

**Pragmatic Strategies of Politeness and Face –Work in Twitter Debates:  
A Speech Act**

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**Abstract :**

This study examines the way people engage with one another when debating on Twitter via pragmatic strategies that are used to express politeness and interactively create positive self–presentations (face–work) to build and maintain a relationship, establish credibility, and negotiate meaning within the structure of an online discussion. The study adopted a qualitative approach. A Politeness Theory has been used for this research, and it was developed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson in 1987. It addresses how speakers engage in managing face–work, the desire to preserve self–image and social harmony through practical methods of language, such as positive and negative politeness, and face–threatening acts such as criticisms and disagreements. A representative sample of Twitter debates (5) on socio–political topics are selected, ensuring diversity of participants and contexts. The results showed that Twitter debates illustrate that users utilize strategic combinations of positive politeness, negative politeness, off–record speech, and bald on–record speech to achieve a balance of confrontation and mitigation. The use of these strategies enables users to create meaning in the context of rapidly developing online discourse; they are used to develop interactional meaning and facilitate conflict resolution. Additionally, the use of

these strategies facilitates social identity negotiation and positioning (e.g., as a rational debater, moral advocate, representative of their group) within larger sociopolitical contexts.

**Keywords:** *Debates, politeness, speech, impoliteness, achievement*

## **Introduction**

The rise of social media platforms like Twitter has changed the way people interact with each other, especially when it comes to what the reader talks about publicly. Interacting with each other using social media allows us to have quick conversations, but they are also short and fragmented. Social media also creates a space that can become very argumentative. Therefore, using polite language and performing "face-work" is necessary for everyone who uses social media to create an identity for themselves, avoid conflicts, and keep the peace among those who will see their posts. Sadeghoghli states (as cited in 2016) that according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, there are many ways that speakers try to soften the impact of saying something that could offend someone else a face-threatening act. Brown and Levinson (2011) indicate that the speakers do this by being positively polite, negatively polite, or both. Since all of these strategies work together to help speakers preserve their own face and the face of others, this theory is specifically useful for understanding how speakers communicate on Twitter during debates. Since debating on Twitter requires fast thinking and writing, there is always a chance that you might say something wrong and make someone angry. Therefore, using polite strategies during debate is critical for allowing people to continue having a good conversation. Goffman (2017) built upon Brown & Levinson's work and developed the concept of "face-work." He said that creating and maintaining a person's self-image and keeping that image intact while interacting with others is extremely

important. Goffman explained that since everyone has to present themselves in some type of public setting, whether it is at home, at school, or on social media, creating a public image is just one part of doing "face-work".

When people are debating on Twitter, they use speech acts such as apologetic statements, compliment statements, or softened criticism statements to show how much value they place on building relationships. Since everyone knows that when you post anything on social media, you have no idea who is going to read it, Goffman's ideas help explain why people feel compelled to continuously present a positive version of themselves online. Finally, Goffman's ideas also support the speech act perspective of communication. This means that when you speak, you are not simply expressing yourself; you are taking action that affects the listener(s). Many recent studies have applied Goffman's work to online settings. For example, Olajimbiti (2021) studied politeness in political online discussions. Based on his research, he found that people tend to move back and forth between agreeing with each other and disagreeing with each other based on a variety of factors, including how much they identify with the same ideology, as well as their level of anger towards opposing ideologies. His data indicate that using polite strategies does not serve solely as protection against conflict but rather as a tool for persuading other people and presenting oneself ideologically. Similarly, Idrees (2025) demonstrated in her socio-pragmatic study of Arabic discourse on Twitter that speech acts such as irony (sarcastic comments), flattery (compliments), and criticism (negative comments) are used strategically to express approval or disapproval and thus reinforce how pragmatic strategies influence group opinions and identities within online debates.

### **Research Problem**

Twitter Debates often include "face-threatening" acts such as criticism, disagreement, and sarcasm, which can create conflict for participants and pressure them to protect their social harmony and personal identity. Classical Theories of Politeness and Face-Work were created to help people avoid conflict through the use of polite language in traditional interaction, but there has been little research into how those same strategies function in the unique environment of Twitter's brief, immediate, and publicly visible format. That lack of understanding creates a problem about how the pragmatic strategies of politeness and speech-act functions are used to establish face-work in the process of negotiating digital debate, and whether they influence the dynamics of digital communication.

### **Research Objective and Question**

This study examines the way people engage with one another when debating on Twitter via pragmatic strategies that are used to express politeness and interactively create positive self-presentations (face-work) to build and maintain a relationship, establish credibility, and negotiate meaning within the structure of an online discussion. It will provide an insight into how speech acts serve as mechanisms of balancing self-presentation, mitigating conflict, and creating a sociolinguistic/pragmatics identity during digital debates. **The research question is:** How can the reader see pragmatic strategies of politeness and face work at play in Twitter debates by means of speech acts? Furthermore, how do these pragmatic strategies impact the construction of interactional meaning, conflict resolution, and the establishment/negotiation of social identity in online discussions?

