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A Decade of Digital Politeness: Systematic Review of Strategies, Gaps, and Impoliteness Taxonomies (2015–2025)

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ABSTRACT

Background: Although computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been widely adopted as a primary mode of human interaction, there has been no systematic synthesis comprehensively mapping research on politeness strategies in digital environments over the past decade. This lack of synthesis obscures theoretical trends, empirical gaps, and emerging constructs specific to digital pragmatics.

Aims: This systematic literature review aims to synthesize empirical studies on politeness strategies in CMC published between 2015–2025, identify dominant theoretical frameworks, catalogue the strategies documented across studies, and develop a taxonomy of CMC-specific impoliteness phenomena.

Methods: Following PRISMA 2020, studies were identified through a Scopus search restricted to publications from 2015 to 2025, followed by sequential database filtering and full-text eligibility review. The final corpus comprised 29 peer-reviewed studies, which were analyzed through narrative synthesis and a quality appraisal adapted from the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT).

Results: Three principal findings emerge. First, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory dominates the field, appearing in 20 of the 29 studies reviewed, despite well-documented inadequacies in CMC contexts, evidencing a theoretical conservatism the review terms "framework inertia". Second, positive politeness and bald-on-record strategies are the most robustly documented, yet platform informality frequently appeared to attenuate cultural hierarchy norms in the cases reviewed, a "platform-as-channel-mediator" effect unaccounted for by existing frameworks. Third, three CMC-specific impoliteness constructs, adversative (im)politeness, e-mpoliteness, and impoliteness resonance, collectively form the field's first coherent taxonomy of digital-native face-attacking phenomena.

Implications: Theoretically, this review challenges universalist accounts of digital politeness and establishes that cultural context is constitutive, not incidental, to CMC pragmatic norms. Practically, findings necessitate platform-differentiated EFL/ESL pedagogy and community-norm-sensitive content moderation. Longitudinal design, cross-platform comparisons, and AI-mediated communication research constitute the field's most urgent unaddressed agenda.

Keywords: *Computer-mediated communication; digital pragmatics; impoliteness strategies; politeness theory; systematic literature review*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed interpersonal interaction, creating a rich and diverse range of new linguistic environments. Computer-mediated communication (CMC), broadly defined as any form of human communication conducted or facilitated through digital technologies ([Herring, 2007](#)), now encompasses an extraordinarily varied ecology of platforms, from asynchronous email and discussion forums to synchronous instant messaging, microblogging, online gaming, and AI-powered conversational agents. This transformation has generated pressing theoretical and empirical questions for applied linguists and pragmatists: how do interlocutors navigate face concerns differently when mediated by a screen, a character limit, or the structural anonymity of a pseudonym? And how have classical frameworks of linguistic politeness, developed largely for face-to-face interaction, adapted or failed to adapt to the distinctive constraints and affordances of digital environments?

Politeness, as a domain of pragmatic inquiry, has historically been theorized as a set of strategies employed by speakers to manage interpersonal relationships, attend to face needs, and navigate social distance and power asymmetries ([Brown & Levinson, 1987](#); [Leech, 1983](#)). The application of these foundational frameworks to CMC contexts has revealed both their enduring utility and significant limitations. Digital interaction introduces variables that classical models did not anticipate: the absence of paralinguistic cues, the persistence and searchability of text, the affordance of anonymity, the creative deployment of emojis and graphological deviations, and the emergence of platform-specific communicative conventions. These features collectively create pragmatic conditions that differ substantially from face-to-face contexts.

1.1 Research Gap and Novelty

A growing body of empirical research has begun to map the contours of politeness in CMC across diverse contexts. González-Lloret ([2022](#)) established that technology-mediated communication plays a central role in developing pragmatic competence, including the deployment of politeness strategies in digital settings. Ren ([2023](#)) demonstrated that (im)politeness practices in online communication are substantially shaped by cultural context and the specific platform in which interaction occurs. Subsequent work by González-Lloret ([2024](#)) confirmed that technology-mediated pragmatics instruction supports users in developing politeness strategies suited to digital interaction. A systematic review by Qi and Chen ([2025](#)) found that technology integration in language learning enhances pragmatic competence, including awareness of digital politeness norms. Wang and Liu ([2026](#)) identified that in human-computer interaction contexts, indirectness and mitigation strategies function as critical mechanisms for enhancing interaction quality. Federici ([2025](#)) documented that in online support communities, politeness strategies serve to manage emotional expression and build social solidarity. Goshu and Ridwan ([2025](#)) showed that in digital academic communication, politeness strategies are closely intertwined with power relations and social context. Most recently, Tasneem and Anwar ([2026](#)) have observed that AI-mediated interaction is generating novel forms of digital politeness strategies that existing frameworks have not yet systematically addressed. While the review corpus is restricted to studies published between 2015 and 2025, several 2026 publications are cited to provide up-to-date contextual framing. These sources are not included in the review corpus but serve to situate the study within recent developments.

