Ghancaran
Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia
P-ISSN 2714-8955 | E-ISSN 2715-9132
https://ejournal.uinmadura.ac.id/index.php/ghancaran/index
https://doi.org/10.19105/ghancaran.v20i2.26136

OPEN ACCESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Communication risk mitigation levels based on politeness strategies in political discourse on TikTok

Tri Santoso[1]*, Hari Kusmanto[2], Presillia Agustina[1], Muhammad Afrizal[1]

[1] Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Surakarta, Indonesia
[2] Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

***Corresponding Author**
Email: ts675@ums.ac.id

ABSTRACT
The growth of TikTok as a digital political space has increased in public participation in political support, criticism, and opinions. However, interactions in comment sections often involve face-threatening acts, polarisation, and communication conflicts because of the use of insufficiently mitigative communication strategies. This study aimed to analyse politeness strategies in political discourse on TikTok comment sections. Additionally, this study aimed to explain the degre of communication risk mitigation reflected in the use of each strategy. The research used a descriptive qualitative methodology, from a cyberpragmatic perspective. The data consisted of 39 user comments on the Mens Rea TikTok account which discussed political issues and public figures. The data were used Brown and Levinson's politeness theory through collected by non-participant observation through listening and note-taking methods. The analysis identification, classification of politeness strategies, and interpretation of their levels of communication risk mitigation in the digital context. The results revealed that bald on record strategy was the most dominant strategy, accounting for 18 comments (46.15%), followed by positive politeness with 11 comments (28.21%), off record with 7 comments (17.95%) and negative politeness with 3 comments (7.69%). Bald on record represented low mitigation, positive politeness represented moderate mitigation, negative politeness represented very high mitigation, based on the degree of communication risk mitigation. The results show that the more indirect the politeness strategies were, the more effectively they mitigated threats to face and possible communication conflicts.

Keywords: Politeness strategies; communication risk mitigation; Brown and Levinson; political discourse; TikTok

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: September 30,2026
Accepted: October 28, 2026
Published: November 12, 2026

LICENSE

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) License. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.

How to Cite This Article
Santoso, T., et al. (2026). Communication risk mitigation levels based on politeness strategies in political discourse on TikTok. *Ghancaran: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*, Special Edition Lalongét VII, 409-429. https://doi.org/10.19105/ghancaran.v20i2.26136

INTRODUCTION

Initially a platform for entertainment, TikTok has turned into a space for digital political discourse that brings together different forms of political participation, ranging from activism and campaigning to expressions of political identity (Cervi & Divon, 2023; Guinaudeau et al., 2022; Hunklinger & Limacher, 2025; Widholm et al., 2024). The platform's features that emphasise creativity, participatory culture, and algorithmic distribution allow political messages to be disseminated to extensive audiences through various content formats, such as memes, duets, and audio (Hautea et al., 2021). This shows that politics is no longer a fringe element of TikTok but has become an important component of contemporary digital communication practices (Jalli, 2025).

The comment sections of TikTok are open spaces for expression in which users can give support, criticism, rebuttals, and opinions about political issues being discussed (Berdón-Prieto et al., 2023). However, several studies indicate that comment sections tend to be more affective and partisan than deliberative in their political discourse, as they are subject to the logic of virality, group affiliation, and high engagement with controversial or toxic content (Quick & Maddox, 2024). Thus, political interactions on TikTok may result in polarisation, communicative conflicts, and various interactional risks that influence the quality of public conversation in digital spaces (Akter & Fichman, 2025).

Political discourse is a communicative space that is subject to face-threatening acts (FTAs), interpersonal conflict, and public escalation, especially when political actors use direct attacks, sarcasm, delegitimisation, or threatening language (Aporbo et al., 2024; Dingler & Kroeber, 2023; Zhang et al., 2025). These risks are exacerbated in digital politics by anonymity, social distance, large audiences and the employment of speech strategies deliberately aimed at opinion-shaping and political positioning (Dridi, 2021; Levant et al., 2026). This condition indicates that communication management is an important element in minimising conflict without affecting the effectiveness of message delivery.

Previous studies have examined politeness strategies across various digital and interpersonal contexts, including online academic communication (Tivyaeva & Abdulmianova, 2023), invitation refusals in American and Russian cultures (Litvinova & Larina, 2023), and refusal strategies among Chinese and Malaysian university students (Yan & Bidin, 2025). These studies employed different data collection methods, such as surveys, discourse completion tasks, questionnaires, and interviews, and focused on indicators including directness, indirectness, face-saving moves, and face concerns, demonstrating the importance of politeness in mitigating face threats across communicative contexts. However,

their focus on academic, interpersonal, and intercultural interactions leaves limited understanding of how politeness strategies operate in digital political discourse, particularly regarding their varying degrees of communication risk mitigation and their potential to reduce face-threatening acts and communication conflicts. Therefore, this study examined politeness strategies in TikTok political comment sections and analysed the degree of communication risk mitigation reflected in each strategy, contributing a new perspective to pragmatic research on digital political communication.

According to Brown & Levinson (1987), politeness strategies are used to manage face-threatening acts (FTAs) related to positive face (the desire for appreciation) and negative face (the desire for freedom of action). They identified four strategies: bald on record, characterised by direct and explicit expressions; positive politeness, indicated by solidarity, agreement, and appreciation; negative politeness, marked by hedging, apologies, and minimisation of imposition; and off record, expressed through indirect meanings, hints, and irony. The selection of these strategies is influenced by social distance (D), relative power (P), and the rank of imposition (R), which shape the perceived weight of face threats in communication. However, these strategies do not universally determine conflict-reduction effectiveness; therefore, this study employed them as analytical categories to interpret context-dependent levels of communication risk mitigation in TikTok political discourse.