### **Research Significance**

The significance of this research lies in its expansion of classical politeness theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987) as well as that of Goffman's

(1967) work on face-work into the realm of digital communication. This study provides insight into how pragmatics is used when participants use a particular strategy in order to create an interactional environment based upon their own needs and desires. The study contributes to the human knowledge base by studying how people develop their identities through negotiations with others, resolve conflicts quickly in fast-paced public debate, and ultimately contribute to creating social harmony in a rapidly changing world. The results of this study have the potential to enhance the fields of both pragmatic and discourse analyses as they relate to social media, as well as provide practical applications in terms of developing best practices for digital communication, promoting media literacy, and facilitating cross-cultural dialogues in today's ever-changing social media landscape.

## **Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) is still considered one of the most important frameworks for studying how people use language to avoid offending. As a result of its digital format, Twitter amplifies both the brevity and immediacy of language usage and requires users to be assertive while maintaining relationships. Goffman (2014) developed an additional framework that describes "face-work" as an ongoing process of negotiating one's image in social situations. More recent research from Keith (2026) has shown that developing appropriate politeness strategies for communication across cultures on social media requires significant adjustments to meet the differing expectations of various cultures. Therefore, all speech acts performed online may not only have linguistic value but also be highly context-specific.

Research has identified two primary ways that politeness strategies function in creating solidarity among individuals who share similar opinions and in regulating conflicting attitudes. For example, Maros and Rosli (2017) demonstrate how individuals engaging in politics via the internet often exhibit both aligned and misaligned behaviors. They illustrated how individuals engaged in online debate use both polite and impolite behavior to both support and challenge each other. Trifiro et al. (2021) study the Arabic Twitter discourse as a form of socio-pragmatic study; they found that individuals employed a variety of speech acts, including flattery, irony, and criticism, to communicate approval and disapproval. Their study showed that individuals utilized their politeness strategies not simply as a defense mechanism against being offended but also as a means to establish their identities and ideologies. The studies mentioned above clearly demonstrate that politeness strategies employed during Twitter debates are not simply reactive mechanisms but rather proactive tools for influencing the construction of digital discourse and power dynamics.

In addition to this earlier focus on politeness by the current generation of researchers on pragmatics, most notably Culpeper and Terkourafi (2017), who have shown a revived interest in the study of politeness and impoliteness. This has critically evaluated many of the established politeness notions (e.g., face-threatening acts; politeness principles, maxims and implicatures; politeness strategies; indirectness). It highlights how these politeness notions were shaped by the linguistic pragmatic underpinnings which gave rise to some of the major issues within the area of politeness research. On the other hand, new developments in pragmatics (e.g., neo-Gricean pragmatics; relevance theory) have provided much better foundations for continued development in the field of politeness studies (e.g., frame-based approaches to politeness; extensions and strengthening of Grice's account of implicature, etc.).

Linguistic pragmatics is where much of the earlier work on politeness came from, particularly in the form of speech act theory and conversational implicature. As stated previously, Searle (1975) provides a framework for understanding language production in terms of illocutionary acts, which include assertions, requests, and directives. Additionally, he indicated that illocutionary acts can produce social consequences. Culpeper and Terkourafi (2017) build upon Searle's theory; they emphasized the importance of pragmatics when evaluating the interpretation of meaning within social media dialogue. Specifically, they discussed the significance of implicatures, politeness, and contextual clues when evaluating the meaning of social media dialogue. Sifianou and Bella (2018) evaluate Twitter debates using a framework based on pragmatically governed structures of interaction. They demonstrated how politeness strategies and face-work interact with speech acts to govern digital discourse, identity formation, and conflict resolution.

### **Empirical Studies**

Here are some important empirical studies that clarify the content of this topic. Idrees (2025) carried out a study on how speech acts associated with (Twitter comments now commonly referred to as X comments) are realized at the 2024 Arab summit in Iraq using a qualitative and descriptive approach based on a synthesized theoretical framework of Searle's (1969) and Jucker's (2024) Speech Act Theory. Data was drawn from comments on Twitter, and this study identified the linguistic patterns and pragmatic meaning of the comments in addition to recognizing their functional role in a social media environment, which includes stance-taking and multimodal cueing mechanisms. The results indicate important issues regarding how Arabic speakers express assertive/religious

expression, directives/imperatives, modals, performative verbs, rhetorical, and questions to communicate socio-pragmatic intention and position themselves within public discussion. Therefore, this study identifies how polite linguistic etiquette is negotiated in public settings and how socio-pragmatic norms, cultural values, and political ideology shape commentators' opinions.