Despite this accumulated evidence, the existing literature is characterized by three significant limitations that the present review addresses. First, the majority of studies remain empirically partial, focusing on specific contexts, education, healthcare, or

individual social media platforms without integrating findings across contexts. Second, while adjacent reviews exist, no review to our knowledge has systematically synthesized empirical studies of politeness strategies in CMC across platforms, theoretical frameworks, and strategy types within the 2015–2025 period. Qi and Chen (2025) examine technology integration in L2 pragmatic competence broadly, and Wang and Liu (2026) address pragmatics in human–computer interaction; neither synthesizes the strategy-level, platform-comparative, and framework-critical dimensions that the present review addresses. Third, the theoretical transition from classical politeness frameworks to approaches better suited to modern digital communication, including AI-mediated interaction, remains undocumented at the field level. The present review directly addresses these gaps by providing a comprehensive synthesis, identifying emerging research trends, and formulating a specific agenda for future investigation.

1.2 Research Questions

Four research questions guide this review:

1. What theoretical frameworks have been most commonly adopted in empirical studies of politeness strategies in CMC (2015–2025)?
2. What CMC platforms and cultural contexts have been most frequently investigated?
3. What politeness and impoliteness strategies have been most prominently identified?
4. What trends and research gaps have emerged in the study of politeness in CMC over the period under review?

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). No formal review protocol was pre-registered prior to the conduct of this review. The search string, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and data extraction template are documented within this manuscript (search string in Section 2.1; criteria in Section 2.2; extraction fields in Section 2.4) to ensure transparency. This absence of pre-registration is acknowledged as a limitation.

2.2 Search Strategy

A structured database search was conducted in Scopus on 21 April 2026. Scopus was selected as the primary database because it provides the most comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed linguistics journals among major international indexing services; its coverage of pragmatics and CMC research substantially overlaps with Web of Science and LLBA for the journals represented in the final corpus. However, reliance on a single database may have reduced retrieval breadth, particularly for regionally indexed or interdisciplinary studies. This issue is treated as an important limitation of the review; future replications should incorporate Web of Science, LLBA, and forward/backward citation chasing to ensure completeness. The filters described below were applied sequentially in the order listed; the full exported record list is available in the Supplementary File. The following Boolean search string was applied to the Title, Abstract, and Keywords fields:

TITLE-ABS-KEY(("politeness strategies" OR "politeness theory" OR "face-threatening acts" OR "im/politeness") AND ("computer-mediated communication" OR "CMC" OR "social media" OR "online communication" OR "digital communication")) AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND LIMIT-TO(LANGUAGE, "English")

The initial search returned 152 records. Sequential Scopus filters were applied: year (2015–2025) yielded 120; subject area (Arts & Humanities) yielded 93; document type (articles) yielded 75; language (English) yielded 70; and the Open Access (OA) filter yielded 41 records for eligibility screening. The Open Access filter was applied to ensure full-text accessibility for this independently conducted review. However, this step removed approximately 29 records (41% of the 70 otherwise-eligible items) for reasons of access rather than relevance, representing a primary limitation of the present review. This selection mechanism systematically over-represents APC-funded and certain regional publication outputs. Future replications should retrieve full texts of all eligible records via institutional access or interlibrary loan rather than applying an OA filter, and should assess whether the distribution of theoretical frameworks and key findings holds across OA and non-OA corpora. This limitation is discussed further in the Limitations section.

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Records were assessed against the following pre-specified criteria. Inclusion criteria (IC): (IC1) original empirical study; (IC2) politeness or impoliteness strategies as primary research concern; (IC3) computer-mediated communicative context; (IC4) published 2015–2025; (IC5) full text in English. Exclusion criteria (EC): (EC1) not politeness-focused as primary concern; (EC2) not CMC context; (EC3) not original empirical study; (EC4) article body not in English.

2.4 Screening and Selection

Following database-side screening through sequential Scopus filters, the remaining 41 records were subjected to full-text eligibility review. Twelve were excluded at the full-text stage: 5 for EC1, 4 for EC2, 2 for EC3, and 1 for EC4. Figure 1 summarizes this workflow.