In their development, politeness strategies have been considered not only as linguistic norms but also as ways to reduce communication risks that help to maintain the interactional harmony and to reduce the possibilities for conflict (Syting & Gildore, 2022). Positive politeness, negative politeness, hedging, and indirect forms have been found effective in softening criticism, protecting the interlocutor's face, and enhancing communication effectiveness in diverse settings, including digital communication (Ahmed et al., 2024; Boginskaya, 2025). The more frequent use of bald on record without mitigation may heighten tension and discomfort, so the choice of politeness strategy is an important determinant in reducing communication risks (Alsubaie et al., 2022; Sonmez & Akbaş, 2023).

Research on politeness strategies in digital communication has been limited to the identification of the types of strategies used by speakers in different interactional contexts. However, there is a relatively small number of studies that associate politeness strategies with the degree of mitigation of communication risks, especially in political discourse on TikTok. The present study, therefore, aims to fill this gap by analysing the extent of communication risk mitigation through the use of politeness strategies in political discourse on TikTok.

The novelty of this study lies in its conceptual proposal for classifying communication risk mitigation levels based on Brown & Levinson (1987) politeness strategies in TikTok political discourse. Unlike previous studies that primarily identified politeness strategies or examined their interpersonal functions, this study interprets the relationship between the linguistic characteristics of each strategy and its potential to mitigate face-threatening acts in political comment sections. The proposed classification distinguishes four levels of mitigation: low for bald on record, moderate for positive politeness, high for negative politeness, and very high for off record. Rather than presenting this classification as a validated universal model, this study offers it as an interpretative framework that contributes to understanding politeness and communication risk mitigation in digital political interactions.

This study aims to analyse politeness strategies used in the political discourse of TikTok comment sections. Furthermore, this study aims to provide an account of the extent of communication risk mitigation as reflected in the use of each politeness strategy. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of pragmatic studies, particularly regarding the application of politeness strategies and the mitigation of communication risk in digital political interactions.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a cyberpragmatic perspective to examine politeness strategies in political discourse on social media. The qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on interpreting the use of politeness strategies as a form of communication risk mitigation in digital interactions. The cyberpragmatic perspective is used to understand how politeness strategies are produced, interpreted, and function within an online communication environment characterized by asymmetric interaction, multiple audiences, and high visibility.

The research data were obtained from the comment section of video posts on the *Mens Rea* TikTok account discussing social and political issues related to public figures https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSmEnepEE/. The account was selected because it consistently produces content that generates diverse public responses, making it relevant for examining the use of politeness strategies in digital political discourse. Comments were collected from December 30, 2025, to January 6, 2026, within a seven-day period after the video was published. The data consisted of user comments responding to the issues and public figures discussed.

Data were collected through non-participant observation using the listening and note-taking method. The researcher observed all comments on the selected posts and documented comments relevant to the research focus. Comments consisting only of emojis, symbols, spam, promotions, or unrelated content were excluded from the corpus, resulting in 39 comments that met the analytical criteria.

The unit of analysis was individual comments produced by TikTok users. Each comment was treated as a single utterance and analyzed based on the dominant politeness strategy using Brown & Levinson (1987) theory, namely *bald on record*, *positive politeness*, *negative politeness*, and *off record*. Subsequently, each strategy was interpreted according to the level of communication risk mitigation it demonstrated in reducing face-threatening acts in digital political interactions.

Data analysis was conducted through four stages: data identification, classification of politeness strategies, interpretation of communication risk mitigation levels, and cyberpragmatic interpretation. At the classification stage, each comment was categorized according to Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies, while the interpretation stage aimed to explain the relationship between the strategies employed and the level of communication risk mitigation in the context of political discourse on TikTok. The final stage involved cyberpragmatic interpretation to explain how the characteristics of digital media influence the selection of politeness strategies and the management of communication risks.

The reliability of the analysis was supported by a coding manual containing operational definitions and linguistic indicators for the four politeness strategies proposed by (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Each comment was classified based on its linguistic features and interpreted in relation to the utterance context, discussion topic, relationships between users and public figures, and characteristics of TikTok communication. Coding decisions were documented and reviewed through repeated readings to assess classification consistency, reconsider ambiguous expressions, and revise initial interpretations when necessary. As the analysis was conducted by a single researcher, reflexivity was maintained through critical self-review of interpretative assumptions and an audit trail documenting coding decisions and their revisions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Politeness Strategies in Political Discourse on TikTok

The analysis results show that all comments in political discourse on TikTok use four politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson, such as bald on record, positive

politeness, negative politeness, and off record. The four strategies are used with different frequencies, which reflects the different ways in which users show their attitudes, criticisms and support to the political issues that are debated. Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of each politeness strategy.

No.	Politeness Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
1	Bald on Record	18	46.15%
2	Positive Politeness	11	28.21%
3	Off Record	7	17.95%
4	Negative Politeness	3	7.69%
Total		39	100%

Table 1. Strategies of Politeness in Political Discourse on TikTok

Based on the data in table 1, the most dominant politeness strategy is bald on record strategy with 18 data (46.15%), then positive politeness with 11 data (28.21%), off record with 7 data (17.95%) and negative politeness with 3 data (7.69%). The occurrence of bald on record strategy indicates that TikTok users are likely to express political opinions, criticism and evaluation directly without using linguistic mitigation to reduce threats to the hearer face. The relatively low use of negative politeness, in contrast, indicates that the use of strategies aimed at protecting the hearer's freedom of action and reducing imposition is less frequently taken into consideration in political interactions in digital spaces.

The *Bald on Record* Strategy as Direct Criticism

The bald on record strategy is when the speakers deliver criticism or evaluation directly without using forms of redressive action to the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Prayitno et al., 2021) . This strategy is usually employed in the research data to firmly evaluate political figures and government policies, which result in relatively high face threats to the utterance targets (Aporbo et al., 2024). The following utterance exemplifies the use of this strategy.