Olajimbiti (2021) study the pragmatics of (im)polite politeness in selected political online discourses. Political online discourses, as a type of new media discourse, typically exhibit both alignment and misalignment towards individuals or groups by affecting them either positively or negatively. This research study investigated the pragmatic characteristics of impoliteness and politeness in the selected political online communications via a descriptive qualitative research methodology. Between Nov. 14, 2018, and Mar. 29, 2020, twenty political tweets were sampled, where an average of 120 responses per tweet generated comments. Of these comments, ninety-eight responses were analyzed. An analytical framework based upon the theoretical frameworks of politeness/impoliteness theory and stance theory guided this analysis. Data collected revealed that the sampled comments assess three areas of discourse: performance, ethnic identity, and character. In essence, this study found that the sampled political online interactions are comprised of approximately sixty-four percent impolite content vs. thirty-six percent polite content. Further, it was found that there seems to be an abundance of Nigerians who utilize language to indicate dissatisfaction with governmental actions. Therefore, this study concludes that expressions of dissatisfaction and misalignment may be expressed politely to foster social cohesion.

Trifiro et al. (2021) examine a study concerning the relation of politics and politeness. This is an investigation into the civility of discourse via Twitter within the 2020 U.S. democratic presidential primaries. Social media websites have

come to play a central role in facilitating public discourse and political participation over the last decade. Specifically, it has been found that Twitter functions as a significant vehicle for the promotion of public discourse and political activity. Using Suler's concept of the online disinhibition effect as a theoretical framework for analysis, this study aims to examine the degree to which civil behavior exists on Twitter relative to discourse concerning the top three 2020 Democratic primary candidates. An analysis of a total corpus of 17,238,292 tweets was used to determine the degree to which civil behavior existed in Twitter discourse concerning those candidates. Notably, no apparent relationship existed between the level of incivility exhibited through tweets and whether the tweets originated from identifiable user names or anonymous accounts. The research provided empirical evidence suggesting that some policy issues are significantly more associated with civil discourse than other issues. Through the utilization of k-means cluster analysis,

Maros and Rosli (2017) explore politeness strategies through the Twitter posts of nine undergraduate students studying English Language Studies from Malaysia. Twitter is now rapidly growing into one of many platforms where researchers can examine issues such as social interaction, information exchange, and a host of other areas. As a result of these changes in the development of online environments for interaction, this paper provides evidence for the use of politeness strategies, as well as examples of potential misfires in Tweets. Using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies, a total of 775 Tweets posted during a period of two months by nine undergraduate females, all heavy users of Twitter, were analyzed. In addition to analyzing their postings, the respondents also completed an open-ended survey to provide further insight into the findings. The results indicated that there were four politeness strategies employed, with the greatest number of positive politeness. Negative politeness was utilized the least.

This was based upon the fact that CMC encourages interpersonal interactions. All four strategies were employed by the respondents, but they should be made aware that misunderstandings may easily occur when communicating virtually and without non-verbal "cues". Therefore, the overuse of profanity, utilizing an ambiguous indirect strategy, and failure to adhere to Twitter's character limit will be some of the reasons that may lead to misfires.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study used a qualitative methodology based upon the principles of Speech Act Theory and the Politeness Theory of Brown and Levinson (1987). Using a qualitative methodology allowed this study to examine in detail the strategic use of polite and face-work strategies through which participants negotiate meaning, interact with each other, and develop their socio-pragmatic identities in online debates.

### **Data Collection**

The sample includes five representative Twitter debates on socio-political issues that were collected as data. These debates were selected so that there would be a variety of participant backgrounds and contexts; hence, they included a wide range of communication strategies and cultural influences. By using this sampling method, the data set was diversified enough to allow for a comparative examination of the ways in which politeness and face work may or may not differ from one another in various online interactions. At the data preparation stage, all of the tweets in the debates were transcribed and organized into debate threads. Each tweet was coded for the type of speech act it represented, including requests, criticism, and compliments. This coding system helped to ensure that

the debates were analyzed in a consistent manner and that the pragmatic characteristics of the debates were easily recognizable.