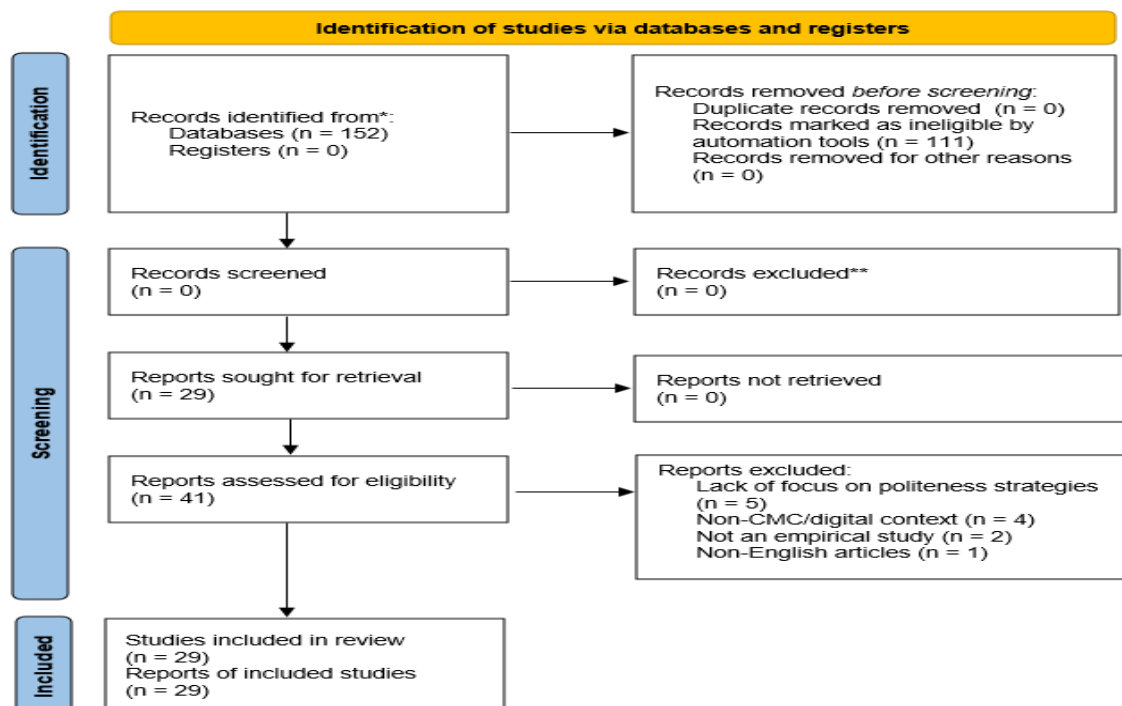


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

Table 1 PRISMA 2020 Screening Summary

Phase	Action	n
Identification	Records retrieved from Scopus (initial search)	152
	Records after year filter (2015-2025)	120
	Records after subject area filter (Arts & Humanities)	93
	Records after document type filter (Articles only)	75
	Records after language filter (English)	70
Screening	Records after Open Access filter	41
	Records excluded via Scopus filters (combined)	79
Eligibility	Reports sought for retrieval (full-text downloaded)	41
	Reports not retrieved	0
	Reports assessed for eligibility (full-text review)	41
	EC1: Not politeness-focused	5
	EC2: Not CMC context	4
	EC3: Not empirical study	2
Included	EC4: Not English (article body)	1
	Studies included in final synthesis	29

2.5 Data Extraction

Data were extracted using a standardized 14-field template comprising: author(s) and year; title; journal; country/context; CMC platform; theoretical framework(s); research design; data collection method; sample size; strategy focus; key findings; implications; limitations; and research gaps. Extraction was conducted through systematic full-text reading of all 29 articles; all analytical interpretations are the author's own. Table 2 summarizes the extracted data.

2.6 Quality Appraisal

Each study was appraised using three criteria adapted from the MMAT (Hong et al., 2018): (1) adequacy and transparency of data collection and sampling; (2) coherence between research design and analytical method; and (3) rigor of data analysis, including triangulation or methodological verification where applicable. The MMAT instrument includes five category-specific criteria per design type plus two screening questions; the present appraisal reduces this to three generic criteria to accommodate the methodologically heterogeneous corpus, a decision acknowledged as a limitation of the appraisal process. Studies meeting all three criteria were rated High (H); those meeting two were rated Medium (M); and those meeting one or none were rated Low (L). The full per-criterion appraisal matrix is provided in the Supplementary File. All screening, extraction, and quality appraisal were conducted by the sole author; no second rater was available. This absence of inter-rater reliability testing is a recognized methodological limitation: the reproducibility of MMAT-based quality ratings and inclusion decisions cannot be formally verified. Future replications should incorporate independent dual screening of at least a random 20% subset with Cohen's kappa reporting.

Low-rated studies (Fernández-Amaya, 2019; Ivković, 2024; Z. Wang, 2021) are characterised by very small samples and limited methodological transparency. In the synthesis, findings from these studies are reported with explicit qualification and are not used as sole or primary evidence for any substantive claim; they appear only were supported by convergent High- or Medium-rated evidence. No studies were excluded solely on quality grounds.

2.7 Synthesis Method

A narrative synthesis approach was employed, following Popay et al. (2006), comprising four stages: preliminary synthesis through tabulation; exploration of relationships across studies; robustness assessment; and final synthesis addressing each RQ. This approach was selected over meta-analysis because the corpus is methodologically heterogeneous, and no common quantitative outcome measures exist across studies. Robustness was assessed by examining whether the key findings of each RQ held when Low-quality studies were excluded from the evidence base. Where findings changed materially upon removal of Low-quality studies, this is noted in the relevant Findings subsection. Apparent divergences between studies were examined against study quality, platform, cultural context, and method to assess whether differences reflected genuine empirical conflict or non-comparability of study designs.