No.	Comment	Speech Context	Pragmatic Function
1.	*Presiden harusnya sesuai dengan kualitasnya bukan kaya gibran 💅 (nesa.anzani)* [The president should be a person who has the necessary level of competence, not someone like Gibran. 😭]	comment on the backlash against the government's leadership following a TikTok video	The commentor directly criticizes the president and judges leadership competence directly, not indirectly or mitigated.

Table 2. Data 1 The Bald on Record Strategy as Direct Criticism

In Data (1), the speaker directly disapproves the quality of leadership by claiming that the president should have better qualities than the figure mentioned in the utterance. The

phrase "Presiden harusnya sesuai dengan kualitasnya bukan kaya Gibran" is uttered without mitigating markers like hedging, apologies, or other forms of linguistic mitigation, and therefore represents the bald on record strategy (Prayitno, Kusmanto, et al., 2019; Syting & Gildore, 2022). The employment of this strategy shows that the speaker is more concerned with clarity in expressing evaluation than maintaining the target's positive face. This may increase the possibility of conflict in political discourse on TikTok.

Criticism: The bald on record strategy indicates the speaker's tendency to state evaluations explicitly without using mitigating language. For example, Haristiani et al. (2023) show that the use of this strategy in speech acts of criticism is associated with more direct communication styles in certain cultural contexts. Such direct communication patterns are made increasingly possible on social media, where users can explicitly express complaints or criticism using offensive language (Al-Shboul et al., 2026).

Therefore, the use of bald on record strategy in the data of the research can be seen as the pragmatic choice of the speaker to express criticism in a firm and explicit way. The strategy reveals the presence of a face threatening act and the speaker's inclination toward expressing attitudes directly without considering the mitigation toward the criticised party (Al-Khawaldeh & Rabab'ah, 2024).

The Positive Politeness Strategy as a Support and Solidarity

Speakers used positive politeness strategy to create closeness, solidarity, and agreement to the target of the utterance. In the research data, this strategy is generally realised by expressions of support, appreciation, and shared perspectives toward the public figures or political issues under discussion (Syting & Gildore, 2022). This strategy is illustrated in the following utterance.

No.	Comment	Speech Context	Pragmatic Function
2.	tujuan bang Panji ini rakyat biar milih pemimpin itu gak asal2an lagi, hanya dikasi janji2, sembako Krn tampang, dikasi pencitraan baik langsung dianggap orang suci (bolon) [The purpose of Bang Panji is to educate the people so that they no longer elect leaders carelessly, just because they are given promises or basic needs, or because of their appearance and positive image that can make them immediately see someone as a virtuous person]	A statement supporting Panji's efforts to inform the public to be more critical in choosing political leaders.	The comment shows agreement and support for Panji's position and stresses the importance of critical public judgment in judging political leaders.

Table 3. Data 2 The Positive Politeness Strategy as a Support and Solidarity

In data (2), the speaker shows that he agrees with Panji's purpose by stressing that the criticism is to educate the public to be more critical in choosing the leader and not easily influenced by political promises or image building. This utterance is categorised as positive politeness strategy because the speaker build common ground (claim common ground) and show her support toward the figure who is being talked about, so that it boosts positive face (Aporbo et al., 2024). The employment of this strategy suggests that political evaluation can be expressed persuasively through solidarity and agreement, resulting in a low potential threat to face compared with the bald on record strategy (Syting & Gildore, 2022).

This data also shows the positive politeness strategy which is the strategy that shows the effort of the speaker to minimise the social distance from the party that is supported. The function is consistent with the findings that positive politeness can be used to create familiarity and reinforce interpersonal relationships through shared perspectives and social solidarity (Aporbo et al., 2024). Strategies such as in-group identity, claim common ground, and seek agreement can increase a sense of togetherness among communication participants when there are shared identities or interests (Migdadi et al., 2025a).

Thus, the utterance in Data (2) is not only a comment on a political issue, but also an expression of interpersonal support for the viewpoint expressed by Panji. The use of agreement and shared perspectives indicates that positive politeness can be used as a strategy to build solidarity and convey political evaluation in a more relational and persuasive manner (Nikpoo & Allami, 2024).

A request for clarification: Negative Politeness Strategy

Negative politeness strategy is used when speakers want to express opinion or question a certain point of view while respecting the freedom of action of the hearer. In the research data, this strategy is usually realised through questions or requests for clarification that offer the hearer a chance to give reasons or explanations (Syting & Gildore, 2022). Here is an example of an utterance using this strategy.

No.	Comment	Speech Context	Pragmatic Function
3.	terus menurut lu siapa yg bagus jadi presiden?? klo bukan prabowo.. kasih 1 alesan yg tepat pilihan lu bner ["So who else would be a good choice for president other than Prabowo? "Give one good reason why you think your choice is the right one."]	A response to another users political opinion and asking for clarification on an alternative presidential candidate preferred over Prabowo.	The comment asks the interlocutor to justify and clarify his political preference. The request is formulated in a rather non-confrontational way, giving the interlocutor the freedom to give an explanation and at the same time implicitly challenging the basis of their opinion.

Table 4. Data 3 A request for clarification: Negative Politeness Strategy

In Data (3), the speaker seeks an explanation about which president is better by using a question rather than a statement that directly blames or attacks the other party. It is a negative politeness strategy because it gives the hearer a chance to give reasons for his/her opinion respecting the hearer's negative face or freedom of action (Aporbo & Barabag, 2024). The use of this strategy suggests that the difference in political views can be expressed through requests for clarification that lessen imposition and lead to a reduced likelihood of communication conflict than the bald on record strategy (Syting & Gildore, 2022).