## **Data Analysis**

All of the politeness strategies identified (i.e., positive, negative, off-record, bald-on-record) were matched with particular speech acts. At this stage, mechanisms for maintaining face were also examined to determine how participants present themselves and how they mitigate conflict while developing credibility in their online discourse. It is at this point that the basis for analyzing the relationship between speech acts and politeness strategies was established. During the interpretive phase, findings from each of the debates were compared to illustrate how participants' social-cultural background, context, and experience influence both the use of politeness and face-work. In addition, this stage highlighted how participants negotiate relationships and identity and how these relationships are influenced by the socio-political context(s) in which they occur. The five representative Twitter debates on socio-political issues were analyzed as follows:

### **1. Debate on Climate Change Policy**

1. 1. Description: After an announcement by the government regarding new carbon emission goals, this conversation took place on Twitter. Advocates, politicians, and regular people had differing opinions that varied from supporting comments to sharply criticizing the announcements. The thread contained both official NGO's (Greenpeace) and official government and climate skeptic accounts. Thus, it is a good example of using pragmatics to examine polite behaviors and face work.

1. 2. Speech Acts: Speech acts were present throughout the exchange of participants, including:

- Requests: Advocates asked politicians to take stronger action ("Please agree to net zero by 2030").
- Criticisms: Critics questioned the feasibility of the emissions reduction goal ("This plan is unrealistic and will be economically damaging")
- Compliments: Supporters complimented the progress made ("This is a big step forward and needed").
- Accusation: Some of the tweets said governments are "greenwashing" or not being sincere in their actions.

These speech acts show how conversations on Twitter operate like performances of speech where directives, assertive statements, and expressions predominate.

1. 3. Politeness Strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987): Participants used different types of politeness strategies:

- Positive Politeness: Supporters expressed solidarity with policymakers through "we support you" and other positive compliments.
- Negative Politeness: A few critics downplayed disagreement through the use of hedges ("I respect what you are doing, however, I do think there is no way to reach these timelines").
- Off-record Strategies: Sarcasm and irony occurred ("Planting some trees should solve our problems"), which invited inference rather than confrontational behavior.

- On-record Strategies: Bald statements of criticism ("You have failed with this policy") frequently escalate conflict.

1. 4. Face Work Mechanisms (Goffman, 1967): Mechanisms to protect one's own self-face (activists defined themselves as ethically accountable to enhance credibility):

Mechanisms to threaten others' face (critics threatened policymakers' competency): Mechanisms to help save another person's face (some participants reduced conflict by saying they saw the opposite viewpoint ("I understand your point, however, we cannot delay"). This back-and-forth reveals how participants build identities while managing conflicts in online interactions.

1. 5. Cultural & Contextual Influences: Global tension exists between prioritizing economics over environmental responsibility. Cultural influences affected the types of politeness strategies: Western advocates emphasized urgency and solidarity; policymakers employed cautious, hedge-laden language to preserve their authority and prevent losing face.

1. 6. Interactional Dynamics: Conflict increased when direct on-record critiques conflicted with activist urgency; however, when participants utilized humor, irony, or hedge-disagreement, conflict decreased. Pragmatic uses of humor serve to display contradictions while reducing confrontation.

**Conclusion:** This debate illustrates how pragmatic politeness strategies and facework mechanisms affect the interactional dynamics of climate change discussions. Speech acts, politeness strategies, and face work intersect to show how participants develop credibility, identity, and conflict resolution processes in socio-political debates on Twitter.

## 2. Debate on Immigration and Refugee Rights

2. 1. Description: during a surge in discussion regarding refugee resettlement policies, Supporters of an "open door" immigration policy emphasized their humanitarian obligation to accept Refugees; those who opposed it suggested that they needed to take stronger border controls. The social media post contained representatives from non-government organizations (NGOs); government officials; journalists and regular individuals making up a large number of voices engaged in a public conversation on practical methods of politeness and face work.

### 2. 2. Speech Acts

- Requests: refugee advocates asked Governments to "take more Refugees," or to provide "safe passage."
- Criticisms: those who were in opposition criticized policies as being "un-sustainably costly" or as "threatening national security."
- Compliments: those who supported the idea of accepting more Refugees complimented countries that have accepted Refugees ("Canada has set a wonderful example").
- Accusations: there were some posts that accused Governments of abandoning "international law" and/or "fomenting xenophobia."
- Justifications: Governments justified restrictions based upon the cost to their economy or their national security.

Searle's categories of speech Acts:

- Assertives: "Refugees add value to society."

- Directives: "Governments should fulfill their duties under international asylum laws."
- Commissives: "we will continue to support refugee programs."
- Expressives: "i am embarrassed by our policy."
- Declarations: an official statement made by a government detailing its new immigration policies.

### 2. 3. Politeness Strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987):

- Positive politeness: appeals to shared humanity ("we are standing with the Refugees"), and Compliments toward countries that welcome Refugees.
- Negative politeness: apologetic criticism ("i recognize there may be security concerns; however, we cannot abandon our humanitarian obligations")
- Off record strategies: using irony ("it appears that compassion does not extend to borders"), implying hypocrisy without directly attacking someone.
- On record or bald: making direct Accusations ("this is racism"), increasing conflict by eliminating the buffer of polite language.