Table 2 Summary of 29 Included Studies with Quality Appraisal Ratings

Author(s) & Year	Platform	Framework	Design	Strategy Focus	Q*
(Pérez-Sabater & Maguelouk-Moffo, 2024)	WhatsApp	B&L (1987); Leech (2014); Anchimbe (2011)	Mixed	Positive politeness; kinship terms; code-switching	H
(Olshtain & Treger, 2023)	FB; WA; Email	B&L (1987); Locher & Watts (2005)	Qualitative	Complaint strategies; bald on-record	M
(Fernández-Amaya, 2019)	WhatsApp	B&L (1987); Pomerantz (1984)	Qualitative	Disagreement strategies; off-record; irony	L
(Rahardi et al., 2025)	Instagram	Third-wave pragmatics; B&L (1987)	Qualitative	Discursive-integrative politeness; FTA	M
(Andersson, 2024)	YT; FB; Twitter	Culpeper (2011); Carter (2004)	Qualitative	E-mpoliteness; creative impoliteness	M
(Culpeper et al., 2025)	Reddit; Google; YT	PIR; Culpeper (2011)	Quantitative	Impoliteness reciprocity; resonance	H
(Sahawneh et al., 2024)	Facebook	Culpeper (1996); B&L (1987)	Mixed	Bald-on-record; adversative (im)politeness	M
(Depraetere et al., 2021)	Twitter	Decock & Depraetere (2018)	Mixed	Linguistic (in)directness; complaints	H

Author(s) & Year	Platform	Framework	Design	Strategy Focus	Q*
(Ivković, 2024)	AI Chatbot	B&L (1987)	Qualitative	Positive/negative politeness; AI argumentation	L
(Aldossary & Mahzari, 2023)	Twitter	Oatey (2008)	Mixed	Corporate apology; rapport management	M
(Triyono et al., 2025)	WhatsApp	B&L (1987); Maricic (2001)	Qualitative	Positive/negative politeness; power asymmetry	M
(Rhee, 2023)	SNS Korea	B&L (1987); Culpeper (2010)	Corpus	Positive politeness; ideophones; emojis	H
(Z. Wang, 2021)	WeChat	B&L (1987); Van der Bom & Mills (2015)	Qualitative	Request strategies; discursive approach	L
(Albawardi & Alqahtani, 2022)	Email	B&L (1987); CCSARP (1984)	Quantitative	Face-saving; negative politeness; power	H
(Maros & Rosli, 2017)	Twitter	B&L (1987)	Qualitative	Bald-on-record; positive politeness; off-record	M
(Dynel & Poppi, 2019)	Reddit	Culpeper (2011); Locher & Watts (2008)	Qualitative	Mock impoliteness; jocular abuse	H
(Aporbo, 2023)	FB; IG; Twitter	Culpeper (2011); Crystal (2001)	Qualitative	Bald-on-record; graphology; sarcasm	M
(Alkhresheh, 2025)	Facebook	B&L (1987); Elwood (2004)	Qualitative	Positive politeness; congratulation; IFID	M
(Válková & Kořínková, 2020)	YouTube	B&L (1978); Culpeper (2011)	Corpus	Positive evaluation; complimenting	H
(Pathanasin & Eschstruth, 2022)	LINE	B&L (1987); Gu (1990); Watts (2003)	Mixed	Bald-on-record; mock impoliteness	H
(Mahzari, 2025)	Facebook	B&L (1987); CCSARP; Searle (1969)	Quantitative	Direct/indirect requests; gender	H
(Federici, 2025)	Online forum	B&L (1987); Locher & Watts (2005)	Qualitative	Positive politeness; self-disclosure	H
(Diegoli, 2022)	Yahoo! Q&A	B&L (1987); Ide (1989)	Mixed	Apology strategies; wakimae	H

Author(s) & Year	Platform	Framework	Design	Strategy Focus	Q*
(Nensilianti et al., 2025)	Game chat	Culpeper (1996, 2011); Bamberg	Qualitative	Impoliteness; aggression; narrative power	M
(Burnette & Calude, 2022)	Twitter	B&L (1987); stance theory	Corpus	Bald-on-record; directives; stance	H
(van Mulken, 2024)	Twitter/X	B&L (1987); Oatey (2007)	Mixed	De-escalation; linguistic style matching	H
(Yang, 2021)	Online forums	Bousfield (2008); Culpeper (1996)	Mixed	Disagreement strategies; intercultural	H
(Doval-Suárez & González-álvarez, 2025)	Moodle forum	B&L (1987); Locher & Watts (2005)	Corpus	Concessive hedging; positive politeness	H
(How et al., 2025)	YouTube	PIR; Culpeper (2011); Tantucci (2023)	Qualitative	Impoliteness resonance; mimicry	M

Q = Quality rating (MMAT-adapted; Hong et al., 2018): H = High, M = Medium, L = Low.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

This section reports the results of the review in relation to the four research questions guiding this study: the theoretical frameworks most commonly adopted in empirical studies of politeness strategies in CMC (RQ1), the CMC platforms and cultural contexts most frequently investigated (RQ2), the politeness and impoliteness strategies most prominently identified (RQ3), and the trends and research gaps that have emerged over the 2015–2025 period (RQ4). The results are presented in two stages: first, the descriptive distribution of the 29 included studies by publication year, platform, theoretical framework, and research design (Tables 3–6); second, a thematic synthesis organized around each research question in turn.