The use of a question form in Data (3) also reflects an attempt to express the request more indirectly. One form that can be used in negative politeness is questions that minimise the burden on the hearer and allow the hearer space to determine their response (Aporbo et al., 2024; Prayitno, Ngalim, et al., 2019). The speaker thus demands a clear reason of the hearer, but puts the demand in the form of a question and not as a direct command or attack.

In interactions with differences of opinion or power relations, negative politeness can function as a mitigation strategy against face threats. The speaker may maintain the content of the question or demand, but allow the hearer space to justify his position (Pompeu, 2021). Data (3) therefore shows how disagreement can be treated more cautiously by means of negative politeness, in the form of requests for clarification and giving the hearer the opportunity to give reasons.

The *Off Record* Strategy as Political Sarcasm

The off record strategy is used when speakers express criticism or evaluation indirectly by using sarcasm, irony, or implicature (Al-Khawaldeh & Rabab'ah, 2024). In the data of the research, this strategy is mostly used to express disagreement with political practices without directly naming or attacking a particular party. The utterance below makes use of this strategy.

No.	Comment	Speech Context	Pragmatic Function
4.	yg mengkritik dan ga sejalan dg pemerintah di labeling PKI, antek aseng, pemecah belah NKRI 😅😅 (dinartbydinarsafitri) ["If you are critical of the government or have a different opinion, then you will be branded as a PKI sympathizer, foreign agents or divisive forces that want to destroy the unity of the Republic of Indonesia. 😅😅 "]	A reply to the stigmatization of those who express criticism or dissenting views of the government.	By listing the stigmatizing terms often used to label dissenters, the comment implicitly satirizes the practice of branding government dissenters. The use of ironic language and emojis also points to the speaker's critical attitude toward such labeling practices.

Table 5. Data 4 The Off Record Strategy as Political Sarcasm

In Data (4), the speaker sarcastically criticises the practice of labelling people who criticise the government by mentioning various stigmas such as PKI, antek aseng, and pemecah belah NKRI. The utterance is categorised as an off the record strategy because the criticism is delivered implicitly by showcasing a social phenomenon, rather than directly accusing a particular party of engaging in the labelling practice (Aporbo et al., 2024). The employment of this strategy suggests that sarcasm can help the speaker to deliver political evaluation while reducing face threat, and the possibility of communication conflict is relatively lower than directly expressed strategies.

The indirect form in Data (4) is clear from the absence of any explicit reference to a particular party responsible for the labelling. The speaker only presents the sequence of labels PKI, antek aseng, pemecah belah NKRI as an expression of the phenomenon being criticised. It is in line with the features of off record. It is based on implicature and the hearer's interpretation of the speaker's intended meaning from the context of the utterance (Syting & Gildore, 2022).

The use of these terms also creates an ironic effect, as the speaker does not overtly say that the labelling practice is incorrect, but rather identifies it as something recognisable to readers. One can use the off record strategy by using irony, rhetorical questions, metaphors, and hints to criticise without directly expressing the intended meaning (Aporbo et al., 2024). Thus, the interpretation of the criticism in Data (4) is largely dependent on the reader's ability to correlate the form of the utterance with the political context behind it.

These strategies allow speakers to express political criticism in social media by relying on shared knowledge and context. Also, the use of sarcasm and irony as a form of indirect criticism has been identified in political communication on social media, including in responses to political figures and political campaigns (Del Saz-Rubio, 2018). Thus, Data (4) shows that off the record can be used as a pragmatic resource to express political disagreement implicitly, managing the risks of conflict and face threats at the same time. All four strategies are interactional resources for negotiating power, social relationships and face threats in different contexts of cross-cultural discourse (Kamlasi et al., 2026).

Levels of Risk Mitigation of Communication Based on Politeness Strategies

The extent to which politeness strategies mitigate communication risk varies in their ability to minimise face-threatening acts (FTAs). The degree of risk mitigation is understood in this study through the traits of every politeness strategy as conceptualised by Brown and

Levinson in dealing with face threats in political interactions on TikTok. In Table 2, the classification of communication risk mitigation levels is presented according to politeness strategies.

No.	Politeness Strategy	Degree of Risk Mitigation	Basis of Interpretation
1	Bald on Record	Low	The utterance is expressed directly without *redressive action*, resulting in a relatively high potential for face threat.
2	Positive Politeness	Moderate	The strategy emphasizes solidarity, familiarity, and the interlocutor's *positive face*, thereby reducing interpersonal tension.
3	Negative Politeness	High	The strategy minimizes imposition through indirectness, hedging, deference, or other forms of mitigation.
4	Off Record	Very High	The intended meaning is conveyed implicitly, allowing the speaker to reduce direct responsibility for the face-threatening act.

Table 6. Degree of Communication Risk Mitigation Based on Politeness Strategies

From Table 6, the bald on record strategy represents the lowest communication risk mitigation, while positive politeness, negative politeness and off record have increasing higher levels of mitigation according to their characteristics in reducing face threats. This difference shows how the level of mitigation is influenced by the way in which speakers deal with face threatening acts, either directly, or through different forms of linguistic mitigation. Therefore, the politeness strategies are not only about the choices of linguistic forms, but also about the ability of the speaker on the minimisation of potential conflict in the political discourse on TikTok.

The Low-Risk Mitigation Strategy: Bald on Record

Bald on record strategy is shown as low communication risk mitigation where criticism is communicated directly without an effort to mitigate the threat to the hearer's face (Migdadi et al., 2025b). In the research data, this strategy is often applied to provide negative assessments of political figures or certain groups by simple and direct words. An example of mitigation of low communication risk is the following utterance.

No.	Comment	Speech Context	Risk Mitigation
5.	Pemimpin oon dipilih rakyat oon (dewins) [Stupid voters elect stupid leaders.]	A judgment of the outcome of a leadership election with a derogatory term for both the leader and the voters.	Low because the criticism is direct without any redressive action. The utterance thus threatens potentially the positive face of the individuals targeted.