### 2. 4. Face Work Mechanisms (Goffman, 1967):

- Self-face preservation: advocates portrayed themselves as ethically responsible; thus building credibility.
- Other-face Threats: Opponents attacked the competency of Governments and called into question the naivety of NGOs.

- Face-saving maneuvers: a few of the participants recognized the validity of opposing viewpoints ("i acknowledge the financial risks associated with allowing Refugees; however, Refugees also deserve to be protected"); thereby attempting to avoid further conflict.
- Identity formation or Construction: Supporters positioned themselves as protectors of human rights; while Opponents created identities through national sovereignty and national security.

## **2. 5. Cultural and contextual factors**

- In global debates, advocacy for Refugees was centered upon humanitarian arguments, which reflect the international legal framework governing refugee movements.
- Within local contexts, concerns regarding economic burdens and cultural assimilation influenced the politeness strategies employed by participants.
- Western-based NGOs advocated for solidarity and empathy, while local politicians typically employed cautionary, hedged language in order to mediate between their humanitarian obligations and domestic concerns.

## **2. 6. Interactional Dynamics:**

- Conflict escalation: when Accusations are made in a bald on record manner ("you are xenophobic") then conflicts become exacerbated.
- Conflict reduction/mitigation: the use of negative politeness and hedging ("i appreciate your concerns, but Refugees require a place of safety") can reduce disagreement among parties.

- Credibility Negotiation: NGOs referenced international law, while government agencies referenced national security.
- Humor or irony: sarcastic comments ("building walls solves all problems") are one way to point out the contradictions inherent in a particular position while avoiding direct confrontation.

**Conclusion:** The way participants negotiated the value of humanitarianism with national security is a clear example of how pragmatic strategies (speech acts, politeness strategies and face-work) can be used to create and express identity, demonstrate credibility and resolve or manage conflict. Additionally, the cultural context and social-political environment that exists within each participant's community shaped the way they employed their politeness strategies; this demonstrates how Twitter is an arena for both expressions of unity and division in relation to socio and political issues.

### 3. Debate on Gender Equality and Women's Rights

3. 1. Description: A political leader made statements regarding gender-based social norms that prompted an intense exchange of views between feminists and conservative commentators. In NGO threads including UN Women, Human Rights Watch, journalists, and public figures, users used complementary language, critical language, and rhetorical devices in support of, or against, equality legislation.

3. 2. Speech Acts: Speech acts include requests (directives) and criticisms/assertions (assertives). Requests were made by feminist activists for stronger equality legislation ("Ensure there is enforcement of equal pay legislation"), and criticisms/assertions were made by conservative commentators

when they described reform as "eroding" or "undermining" traditional family values. Complimentary language was used to praise NGOs and leaders who advocate for equality ("UN Women's initiative is very inspiring"). Accusatory language was used to criticize political leaders for being hypocritical ("You speak about equality but you don't take into account workplace discrimination") and justifying actions through declarations/commissive speech ("Gradually we will implement reforms", "Our culture dictates the way society should be organized").

3. 3. Politeness Strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987): Politeness strategies can be categorized as positive politeness (building alignment), negative politeness (softening disagreement), off-record strategies (inviting inference without confrontation), and bald-on-record strategies (making assertions directly). Activists using solidarity markers ("We stand with women everywhere") and complementary language ("Your initiative has been helpful") built an alliance with their audience. Conservative voices softened disagreements ("I have great respect for what women contribute to society. However, I do think some roles in life are naturally defined.") and used irony/ and implicatures ("Equality is wonderful, as long as it doesn't get to the board room") to invite inference without confronting head-on. A bald-on-record strategy was utilized when critics did not mitigate their criticism ("This statement is sexist") and escalated the conflict.

3. 4. Face-Work Mechanisms (Goffman, 1967): Face-work mechanisms refer to self-face protection (enhancing one's own moral authority), other face threats (undermining another's competence), face-saving moves (mitigating conflict), and identity construction (constructing oneself digitally as a specific type of person). Feminist activists enhanced their moral authority by presenting themselves as defenders of justice and credibility. Conservative commentators diminished activists' competence by labeling them as "radicals," "extreme," and "out of touch."

Participants constructed identities that allowed them to present themselves as a global advocacy group, while others presented themselves as authentic representatives of a particular culture.

### 3. 5. Cultural and Contextual Influences:

- Socio–Political Context: The debate showed the tension between progressive global standards (HRW, UN Women) and traditional cultural values.
- Global vs. Local: Global organizations like HRW used the language of universal rights; meanwhile, local commenters placed equality into a cultural or religious context.
- Contextual Shaping: Journalists noted systemic inequality issues; meanwhile, public figures attempted to balance their desire to be politically correct with their need to satisfy their constituents.