Table 3 Distribution by Year of Publication from the Coding Matrix

Year	n
2017	1
2019	2
2020	1
2021	3
2022	4
2023	4
2024	5
2025	9

Total = 29

Table 3 presents the distribution of the 29 included studies by year of publication. Publications increased markedly across the review period, rising from a single study in 2017 to nine studies in 2025 alone; together with the four studies published in each of 2022 and 2023, this trend indicates that research attention to politeness in CMC has intensified substantially, particularly from 2021 onward.

Table 4 Distribution by CMC Platform from the Coding Matrix

Platform	n
Facebook	7
Twitter/X	7
WhatsApp	4
YouTube	4
Forum (online forum + Moodle forum)	3
Reddit	2
Instagram	2
Email	2
WeChat	1
LINE	1
AI Chatbot	1
SNS Korea	1
Yahoo! Q&A	1
Game Chat	1
Google	1

Table 4 shows the platforms examined across the corpus. Facebook and Twitter/X are the most frequently studied platforms, each appearing in seven studies, followed by WhatsApp and YouTube with four studies each. Because four studies examined more than one platform simultaneously (Study No. 2: Facebook, WhatsApp, Email; Study No. 5: YouTube, Facebook, Twitter; Study No. 6: Reddit, Google, YouTube; Study No. 17: Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter), platform counts are not mutually exclusive and therefore sum to more than 29.

Table 5 Framework Frequencies Derived from the Coding Matrix

Framework Category	n	%
Brown & Levinson Politeness Theory	20	69.0
Culpeper's Impoliteness Framework	10	34.5
Locher & Watts Relational Work	4	13.8
Oatey's Rapport Management	2	6.9
Pragmatic Identity Resonance (PIR)	2	6.9
Other Frameworks	18	62.1

Table 5 reports the theoretical frameworks applied across the corpus. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is the dominant framework, adopted in 20 of the 29 studies

(69.0%), followed by Culpeper's impoliteness framework in 10 studies (34.5%) and Locher and Watts' relational work in four studies (13.8%). Brown and Levinson's theory was coded as a single framework category irrespective of citation year, such that studies citing either the 1978 or 1987 formulation were classified together; 18 studies (62.1%) drew on frameworks outside these five categories, and 25 of the 29 studies combined two or more frameworks.

Table 6 Research Design Distribution from the Coding Matrix

Research Design	n	%
Qualitative	14	48.3
Mixed Methods	8	27.6
Corpus-based	4	13.8
Quantitative	3	10.3

Table 6 summarizes the research designs employed across the corpus. Qualitative approaches predominate, accounting for 14 of the 29 studies (48.3%), followed by mixed methods in eight studies (27.6%), corpus-based approaches in four studies (13.8%), and quantitative designs in three studies (10.3%).

RQ1: Theoretical Frameworks

As shown in Table 5, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is the dominant framework, adopted in 20 of the 29 included studies in the corpus (with 19 entries explicitly citing the 1987 version and one citing the 1978 version). All percentages reported in this section are descriptive frequencies of a small, non-random sample ($n = 29$); a one-study shift represents approximately 3.4 percentage points, and these figures should not be interpreted as population estimates. Culpeper's impoliteness framework appears in 10 of the 29 studies, while 25 of the 29 studies combine two or more frameworks.

The continued dominance of Brown and Levinson's framework is qualified by three recurring limitations identified across the corpus (see Table 7): (1) the absence of paralinguistic cues renders strategy classification interpretively unstable; (2) platform affordances such as character limits constrain strategy choice in ways the framework's social-variable model does not predict; and (3) culturally specific politeness forms, such as Japanese *wakimae*, Korean ideophones, and Arab religious invocations, fall outside its universal typology. The growing adoption of Culpeper's framework reflects the increasing centrality of hostile and face-attacking digital behavior as a research focus. Three studies propose CMC-specific theoretical extensions: adversative (im)politeness, e-mpoliteness, and impoliteness resonance (see Table 7).