Table 7. Data (5) The Low-Risk Mitigation Strategy: Bald on Record

In Data (5), the speaker judges the leader and their voters with the statement "Pemimpin oon dipilih rakyat oon" ("Stupid leaders are chosen by stupid people"). It is stated directly without any linguistic mitigation. The utterance demonstrates a low level of communication risk mitigation as there is no redressive action to mitigate the threat to the positive face of the party targeted by the criticism (Ribino, 2023). The condition suggests that the speaker prefers assertiveness over interactional harmony in expressing the evaluation. Therefore, it increases the likelihood for conflict escalation in political discourse on TikTok.

The evaluative form "oon" strengthens the direct character of the utterance. The speaker explicitly states a negative evaluation of the leader and his group of voters. This feature is consistent with the use of bald on record, which is characterised by the explicit expression of meaning without a mitigating strategy (redressive action) . The utterance thus does not leave enough (Daar, 2023) room for the targeted party to receive the criticism as a mitigated evaluation.

The low level of mitigation also suggests that the bald on record strategy is relevant when the speaker prioritises the effectiveness and assertiveness of the message over face maintenance. In some instances this strategy enables speakers to convey their intentions efficiently and unambiguously (Prayitno et al., 2022; Ribino, 2023). However, when used in political discourse about differences in political choices and group identities, the lack of mitigation can increase the threat to the face and the possibility of a negative response from the criticised party.

Thus, the utterance shows the low level of mitigation of the bald on record strategy since the criticism is expressed explicitly, without hedging, softeners or redressive action. This finding demonstrates that the fewer mitigation devices used in delivering criticism, the greater the face threats and conflict escalation in digital political interactions.

Moderate-Risk Mitigation Using the Positive Politeness Strategy

Positive politeness is a strategy of moderate communication risk mitigation by mitigating the face threats through support, praise, and solidarity (Ribino, 2023). This strategy in the data of the research enables the speaker to positively express political attitudes without losing the substance of the intended message. The following statement provides an example of moderate communication risk mitigation.

No.	Comment	Speech Context	Risk Mitigation

6.	salut bang .diam tertindas atau berdiri melawan (l-hak&sekutu) ["Salute bro. Be quiet and be oppressed, or fight and stand up."]	I respect Panji's courage to speak out on political issues.	Moderate because the utterance acts as praise that increases solidarity and maintains positive face of the person being talked about.

Table 8. Data 6 Moderate-Risk Mitigation Using the Positive Politeness Strategy

In Data (6), the speaker expressed his appreciation from utterance "salut bang, diam tertindas atau berdiri melawan" as a form of support for the courage of Panji to express political criticism. The utterance shows a medium level of mitigation of communication risks since praise and solidarity work to protect the positive face of the figure being talked about while minimising possible threats to interpersonal relationships (Ribino, 2023). The use of this strategy shows that polite support can increase the acceptance of a political message without provoking direct confrontation.

The phrase "salut bang" is a marker of appreciation that strengthens the social closeness of the speaker to the figure being supported. Praise and friendship are types of positive politeness that can decrease social distance and reduce the threat to face (face-threatening act) (Ribino, 2023). At the same time, the use of the word "bang" points to an attempt to establish interpersonal closeness through a familiar social identity marker.

The phrase "diam tertindas atau berdiri melawan" further strengthens the solidarity because the speaker not only gives praise but also demonstrates a shared attitude toward the courage to express criticism. Nevertheless, the strategy of positive politeness is related to efforts to emphasise group identity, common views, and social relations so as to establish solidarity (Daar, 2023). Hence the support functions to buttress the political position expressed by the figure attacked by the comment.

It implies that the moderate level of mitigation present in this utterance is still a clear expression of the speaker's political stance framed in terms of appreciation and solidarity. Positive politeness provides relational support that can reduce social distance and maintain positive face Ribino (2023) compared to bald on record which implies an FTA without mitigation. Thus, the implementation of this strategy means that the political message is assertive, and the risk of interpersonal conflict is relatively controlled.

Negative Politeness Strategy for High-Risk Mitigation

The employment of negative politeness strategy as a form of high communication risk mitigation, which reduces threats to face through indirectness, hedging, or expressions that avoid imposing on others (Daar, 2023), is an indication of high communication risk mitigation. In the data of the research this strategy is used when the speaker offers criticism

or suggestions and respects the other party's freedom of acceptance or rejection. The following utterance is an example of applying high communication risk mitigation.

No.	Comment	Speech Context	Risk Mitigation
7.	gw sih berharapnya pilpres kek ada draft pick, jadi klo ud jawa, besok pilpres next gk bole jawa lagi, biar kita liat "mendingan" mana wkwkwk (WanPikMen) ["I wish presidential elections were like a draft pick. If the president is from Java, then the next president shouldn't be from Java so we can see which one is 'better'. LOL."]	A response proposing a different method of electing a president to prevent the political leadership from being monopolized by one region.	High, as the speaker presents the proposal as a personal wish ("I wish..."), thus lessening the sense of imposition and respecting the others' freedom to accept or reject the proposal.

Table 9. Data 7 Negative Politeness Strategy for High-Risk Mitigation

The speaker proposes a method for the election of the president in Data (7) by using the expression "gw sih berharapnya". This expression indicates that the opinion is stated as a wish and not as a demand. The hedging makes the imposition less apparent and preserves the negative face of the other party by offering an option to accept or deny the proposition (Ribino, 2023). The use of this strategy suggests that political criticism or ideas can be formulated more diplomatically, reducing the likelihood of communication conflict compared to direct expressions.

The expression "gw sih berharapnya" is an important marker in the creation of a mitigating effect as the speaker frames the idea as a hope of the speaker. This form diminishes the illocutionary force of a demand, and allows the other party to choose whether to accept or reject the expressed idea. Negative politeness is marked by the use of hedging, minimisers and indirect forms which aim to reduce the burden or imposition on the hearer (Alsubaie et al., 2022).