### 3. 6. Interactional Dynamics:

- Conflict Escalation: When "This is blatant sexism" was said by an individual publicly, the comments became very polarized. Conservative defenders were responding aggressively.
- Conflict Mitigation: Using hedged criticism ("Maybe women should run the economy– men already messed it up") mitigated some of these conflicts. Humor was also utilized ("equality is great...unless you're trying to lose your job").
- Credibility and Authority: NGOs/Journalists use their institutional credibility to support their claims. Politicians/Leaders utilize their cultural legitimacy as authority.

- Humor and Irony: Sarcasm can be viewed as a practical tool to illustrate contradictions ("Equality is good...unless you are losing your power"), and at the same time provide entertainment, and challenge others.

**Conclusion:** The above debate shows that language acts (such as solidarity), politeness strategies (such as hedging), and face-work (how individuals can present themselves as being socially acceptable) all come together in a way that shapes talk about gender equality. Solidarity/moral authority was used by activists, hedging/cultural framing by conservatives, and credibility/institutional framing by NGOs. Politeness choices were also shaped by the social-political context in which the conversation occurred; humor and irony served as avenues for escalating and mitigating aspects of the conversation. Thus, this debate highlights the complex pragmatics involved when negotiating identities/authority/conflict within digital conversations related to gender equality, and specifically demonstrates the complexities of discussing gender equality via Twitter.

#### **4. Debate on Freedom of Speech and Online Regulation**

4. 1. Description: The primary focus of this debate will be on balancing free expression with regulation to stop misinformation on social media sites. Many journalists, tech-policy analysts, and civil-rights organizations, such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation, have been tweeting back and forth regarding these issues. There were many examples of participants calling for greater governmental oversight to ensure protection of its users from harm, while other participants called for the defense of free speech and accused the government of censoring them. The exchange demonstrated how deeply entrenched conflicting values between democratic principles and the power of regulators are, as well as

how credibility and legitimacy are constantly being negotiated through direct criticism and nuanced rhetorical tactics.

#### 4.2. Speech-Acts:

- Requests (Directives): Civil Rights Organizations urged the government to protect the right to express freely, while also providing transparent regulation ("Please protect our First Amendment rights without silencing us").
- Criticisms (Assertives): Journalists described proposed regulations as "thinly veiled censorship."
- Compliments (Expressives): Advocates of the position supporting balanced approaches complimented technology experts for their advocacy ("Your thoughts and approach to this issue seem reasonable and fair").
- Accusations (Assertives): Some Twitter posts accused government agencies of using regulation to silence opposing viewpoints.
- Justifications (Commissives/ Declarations): Government officials supported regulation because they believed it was necessary to prevent the spread of misinformation, stating that they would be able to provide "responsible oversight."

#### 4. 4. Mechanisms of Face Work (Goffman, 1967):

- . Civil Rights Groups and Self-Preservation: The civil rights groups presented themselves as protectors of democratic values, thereby increasing their own credibility.
- . Threatening the Other's Face: Critics questioned policymakers' competence and portrayed them as authoritarian.

. Saving the Other's Face: Some individuals involved in this discussion recognized that there were legitimate opposing viewpoints ("I acknowledge that misinformation can have serious consequences; however, we must also recognize that any regulatory action taken by government must be reasonable and balanced").

. Constructing Identity: Through digital discourse, activists were able to create an identity as protectors of liberty, while policymakers positioned themselves as responsible, authoritative figures.

#### **4. 5. Cultural and Contextual Factors:**

. Sociopolitical Context: This debate represented a larger global conflict over whether democratic ideals will take precedence or if states will continue to exert control over information dissemination.

. Global vs. Local: International institutions supported universal rights, while national governments stated that regulation was a necessary cultural measure to maintain social order.

. Shaped by Context: Journalists highlighted the risk of the State exceeding its authority in regulating speech, while technical experts identified the practical problems associated with moderating speech.

#### **4. 6. Interactional Dynamics:**

. Escalating Conflict: Direct attacks on each other's reputations ("censorship") directly challenged policymakers' rationales, creating increased polarization among the parties involved.

. Mitigating Conflict: Using indirect language to criticize the opponents ("If you are so concerned about misinformation, perhaps we should start regulating politicians") has been shown to reduce animosity between adversaries.

. Establishment Credibility & Legitimacy: Civil Rights groups utilized their moral authority; journalists utilized their role as watchdogs of government; and policy makers based their authority upon their governmental position.

. Humor and Irony: Humor was used in a way that challenged contradictions ("Free Speech... except when it is too convenient"); yet at the same time provided a form of entertainment to soften the disagreement.

