

## Facial Expression behind the Mask

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 Pandemic has changed our lifestyle drastically and it is 'new normal' now. Wearing a face mask in public places has become mandatory. Though many people used to wear facemask in public places for various reasons, it was not considered as an etiquette. In the olden days wearing a mask in many places was considered as inappropriate due to safety and identification issues. The vaccine for COVID-19 has already started and COVID-19 may be eradicated soon, but wearing a mask is going to be part of the lifestyle due to a number of reasons. A new pandemic is expected any time, due to pollution and we have experienced and scientifically proved that viral diseases are very less since we started wearing masks. In this research, the problem of face-to-face communication while wearing face masks will be analysed. The movement of the muscles on the face plays an important role in the communication process. When we wear a mask the lower parts of the face including the part of the nose, mouth, jaws and part of the cheeks are not visible. The muscle movements of these parts of the face play an important role in the communication process. The messages otherwise conveyed through facial expression need to be spoken. Spoken communication no longer gets the support of facial expression. The real question is how the communicators overcome this situation. At the end of the research it will be clear that facial expression helped the communicators in expressing their ideas.

**Key words:** Face-to-face Communication, Facial Mask, Facial Expression

### Introduction:

Facial expressions are one of the most important aspects of human communication. The face is responsible for communicating not only thoughts ideas, but also emotions. A facial expression is one or more motions or positions of the muscles beneath the skin of the face. Facial expressions are a form of non-verbal communication.

Face-to-face communication was mainly affected by the COVID-19. The requirement for face masks, as an important defensive measure to control the spread of the virus, had a big impact on face-to-face communication. Facial expressions and gestures play a major role in facilitating interpersonal communication, understanding, and the delivery of messages. Wearing face masks masked the ability of seeing and understanding people's expressions during conversations.

In this study, we explore the role of facial expressions in communication and we highlight how the face mask can affect it. In addition, we offer coping strategies to enhance the quality of interpersonal communication while wearing face masks. Speech apprehension is affected by face masks in two ways. By screening the mouth, masks limit essential visual speech cues. Masks can also change the acoustic properties of the speech signal that is transmitted. Someone with normal hearing can experience a 30% decrease in audibility.

### Methodology:

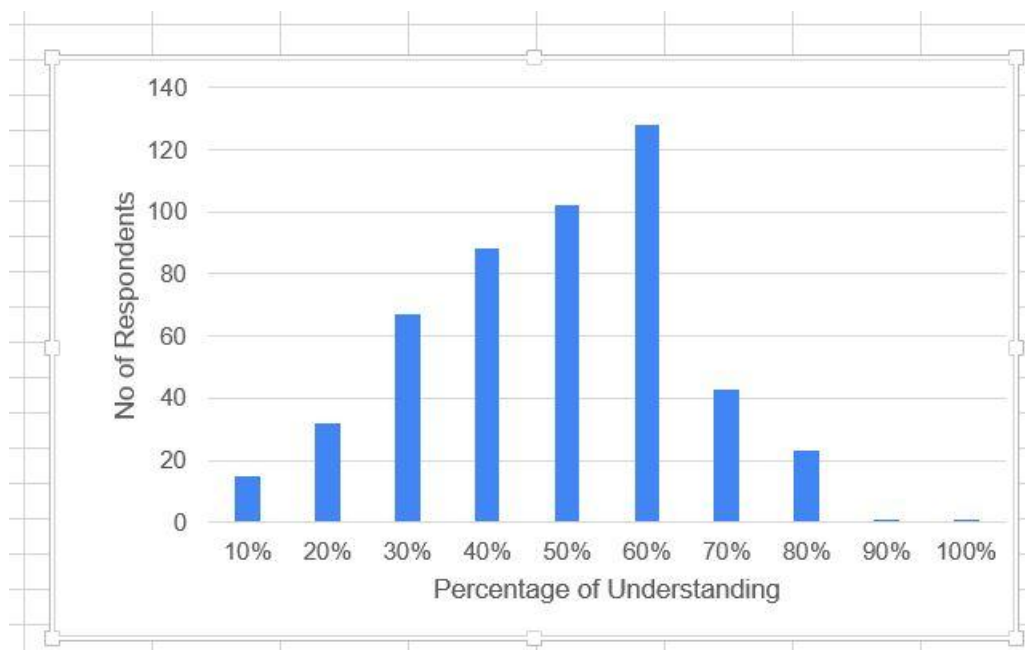
A review of the literature and Survey methodology is used to collect data. Respondents were asked to participate in an anonymous survey to understand the problems and challenges they face in day-to-day