But the substance of the proposal still strikes at a leadership pattern that is perceived to be under the control of certain groups or regions. The speaker does not avoid the content of the criticism, but formulates it in a more cautious way so as to minimise the threat to the other party's freedom. This kind of pattern corresponds to the principle of negative politeness, which allows the speaker to convey an intention on record but still gives the hearer space to determine their response (Ackermann, 2023).

The utterance is, thus, very mitigated, as the speaker uses expressions of hope and hedging to convey a political idea without making that idea obligatory. In this context, the negative politeness strategy serves as a pragmatic tool to safeguard the core of the criticism

while reducing the imposition and the likelihood of conflict in interpersonal interactions within digital political discourse (Kamlasi et al., 2026).

Off Record Strategy for Very High Risk Mitigation

Very high mitigation of communication risk is shown through the off record strategy, which uses sarcasm, irony or implicature to convey criticism implicitly (Ribino, 2023). In the research data, this strategy allows speakers to express political evaluations without directly attacking the targeted party, so the threat to face is relatively smaller. The following utterance illustrates the use of very high communication risk mitigation.

No.	Comment	Speech Context	Risk Mitigation
8.	Bisa kerja kok pemerintah kita, ngerjain rakyatnya uwaaaw 😁 (albetisla) ["Our government can certainly do things. Screwing its own people. Wow! 😁" read more]	A wry comment on the government's performance.	Very High, because the criticism is expressed implicitly through irony, and therefore the face threat is not stated explicitly and is subject to the reader's inference.

Table 10. Data 8 Off Record Strategy for Very High Risk Mitigation

In data (8), the speaker expresses criticism of the government's performance through the expression "Bisa kerja kok pemerintah kita, ngerjain rakyatnya uwaaaw" which uses irony to convey an evaluative meaning. The utterance shows a very high level of mitigation of the communication risk as the criticism is not expressed explicitly but implicatively, leaving the reader to infer the intention of the speaker (Ribino, 2023). The use of this strategy shows that the use of sarcasm becomes an alternative of delivering political criticism which still contains a critical power, but with a lower threat level to face compared to strategies that are direct.

The sentence *"Bisa kerja kok pemerintah kita"* literally appears to express praise for the government's performance. However, the second sentence, *"ngerjain rakyatnya,"* shifts the meaning toward criticism. The ironic effect of an utterance is the clash between the literal meaning and the evaluative meaning. Indeed, off record strategy allows the speaker to deliver the intention with the implicature so that the listener needs to make inferences to obtain the meaning intended.

The use of the word "uwaaaw" and the 😁 emoji further adds to the ironic tone since the expression is not used to literally express awe, but rather to emphasise the sarcasm toward the government's performance. Dalam strategi off record ironi bisa digunakan untuk menyampaikan face-threatening act secara tidak langsung, di mana penutur tidak secara

eksplisit bertanggung jawab atas serangan terhadap muka pihak yang menjadi sasaran (Ribino, 2023). Sehingga daya kritiknya masih dapat dipahami oleh pembaca yang berkonteks sama meskipun dalam bentuk linguistiknya bukan kecaman secara langsung.

Tingkat mitigasi yang sangat tinggi juga berhubungan dengan adanya ruang interpretasi bagi pembaca. The speakers do not directly say that the government is doing badly but rather build that meaning by combining false praise with criticism of the government's actions. This pattern concurs with the use of off record through metaphor, irony and indirect form that allows the speaker to mitigate the pressure on the face in sensitive contexts .

The utterance therefore suggests the possibility of very high levels of mitigation through off record strategies, as criticism is delivered through irony and implicature rather than direct attack. Strategi ini menyediakan ruang bagi penutur untuk menjaga substansi evaluasi politik dan memberi ruang bagi pembaca untuk menginterpretasi maksud tuturan berdasarkan konteks, sehingga ancaman terhadap muka relatif lebih rendah dibandingkan strategi yang disampaikan secara eksplisit (Kamlasi et al., 2026).

Implications of Politeness Strategies for Risk Mitigation in Online Political Communication

The research findings show that the level of mitigation of communication risk in the digital political discourse is conditioned by the politeness strategy used by the speakers to express the evaluations of public persons, policies and political issues. The dominance of the bald on record strategy (46.15%) indicates that political interaction in the TikTok comment sections is more about explicit expressions of attitude than maintenance of interpersonal relationships. This feature indicates that TikTok comment sections are places for affective expression that allow direct criticism and therefore pose greater threats to the positive face of the parties targeted by utterances and increase the possibility of escalating communication conflict. This is in line with research showing that decreasing verbal attacks, irony and forms of flaming can help prevent the escalation of conflict in political communication on TikTok (Quevedo-Redondo & Gómez-García, 2023) and that cross-ideological interactions including positive sentiment toward other groups are more likely to receive constructive answers (Haro Marchal, 2023).

In contrast, the use of positive politeness, negative politeness and off record strategies shows that not all the users have a confrontational attitude when expressing their political views. The use of praise, support, agreement, requests for clarification, hedging and sarcasm demonstrates speakers' attempts to communicate criticism or evaluation in a way that is

sensitive to the hearer's face. The more indirect the form of expression, the more likely the speakers may minimise threats to both positive face and negative face, thus decreasing the likelihood of misunderstanding, rejection, or interpersonal conflict. Indeed, politeness strategies in digital communication can serve as facework mechanisms to prevent confrontation and maintain interpersonal relationships, but their effectiveness still depends on the platform context and existing interactional norms (Rahardi et al., 2025). The finding demonstrates that the mitigation of communication risk depends on the pragmatic forms used in the construction of political messages, not only on their content.