**Conclusion:** The discussion of online regulation clearly illustrates how speech acts, politeness strategies, and face-work strategies intersect in discussions of online regulation. Civil Rights Advocates utilized solidarity and moral frameworks; Policy Makers utilized rationales and declarations; and Journalists utilized irony and direct criticisms to call into question the authority of those involved. Politeness strategies were influenced by the sociopolitical context of the dispute; while irony and sarcasm were demonstrated to be useful strategies to escalate conflicts as well as mitigate disputes.

## **5. Debate on Public Health Policy (COVID-19 or Vaccination)**

5. 1. The COVID-19 vaccine mandate and policies were a source of controversy in terms of public health. Organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and other National Health Departments utilized Twitter to promote compliance with mandates and provide an update on the scientific developments. In contrast, citizen activists who were skeptical of mandates viewed them as violations of their right to make choices

regarding their own bodies, whereas pro-vaccine advocates saw the development of the vaccines as great advancements in medical research. As this conversation progressed, it was apparent that there was a struggle between what is best for society collectively versus what individuals have the right to do individually. The issue of trustworthiness will be settled using reference to science, authority, and individual freedoms.

### 5. 2. Speech Acts:

. Health officials and/or organizations that utilize social media to communicate their message via the following acts:

- Requests/Directives: e.g., "Get vaccinated so you may help protect your family and community."
- Criticisms/Assertives: e.g., "Requiring mandatory vaccinations is a violation of our individual rights."
- Praise/Expressive: e.g., "Thank you to the scientists who worked tirelessly to develop these life-saving vaccines."
- Allegations/Assertives: e.g., "You lied about how bad things really were."
- Facts/Commissive Declarations: e.g., "We need everyone to get vaccinated because it's essential for protecting us all."

### 5. 3. Politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987):

- Positive politeness: e.g., "United together we can stop COVID-19" — appealing to solidarity.

- Negative politeness: e.g., "I believe in science; however, I am concerned about side effects" — softening the opposition.
- On record/off record strategies: e.g., "Now that we have liberty, does this mean we catch viruses free?" — irony, inviting inference, rather than directly confronting.
- Bald on record: e.g., "This is nothing short of an authoritarian move"; bald on record = no mitigating strategies.

#### **5.4 Face Work Mechanisms (Goffman, 1967):**

- Self-Face-Preservation: Health authorities were able to depict themselves as responsible guardians of the public's well-being and therefore preserve their credibility.
- Other Face Threats: Opponents depicted health officials as incompetent and/or as coercive; thereby threatening other people's perception of health officials' faces and ultimately undermining it.
- Face-Saving-Moves: Many participants made statements that acknowledged opposing concerns ("I know many of you have fears about this, but I believe vaccines are safe and they're necessary") and thus prevented an increase in conflict.
- Identity construction: While activists established themselves as defenders of individual liberties, health officials portrayed themselves as possessing the authority of science and establishing a sense of social responsibility among all members of society.

#### **5.5 Cultural and Contextual Influence:**

- Socio-political influence: The two sides represented different perspectives based upon a global struggle between ensuring public safety versus protecting individual freedoms.
- Global vs. local differences: Health organizations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), promoted international health standards, whereas each country's Ministry of Health provided the specific framework for vaccine mandates within the cultural and political context of its nation.
- Contextual shaping: People responded to messages regarding vaccinations based on institutional trust, political climate, and their own cultural attitude towards science.

#### **5. 6. Interactional dynamics:**

- Conflict escalation: Direct accusations from individuals who oppose vaccination mandates, such as those labeling health officials as "authoritarian," directly conflicted with the reasons health officials gave for imposing these mandates; therefore, the conflict escalated because there was no compromise.
- Conflict mediation: Indirect criticisms and/or use of humor by some individuals softened disagreements ("If wearing a mask is considered 'tyranny,' then what does that say about our position on mandatory seat belts?").
- Credibility & Authority: Legitimacy was based upon scientific evidence for health officials (i.e., WHO and CDC), and legitimacy was based upon personal freedom/distrust of institutions for opponents of vaccination mandates.
- Humor & Irony: In addition to providing a form of entertainment, sarcasm can also provide a means of exposing the contradiction in someone's argument ("It

appears science is only valid when it suits your purposes"), and thus can soften potential opposition.

**Conclusion:** This debate illustrates the intersectionality of speech acts, politeness strategies, and face-work mechanisms in digital discourse, specifically regarding debates surrounding vaccination mandates and public health. While health authorities used solidarity and scientific authority to justify their actions, opponents of vaccination mandates utilized hedging, direct attacks, etc., and citizens chose to establish their identity as either a defender of individual freedoms or a member of society collectively working together to protect one another. The socio-political context in which citizens communicate affects their politeness choices, and humor and irony can serve as effective tools for either escalating or mediating conflict. Thus, this debate demonstrates how individuals interactively negotiate their credibility, authority, and identity in digital discourse related to public health crises.