Table 7 Categorization of Framework-Related Findings (RQ1)

Category	Description	Supporting Studies
Limitation, absence of paralinguistic cues	Renders strategy classification interpretively unstable	(Maros & Rosli, 2017; Z. Wang, 2021)
Limitation, platform affordances	Character limits constrain strategy choice in ways the framework's social-variable model does not predict	-
Limitation, Japanese <i>wakimae</i>	Falls outside Brown & Levinson's universal typology	(Diegoli, 2022)

Category	Description	Supporting Studies
Limitation, Korean ideophones	Falls outside Brown & Levinson's universal typology	(Rhee, 2023)
Limitation, Arab religious invocations	Falls outside Brown & Levinson's universal typology	(Alkhresheh, 2025)
Theoretical extension, Adversative (im)politeness	Proposed CMC-specific construct	(Sahawneh et al., 2024)
Theoretical extension, E-mpoliteness	Proposed CMC-specific construct	(Andersson, 2024)
Theoretical extension, Impoliteness resonance	Proposed CMC-specific construct	(Culpeper et al., 2025; How et al., 2025)

RQ2: Platforms and Cultural Contexts

After normalizing platform labels in Table 2 (e.g., FB/Facebook, WA/WhatsApp, and Twitter/Twitter-X), Twitter/X appears in seven studies, Facebook in six, WhatsApp in four, and YouTube in four. Because several studies examine more than one platform, these figures indicate the number of studies in which each platform appears, rather than mutually exclusive shares of the corpus. Online forums and Q&A platforms feature in four studies; YouTube comments in three; instant messaging applications in three; and email, online gaming chat, and AI chatbots each in one. TikTok, Discord, Twitch, LinkedIn, and private direct-message contexts are entirely absent from the corpus despite their large user communities and distinctive communication norms.

In cultural and geographic terms, Arab and Middle Eastern contexts are represented in six studies; Southeast Asian contexts in six; East Asian contexts in four; European contexts in four; global or cross-cultural English-language contexts in six; and other geographic contexts (Israel, New Zealand, Cameroon) in three. Studies across Arab, East Asian, and Southeast Asian contexts consistently find that cultural norms shape digital politeness in ways Brown and Levinson's universalist account does not predict (see Table 8). Because some studies are cross-cultural or multi-context, geographic coding was conducted using multiple coding categories; the categories should therefore be interpreted as analytic groupings rather than strict population shares.

Table 8 Categorization of Cultural-Context Findings (RQ2)

Region	Finding	Supporting Studies
Arab/Middle Eastern	Cultural norms shape digital politeness in ways not predicted by Brown & Levinson's universalist account	(Alkhresheh, 2025; Sahawneh et al., 2024)
East Asian	Cultural norms shape digital politeness in ways not predicted by Brown & Levinson's universalist account	(Diegoli, 2022; Rhee, 2023)

Region	Finding	Supporting Studies
Southeast Asian	Cultural norms shape digital politeness in ways not predicted by Brown & Levinson's universalist account	(Pathanasin & Eschstruth, 2022; Triyono et al., 2025)

RQ3: Politeness and Impoliteness Strategies

Positive politeness strategies are the most consistently documented category, appearing in 21 of the 29 studies reviewed. In the most methodologically rigorous studies (all rated High; see Table 9), with corpora ranging from 239 interaction threads and 62,672 words of WhatsApp data to a 26-million-word corpus, positive politeness manifests through kinship terms, emojis, and ideophones, linguistic style matching, and self-disclosure as an empathy strategy. Bald-on-record strategies are the second most frequently documented type, particularly in microblogging and instant messaging contexts. Four studies spanning four cultural settings on three continents consistently document that platform informality promotes directness even in power-asymmetrical relationships (see Table 9).

Table 9 Categorization of Politeness/Impoliteness Strategy Findings (RQ3a)

Strategy	Manifestation/Finding	Supporting Studies
Positive politeness	Kinship terms, emojis, ideophones, linguistic style matching, self-disclosure as empathy strategy (High-quality studies; corpora from 239 threads to 26 million words)	(Pérez-Sabater & Maguelouk-Moffo, 2024; Rhee, 2023; van Mulken, 2024)
Bald-on-record	Platform informality promotes directness even in power-asymmetrical relationships, across four cultural settings on three continents	(Maros & Rosli, 2017; Pathanasin & Eschstruth, 2022; Triyono et al., 2025; Z. Wang, 2021)

Three apparent divergences between the findings of the included studies emerge from the synthesis, summarized in Table 10. These concern, respectively: the cultural appropriateness of directness in requests across differing platforms and audience configurations; the relationship between anonymity and face-attacking behavior; and the persistence of hierarchy-related politeness norms across formality registers. In each case, the apparent contradiction is plausibly attributable to differences in platform, cultural setting, or communicative register between the studies concerned, rather than a fundamental empirical disagreement.