From the perspective of Brown and Levinson's theory, these results extend the role of politeness strategies from a face-saving function to a communication risk reduction measure in digital political interaction. Politeness strategies have been extensively employed so far in explaining how speakers reduce face-threatening acts in various communication contexts. The result of this study shows that each politeness strategy has different impact to the level of communication risk. Bald on record is low mitigation, positive politeness is moderate mitigation, negative politeness is high mitigation, and off record is very high mitigation. Thus, politeness strategies can be considered as a continuum of communication risk mitigation that explains the relationship between the selection of linguistic strategy and the potential of escalation of conflict in digital spaces. Understanding digital facework is also crucial because social media platforms shape how users construct, maintain, and negotiate their digital faces (Romanishyn et al., 2025).

The findings also have practical implications for the development of political communication on social media. Political actors, content creators and the public can utilise more mitigative politeness strategies to criticise without destroying the message they are trying to convey. The use of positive politeness, negative politeness and off record makes criticism effective, while decreasing the likelihood of polarisation, personal attacks and prolonged conflict. It has been shown that rhetoric stressing solidarity, togetherness and refraining from direct attacks helps to suppress extreme forms of verbal conflict in digital political communication (Quevedo-Redondo & Gómez-García, 2023). However, politeness does not always lead to more meaningful discourse; in some contexts, the use of mitigation tactics can dull disagreements and limit space for debate (de-Oliveira et al., 2022). Thus, this research stresses that the quality of digital political discourse is determined not only in terms of freedom of expression, but also in terms of the users' capacity to choose politeness strategies that reconcile the assertiveness of the message with the management of the risk of communication.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that the political discourse in the TikTok comment sections uses four politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson, namely bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. The dominant politeness strategy used in the comments section of TikTok in this study is bald on record, which indicates that the comments tend to be directly critical without redressive action. The four strategies show different levels of risk mitigation, bald on record is low, positive politeness is moderate, negative politeness is high, and off record is very high. The main contribution of this study is conceptualising politeness strategies as indicators of communication risk mitigation levels instead of mechanisms of face management, thus enriching the research of digital pragmatics and providing a basis for developing more constructive political communication. Future research could test this classification on a wider range of platforms and corpora.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, for providing financial support through the Individual Lecturer Research (Penelitian Individual Dosen/PID) scheme.

DECLARATIONS

Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The authors declare that the generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool ChatGPT was used exclusively to assist with language editing, grammatical improvement, and refinement of the manuscript's wording. The use of AI did not influence the scientific content, study design, data analysis, data interpretation, results, or conclusions of the manuscript. Full responsibility for the content, accuracy, originality, integrity, and validity of the manuscript remains with the authors.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Funding

This research received financial support from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, through the Individual Lecturer Research (Penelitian Individual Dosen/PID) scheme.

REFERENCE

Ackermann, T. (2023). Mitigating strategies and politeness in German requests. *Journal of Politeness Research*, 19(2), 355–389.

Ahmed, W. K., Alkhawaja, H. W., Nimehchisalem, V., & Krishan, T. (2024). Mitigation strategies to manage rapport in the interaction between Iraqi veterinary students and their clients. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 14(2), 287–300.

Akter, S., & Fichman, P. (2025). Expressions of partisanship among young political supporters on TikTok in the United States. *Social Media + Society*, 11(3), Article 20563051251370914.

Al-Khawaldeh, A. N., & Rabab'ah, G. (2024). Strategies of reprimand in spoken Jordanian Arabic: A sociopragmatic study. *Jordan Journal of Modern Languages & Literatures*, 16(2), 337–360.

Al-Shboul, Y., Huwari, I. F., & Saleh, L. (2026). Complaint strategies used by Jordanians: A discourse-pragmatic analysis of Facebook hotel reviews. *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies (IJAES)*, 26(1).

Alsubaie, S., Grant, D., & Donyai, P. (2022). The use of politeness strategies by pharmacy students while obtaining information from patients during OSCEs consultations. *International Journal of Pharmacy Practice*, 30(Suppl. 2), ii2. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpp/riac089.000

Aporbo, R. J., Barabag, J. M. C., Catig, B. U., & Claveria, C. M. P. (2024). Face-threatening and face-saving speech acts of teachers: A discourse analysis of classroom interactions. *World Journal of English Language*, 14(3).

Berdón-Prieto, P., Herrero-Izquierdo, J., & Reguero-Sanz, I. (2023). Political polarization and politainment: Methodology for analyzing crypto hate speech on TikTok. *El Profesional de la Información*, 32(6), 1–12.

Boginskaya, O. (2025). "Why don't you…": A study of linguistic resources of negative politeness in English research article reviews. *Rasprave Instituta za Hrvatski Jezik*, 51(1).

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.

Cervi, L., & Divon, T. (2023). Playful activism: Memetic performances of Palestinian resistance in TikTok #Challenges. *Social Media + Society*, 9(1), Article 20563051231157607.

Daar, G. F. (2023). The sociopragmatic study of speech acts in Go'et Ira in the We'e Mbaru cultural rite. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 10(2), 1084–1102.

Del Saz-Rubio, M. M. (2018). Female identities in TV toiletries ads: A pragmatic and multimodal analysis of implied meanings. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 136, 54–78. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2018.07.009

de-Oliveira, M., de Almeida, C. M., & Mainardes, E. W. (2022). Politics and social media: An analysis of factors anteceding voting intention. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*, 19(2), 309–332. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12208-021-00301-7

Dingler, S. C., & Kroeber, C. (2023). Myths about women in the political executive—How gender stereotypes shape the way MPs assess the competences of ministers. *Political Research Quarterly*, 76(3), 1403–1417. https://doi.org/10.1177/10659129221141871

Dridi, T. (2021). Face threatening acts (FTAs) in AIPAC political annual speeches between 2006 and 2012. *LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching*, 24(1), 261–275.