## Research Results

**The research question is:** How can the reader see pragmatic strategies of politeness and face work at play in Twitter debates by means of speech acts? Furthermore, how do these pragmatic strategies impact the construction of interactional meaning, conflict resolution, and the establishment/negotiation of social identity in online discussions? Twitter debate participants employ a wide variety of pragmatic (linguistic) strategies to perform politeness and protect their "face" in debates. The two types of strategies most commonly used include positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive politeness strategies have been identified as a means for establishing relationships, creating rapport, and showing support to one's allies. Examples of this type of strategy include using inclusive pronouns, humor, and expressions of solidarity. Negative politeness

strategies help to mitigate the imposition created by disagreement and thus reduce conflict. Examples of these strategies include hedging, indirect language, and apologizing. Participants also utilize off-record strategies, which include irony and rhetorical questioning, to criticize indirectly. However, if an individual wants to make a bold statement in order to dominate the conversation, they will typically choose a bald-on-record act, i.e., a blunt command or challenge. Off-record strategies allow for criticism without directly stating it; on the other hand, bald-on-record acts provide clarity but can increase conflict. Because speech acts are made up of layers of both on- and off-record strategies, the way that tweets are interpreted varies greatly depending upon the context of interpretation. In addition, because of the layered nature of speech acts, meaning is constantly being negotiated during the course of fast-paced, public online discussions.

The way in which individuals interact with each other via pragmatic strategies has several implications for how interactional meaning is developed and how conflicts are resolved. For example, polite strategies can transform what would otherwise be considered a threat to another's "face" into a constructive form of criticism. Mechanisms that are involved in protecting an individual's "face," such as self-presentation, enable participants to continue engaging in dialogue even after becoming polarized. Finally, strategic mitigation enables participants to manage their disagreements; however, if directness becomes the primary mechanism for resolving disputes, it will likely escalate. In addition to developing and negotiating interactional meaning and managing conflict, individuals who participate in Twitter debates also develop and negotiate their own social identities. Participants do so by portraying themselves as rational debaters, moral advocates, or representatives of various groups. Therefore, as with all forms of communication, politeness and face-work mechanisms employed in speech acts serve as important mechanisms for creating meaning, managing dispute

resolution processes, and establishing positions relative to others' political views within the context of the socio-political dynamics of Twitter debates.

## **Discussion**

Twitter debates are a clear example of how the strategic use of pragmatic forms of politeness and face work are used within speech acts to control and regulate the meaning of an event or debate, conflict and social identity. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are two primary types of political strategies; positive politeness strategy is intended to create solidarity through means of humor, inclusive personal references (pronominal usage) and supporting statements. Negative politeness strategy creates a form of mitigation for imposing on another's time, space etc., by using hedges and indirectness. The idea of "face" and how we attempt to maintain our own and other people's identities through various "face-work" strategies was first developed by Goffman (2017). Face-work allows individuals to defend both their own and other people's identities during social interactions, which can occur when discussing controversial issues and helps to allow a continuation of conversation even in extremely polarizing situations. As stated by Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015) digital communications also amplify these strategies. For example, off-record uses such as irony and rhetorical question allow for indirect criticisms. On the other hand, bald-on-record uses such as stating one has a right to say something will assert power but may escalate conflicts. Overall, this body of research demonstrates that the choice of politeness and face-work strategies in Twitter debates are simply a part of an individual's ability to choose what they want to say and how they want to communicate it.

## **Conclusion**

The study concluded that participants in a Twitter debate use multiple types of pragmatics (e.g., positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, and bald-on-record) to control face and create and define interactional meanings in rapid-paced, online discussions. Participants not only construct how to say criticism and disagreement, but they also create the potential to have a continued/constructive discussion or escalate into an argument. In using speech acts, along with politeness and face-work, participants make continuous negotiations about meanings, defend their identity/social status, and define themselves in terms of larger political and socio-communicative contexts. Overall, the application of politeness and face work emerges as critical factors for creating and maintaining engagement, managing conflicts, and developing self-concepts in virtual communications.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There are many ways future researchers can build upon these results. For example, researchers may wish to expand the data set to represent a variety of languages used by users engaged in multilingual tweets, so that researchers can examine similarities/differences in the way users employ politeness and face work to negotiate identity/meaning. Researchers may also want to develop hybrid methodologies combining computer-based quantitative techniques (i.e., discourse analysis), as well as qualitative approaches (such as content analysis) to quantify/qualify the broad macro-levels and micro-levels of pragmatically relevant features. Finally, they may be interested in studying the long-term effects of politeness strategies on individuals' digital identities and community relationships over time on various social networking sites.

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