Table 10 Categorization of Divergent Findings (RQ3b)

No	Finding A	Finding B	Plausible Explanation	Supporting Studies
1	Direct request strategies on Saudi Facebook are culturally appropriate and not perceived as impolite (High quality)	Indirect strategies on Twitter frequently cause conflict due to absent shared interpretive context (High quality)	Studies differ in platform, cultural setting, speech-act type, and audience configuration	(Mahzari, 2025; Maros & Rosli, 2017)

No	Finding A	Finding B	Plausible Explanation	Supporting Studies
2	Disinhibition effect explains high face-attacking strategy frequency (Medium quality)	Network analysis shows online interactions do not generate more impoliteness than face-to-face interaction (High quality)	Plausibly attributable to platform design, community norm enforcement, and third-party intervention rather than a fundamental disagreement about anonymity effects	(Culpeper et al., 2025; Sahawneh et al., 2024)
3	Formal deferential email strategies reinforce institutional hierarchy among Saudi students (High quality)	Instant-messaging informality overrides Thai hierarchical constraints (High quality)	Formality-register difference between email and instant messaging, rather than a contradiction regarding cultural hierarchy itself	(Albawardi & Alqahtani, 2022; Pathanasin & Eschstruth, 2022)

RQ4: Trends and Research Gaps

Four significant trends are identifiable across the decade. First, there is a gradual displacement of universalist frameworks by third-wave and discursive approaches: quantitatively modest (three explicit third-wave studies) but qualitatively significant. Second, increasing attention to the prosocial functions of conventionally impolite behavior is evident: mock impoliteness, creative impoliteness, and impoliteness reciprocity are collectively shown to function as social bonding and identity construction (see Table 11). Third, methodological diversification is under way: qualitative discourse analysis remains dominant (14 studies, 48%), while corpus-based and mixed-methods approaches are gaining ground.

Table 11 Categorization of Trend-Related Findings (RQ4)

Trend	Description	Supporting Studies
Prosocial functions of conventionally impolite behavior	Mock impoliteness, creative impoliteness, and impoliteness reciprocity function as social bonding and identity construction	(Andersson, 2024; Culpeper et al., 2025; Dynel & Poppi, 2019; Rhee, 2023)

Six research gaps are identified across the corpus. First, longitudinal studies are entirely absent: no included study examines how digital politeness norms evolve over time. Second, cross-platform comparative studies remain rare, with 27 of the 29 studies focusing on a single platform. Third, AI-mediated communication is represented by only one Low-quality study. Fourth, reception-side research, how addressees and bystanders interpret and evaluate digital politeness is largely absent. Fifth, private and semi-private messaging contexts are under-represented relative to public social media. Sixth, multimodal dimensions such as emoji, GIF, sticker, and voice note pragmatics remain analytically peripheral in most studies.

3.2 Discussion

Theoretical Framework Dominance and Innovation

The 69% dominance of Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, despite its consistent identification as inadequate for CMC contexts across the same corpus, constitutes what this review terms "framework inertia": a theoretically conservative pattern in which researchers supplement rather than replace an established model even when its limitations are well-documented. This pattern aligns with Graham and Hardaker's (2017) call for CMC-specific politeness frameworks that have been only partially heeded: Brown and Levinson appear in 20 of the 29 studies in Table 2 (19 coded as the 1987 version and one as the 1978 version). By contrast, only one study explicitly adopts third-wave pragmatics, while five studies draw on relational or discursive approaches associated with Locher and Watts (2005) or Watts (2003). Documented here systematically across a decade for the first time, framework inertia suggests the field has reached a theoretical plateau requiring deliberate disruption rather than incremental refinement. The consolidation of three independently proposed constructs, adversative (im)politeness (Sahawneh et al., 2024), e-mpoliteness (Andersson, 2024), and impoliteness resonance (Culpeper et al., 2025; How et al., 2025) into a coherent taxonomy of digital-native impoliteness phenomena represents the decade's most generative theoretical contribution, each construct addressing how a specific digital affordance (reduced cue availability, intertextual persistence, networked audience) transforms face-attacking behavior in ways Culpeper's original model does not anticipate.

Cultural Context as Constitutive Dimension

The cross-cultural convergence documented carries a theoretical implication that extends beyond descriptive diversity: cultural context is not a moderating variable in digital politeness but a constitutive one. This conclusion extends Spencer-Oatey's (2008) argument that rapport management is inherently culturally embedded and Haugh's (2007) position that politeness norms are fundamentally community-specific to the CMC domain specifically. It provides systematic empirical support for Kecskés and Romero-Trillo's (2013) critique of universalist pragmatics and constitutes a strong collective argument for culturally embedded frameworks in future CMC research. The "platform-as-channel-mediator" principle identified, that platform formality registers moderate cultural hierarchy norms more powerfully than the cultural norm itself similarly challenges universalist assumptions, and explains why Thai and Saudi students both adopt bald-on-record strategies in informal messaging apps despite markedly different cultural hierarchy norms in face-to-face contexts.