face-to-face communications wearing facial masks. This online survey, using Google forms included 16 questions to find out type and intensity of difficulty in communication in this 'new normal' circumstance. Only data collected through survey was used for this research. Questionnaire was prepared and sent to various Whatsapp groups and requested them to forward it to maximum people. Name and contact details were not collected for this study.

### Analysis:

After receiving responses, I checked missing information and responses that would cause errors in study. Responses were imported to Libra Office Calc and checked data against individual responses. Data Analysis are completed using Libra Office Calc. About 94 % of the respondents wear facial mask when they are in public places. Almost 5% do not wear face mask all the time when they are in public places. Less than 1% say they don't wear mask in public places. Which shows that people are aware of the importance of wearing mask to prevent the COVID-19 disease. As many as 71% of the respondents think that wearing mask is a barrier to face-to-face communication, while 4% say it is not a barrier to communication. About 25% think that sometimes face mask is a barrier to face-to-face communication. So, it is clear that people find it difficult to communicate while wearing face masks.

Percentage of understanding of message, when the communicator wear mask is given below in the form of graph.



The main difficulties the respondents stated are given below.

- Cannot talk properly
- Cannot hear properly
- Cannot see lip movements, so cannot understand properly.
- Cannot understand facial expression, so cannot understand message properly.

More than 81% of the respondents believe that seeing face fully is important in face-to-face communication. Hence it proves that facial expression is an important factor in face-to-face direct communication.

Surprisingly 51% of the respondents talk less when they wear mask, compared to, when they don't wear a mask. Which shows the uneasiness of communicating while wearing facial masks. So they prefer being silent rather than initiating a talk, due to the extra effort to be taken to talk while wearing facial mask. And the below statement confirms this speculation.

Almost 76% of the respondents say they are using more energy while communicating wearing a face mask.

An 88% of the respondents believe that their emotions are unnoticed by other when S/he wears a face mask.

More than 81% of the respondents are not able to recognize other's emotions. The above two statements further proves that emotions, that is the outcome of facial expression, are the vital elements of a successful communication.

### **Findings:**

According to the study, majority of the people feel that wearing mask is a barrier to face-to-face communication, but they still wear mask in new normal world. The barrier of face-to-face communication while wearing facial masks include difficulty in expressing and understanding ideas mainly because it is less audible, and not able to see lip movements and not able to recognize facial expressions.

Nonverbal communication, such as facial gestures and expressions, creates majority of our total communication. The eyes and the mouth are the two key organs that support in evaluating other's faces. By wearing face masks, people are tending to concentrate further on the eyes so as to comprehend the facial expressions proposed.

With words, people can directly say what they feel. But we also rely heavily on non-verbal cues: tone of voice, gesture, touch, body language and facial expressions. The channel that communicates the most specific emotional states is the face. Today, the mask has become a permanent fitment to the face, hindering our capability to express and recognise each other's facial expressions by separating it into an observable top half and invisible bottom half. This considerably limits our ability to precisely understand emotions based on facial expressions

### **Conclusion:**

Facial expression recognition plays an important role in communicating the emotions and intentions of human beings. Face-to-face communication has been severely affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Defensive measures, such as face masks, is essential to moderate efforts against the virus, but challenge daily face-to-face communication. Face masks, muffle sounds, cover facial expressions and lip movements that ease comprehension during live face-to-face communication.

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