Guinaudeau, B., Munger, K., & Votta, F. (2022). Fifteen seconds of fame: TikTok and the supply side of social video. *Computational Communication Research*, 4(2), 463–485.

Haristiani, N., Septiana, A., Nor, N. F. M., & Ryota, N. (2023). The politeness of criticism speech acts in Japanese and Minangkabau films. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 13(1), 134–151. https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v13i1.58272

Haro Marchal, A. (2023). Argumentation as a speech act: Two levels of analysis. *Topoi*, 42(2), 481–494. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-023-09900-x

Hautea, S., Parks, P., Takahashi, B., & Zeng, J. (2021). Showing they care (or don't): Affective publics and ambivalent climate activism on TikTok. *Social Media + Society*, 7(2), Article 20563051211012344.

Hunklinger, M., & Limacher, K. (2025). "Your identity is, what God puts into you"—Christian online activism on gender and sexuality politics on TikTok. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 7, Article 1501105.

Jalli, N. (2025). Viral justice: TikTok activism, misinformation, and the fight for social change in Southeast Asia. *Social Media + Society*, 11(1), Article 20563051251318122.

Kamlasi, I., Pratama, H., Wahyuni, S., & Bahri, S. (2026). Politeness and power in EFL thesis defenses: A discursive pragmatic analysis of institutional oral assessments. *Journal of Language and Education*, 12(1), 117–133.

Levant, E., Kuzai, E., & Morin, C. (2026). Beyond mock politeness: Sarcastic interrogatives as tools for face-threatening acts. *Journal of Politeness Research*. Advance online publication.

Litvinova, A. V., & Larina, T. V. (2023). Mitigation tools and politeness strategies in invitation refusals: American and Russian communicative cultures. *Training, Language and Culture*, 7(1).

Migdadi, F., Al-Momani, K., & Hammouri, I. (2025). Politeness strategies in Arabic-scripted Friday khutbah ("sermons"). *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 16(1), 232–241.

Nikpoo, I., & Allami, H. (2024). Exploring (im)politeness strategies in indirect reports in Persian across genders. *Education Research International*, 2024(1), Article 4642380.

Pompeu, A. C. M. (2021). Analysis on the use of politeness strategies in a scene of *The Crown*. *BELT - Brazilian English Language Teaching Journal*, 12(1), Article e41365.

Prayitno, H. J., Kusmanto, H., Nasucha, Y., Rahmawati, L. E., Jamaluddin, N., Samsuddin, S., & Ilma, A. A. (2019). The politeness comments on the Indonesian President Jokowi Instagram official account viewed from politico pragmatics and the character education orientation in the disruption era. *Indonesian Journal on Learning and Advanced Education (IJOLAE)*, 1(2), 52–71. https://doi.org/10.23917/ijolae.v1i2.8785

Prayitno, H. J., Ngalim, A., Sutopo, A., Pangestu, D. W., Jamaluddin, N., & Ali, A. H. (2019). Directive politeness act strategy in the discourse of education column in national newspaper as the formation of students' character in Indonesia. *Humanities and Social Sciences Reviews*, 7(2), 349–362. https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2019.7241

Prayitno, H. J., Huda, M., Inayah, N., Ardi, H., & Yusof, N. (2021). Politeness of directive speech acts on social media discourse and its implications for strengthening student character education in the era of global education. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 17(4), 179–200.

Prayitno, H. J., Markhamah, Nasucha, Y., Huda, M., Ratih, K., Ubaidullah, Rohmadi, M., Boeriswati, E., & Thambu, N. (2022). Prophetic educational values in the Indonesian language textbook: Pillars of positive politeness and character education. *Heliyon*, 8(8), Article e10016. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e10016

Quevedo-Redondo, R., & Gómez-García, S. (2023). Political communication on TikTok: From the feminisation of discourse to incivility expressed in emoji form. An analysis of the Spanish political platform Sumar and reactions to its strategy. *Profesional de la Información*, 32(6).

Quick, M., & Maddox, J. (2024). Us, them, right, wrong: How TikTok's green screen, duet, and stitch help shape political discourse. *First Monday*, 29(4).

Rahardi, R. K., Setyaningsih, Y., Sulistiyono, R., & Febriani, S. T. (2025). Discursive-integrative politeness meanings in digital spaces: A third-wave pragmatic analysis of face-threatening acts in online communication. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 15(12), 4096–4107.

Ribino, P. (2023). The role of politeness in human–machine interactions: A systematic literature review and future perspectives. *Artificial Intelligence Review*, 56(Suppl. 1), 445–482.

Romanishyn, A., Malytska, O., & Goncharuk, V. (2025). AI-driven disinformation: Policy recommendations for democratic resilience. *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence*, 8, Article 1569115.

Sonmez, D., & Akbaş, E. (2023). "Great work folks!": Establishing interpersonal communication through politeness strategies in transparent peer reviews of research articles. *Ibérica*, (46).

Syting, C. J., & Gildore, P. J. (2022). Teachers' linguistic politeness in classroom interaction: A pragmatic analysis. *World Journal of English Language*, 12(8), 133–141.

Widholm, A., Ekman, M., & Larsson, A. O. (2024). A right-wing wave on TikTok? Ideological orientations, platform features, and user engagement during the early 2022 election campaign in Sweden. *Social Media + Society*, 10(3), Article 20563051241269266.

Yan, G., & Bidin, S. J. (2025). *Refusal strategies and face concerns: A cross-cultural study of Chinese and Malaysian undergraduates* [Tesis/Disertasi tidak diterbitkan]. Universiti Utara Malaysia.

Zhang, C., Liu, G., & Zhang, S. (2025). Chinese perceptions and refutations of face-threatening impoliteness regarding diplomatic press conferences. *Journal of Politeness Research*, 21(2), 369–405.