Resolving Empirical Contradictions

The three contradictions identified are theoretically productive rather than merely problematic, each pointing towards an explanatory mechanism not captured by current frameworks. The indirectness contradiction confirms Leech's (2014) argument that directness and politeness have no universal relationship and are always context-mediated: the same indirect strategy is conflict-avoiding in intimate Twitter networks (Maros & Rosli, 2017) and conflict-generating in a one-way public address (Mahzari, 2025) because the audience configuration differs fundamentally. The anonymity-impoliteness contradiction aligns with Hardaker's (2013) challenge to Suler's (2004) original disinhibition thesis: the relationship between anonymity and impoliteness is moderated by community norms, platform design, and third-party intervention in ways the simple disinhibition model does not account for. The hierarchy-CMC contradiction is most productively explained by Walther's (1996) social information processing theory: the formality register of the channel mediates the expression of cultural hierarchy norms

more powerfully than the cultural norm itself, an effect this review formalizes as the “platform-as-channel-mediator” principle.

Research Gaps in Context

The six research gaps identified update the agenda established by Graham and Hardaker (2017), who called for CMC-specific frameworks, multi-platform studies, and attention to community norms. The decade since has produced significant cultural diversification and emerging theoretical innovation, but the core methodological limitations single platform focus, qualitative dominance, and cross-sectional design remain largely unaddressed. The absence of longitudinal studies is particularly consequential; without them, the field cannot determine whether the “platform-as-channel-mediator” effect is stable, whether impoliteness norms in specific communities intensify or moderate over time, or whether the theoretical constructs identified in this review generalize beyond the specific moments at which data were collected. The field’s most productive next step is likely the integration of computational corpus methods with discourse analytic sensitivity, as demonstrated by Culpeper et al.’s (2025) Bayesian network analysis, which can generate the large-scale, longitudinal, cross-platform data that the current corpus cannot provide.

Limitations

This review has several limitations. First, the search relied on a single database (Scopus), which may have reduced retrieval breadth. Second, the Open Access filter excluded 29 otherwise eligible records for access-related rather than relevance-related reasons, creating potential selection bias. Third, screening, data extraction, and quality appraisal were conducted by a single reviewer without inter-rater reliability testing. Fourth, the final corpus was relatively small ($n = 29$), so descriptive frequencies should not be overinterpreted. Fifth, the review was limited to English-language publications. Finally, the included studies relied predominantly on production-side data, leaving patterns of reception and interpretation underexamined. Accordingly, the present synthesis should be read as descriptive and interpretive rather than causal.

4. CONCLUSION

CMC politeness research has reached an inflection point. The field has accumulated sufficient empirical breadth to demand theoretical consolidation, yet its dominant framework, Brown and Levinson’s face-threat model persists through disciplinary inertia rather than explanatory adequacy. This review suggests that platform architecture may function as a more immediate mediator of politeness strategy selection than broad cultural background in the cases reviewed; however, this proposition should be treated as a hypothesis generated by the synthesis rather than as a settled causal conclusion, a proposition that may help reorient future pragmatic inquiry toward platform-sensitive explanatory variables. The scientific contribution is threefold. This review proposes “framework inertia” as a field-level label for the continued reliance on established politeness models despite repeated recognition of their limitations in CMC contexts. It also introduces the platform-as-channel-mediator proposition as a testable hypothesis for future research rather than a settled explanatory consensus. Finally, by synthesizing adversative (im)politeness, e-mpoliteness, and impoliteness resonance into a unified taxonomy, it provides the conceptual infrastructure necessary for cumulative, cross-study theory-building.

These advances carry direct implications. Platform-specific politeness instruction should be integrated into EFL/ESL curricula as a core, not peripheral, competency. Content moderation systems require community-norm-sensitive architectures capable of distinguishing sanctioned adversarial discourse from genuine harassment, a distinction that current blunt-instrument models cannot reliably make. Several

limitations bound these conclusions. Restriction to indexed, English-language publications introduces both publication bias and a geographic skew that underrepresents Global South contexts and non-Western politeness logics. The reviewed corpus contains no longitudinal studies, meaning all findings reflect cross-sectional snapshots rather than normative trajectories. The near-exclusive reliance on production-side data further means that how digital politeness is received, interpreted, and evaluated by addressees remains structurally unexamined.

The field is now positioned to pursue several high-priority research directions. Longitudinal designs tracking normative evolution across platform updates are urgently needed to move beyond static snapshots. Cross-platform comparative studies holding cultural context constant would isolate affordance effects that single-platform research cannot disentangle. The pragmatics of AI-mediated communication, how face management operates when one interlocutor is non-human, represents an emerging frontier with both theoretical and applied stakes. Reception-side experimental studies examining how addressees interpret and evaluate digital politeness would redress the field's near-exclusive reliance on production data. Together, these directions constitute a coherent empirical programme capable of delivering what this synthesis has shown the field currently lacks: a genuinely explanatory account of politeness in computer-mediated communication.

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Author's Contribution

This manuscript was solely authored by Ach Fauzi, who is fully responsible for all aspects of the work, including conceptualisation, literature search and screening, data extraction, synthesis and analysis, theoretical interpretation, and manuscript writing, reviewing, and finalisation. The author has read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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