of how they will address their juniors and to save the junior's face, they also add the 'ji' term, which is very respectable in Indian culture. Therefore, at times **the difficulty in pronouncing a fellow member's name can also act as an important factor which will determine how people communicate in the social hierarchy.**

Final factors

We can group the factors derived from Collective analysis as Major factors, as we have got the numbers to back them up. Similarly, we can call the factors derived from Individual analysis as Minor Factors. Now, we can list all those factors that we concluded from the survey analysis:

- MAJOR FACTORS:
  - Disturbance of Social hierarchy above oneself
  - Relationship Intimacy/Proximity
  - Formalness of relationship
  - Location or Social setting
  - Introversion/Extroversion

- MINOR FACTORS:
  - Cultural Background
  - Respect
  - Age
  - The general norms
  - Pronunciation of names

Challenges

Since the survey was only limited to 389 people, it is possible that not all of the derived factors will apply to the people that live in social hierarchies in the real world. This problem is more prominent with Minor factors, as they were concluded using Individual analysis and thus, do not have the numbers to back up their conclusions. This stage only considered the people that gave unique yet important answers to some of the questions in the questionnaire. Even though the Major factors

derived through collective analysis, that also have the numbers to back them up pose the same challenge. Even though there are numbers to back up these factors, it is very much possible that people in the real world may not always think along the same lines. There was a response which did not have a single response same as the most common one and there were just two responses that had every single response same as the most common one. This shows that the results of the survey may not be evenly distributed, just like the results of any real world study. We can find more variety as we move towards the center, i.e., consider both major and minor factors together.

All in all, the major challenge was to derive the important factors that affect communication in social hierarchies in real world setting according to their quality and credibility and not just the quantity. All of these is without a doubt subject to the author's, i.e., my intellectual and analytical calibre as well.

Conclusion: Future Improvements

Since there was no code or automation involved in the analysis or data collection stage, the whole process was manual. This generally does improve the quality of the results but along with it also brings a greater number of errors and a larger scope for improvement. Some simple improvements to be noted for related future studies are:

- To hold interviews along with questionnaire
- To provide people only empty fields for writing their answers, so they are not influenced by the multiple choices
- To make the questionnaire more detailed and longer
- Can give them concluded social factors to rank as a part of a second survey

More improvements can be made along similar lines. As we conclude, it is important to mention the people that were involved and I would like to thank my professor, teammates and each one of the 389 people for answering the questionnaire. The learning that came out of this project has humbled me and I am surprised at the fact at how much I also consider these factors that I concluded when I indulge in a conversation with other members in the hierarchy.