

Impoliteness Strategies Inflicted by Twitter Users: The Case of Interaction with Malaysian Royal Family.

Hamdi Khalis bin Kadri¹, Rosmawar Mohamed², Siti Fatimah³, Nidana Yahya⁴, Zuraifah Zaini⁵

ABSTRACT

The language used in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) has been a debated issue for a long time. Ever since the normalisation of this method of communication, the interaction has been going on only between the common people, resulting in a more expressive and direct communication process. However, recently, the elites and royalties have also come into CMC platforms which causes confusion in the interaction between the common people and the royalties. Therefore, it leads to the clash between the common people and the royalties on social media. This study aims to analyse the impoliteness strategies used by Twitter users in expressing their resentment towards royalties by using the impoliteness theory introduced by Culpeper in 1996. 442 tweets that represent impoliteness has been gathered through purposive sampling method. Based on the analysis, the most popular strategy used by Twitter users is off-record (75), followed by sarcasm (55), Negative Impoliteness (41), Bald on record (39) and positive impoliteness (32). The findings show that although Twitter users are more expressive, they tend to resort to a more subtle approach to express their resentment towards the royalties..

Keywords: CMC, impoliteness theory, royalties, social media, Twitter

Introduction

Politeness across cultures share similar affecting factors such as social distance, power relations and rank of imposition. However, in the new age of social media communication, these affecting factors seem to be impotent in keeping the communication the way it was. Hiding behind the curtain of anonymity of social media, users tend to be more direct in delivering their messages. According to Hamdi Khalis, Nidana & Farahnaz (2019), there are countless occurrences of impoliteness on social media caused by provocative journalism by online newspaper sites. This evidence shows two things; 1) social media interaction is a huge part of today's communication, and 2) people tend to be more direct in social media interactions. So, it is imperative for researchers to observe this method of communication in all aspects.

¹ Hamdi Khalis bin Kadri, PPT, KUIS, hamdikhalis@kuis.edu.my

² Rosmawar Mohamed, PPT, KUIS, rosmawar@kuis.edu.my

³ Siti Fatimah Shafie, PPT, KUIS, sitifatimah@kuis.edu.my

⁴ Nidana Yahya, PPT, KUIS, nidana@kuis.edu.my

⁵ Zuraifah Zaini, PPT, KUIS. zuraifah@kuis.edu.my

Twitter is a popular social media service that allows people to share their thoughts not only to their ‘followers’ but also to the rest of over 200 million Twitter users. This depends on whether the user decide to keep their account private (tweets by these accounts are unaccounted for in this study) or public. The expression of thoughts in Twitter used to be limited to 140 characters, but since then, it has been doubled to 280 characters, and users can now expand the expression of their thought by using a feature called ‘thread’. Users can link up their tweets together to ensure the coherence and cohesiveness of their tweets. Furthermore, the nature of Twitter that any Twitter user can reply to the tweet and can easily argue or discuss within the ‘thread’ is what makes Twitter a convenient platform for people to express their thoughts.

Many past studies focused on Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) in the area of linguistics impoliteness. However, this study is unique as it aims to analyse the impoliteness between Malaysians and The Royal family. Therefore, a question arises as to whether CMC has eliminated the power-relation in the interaction between the citizen and the royal family

Literature Review

Before we dive deeper into the impoliteness strategies introduced by Culpeper in 1996, it is imperative for readers to understand clearly several terms related to this framework. Politeness theory was first introduced by Goffman (1963) that focuses on the notion of face, in which everybody has positive face and negative face that must not be violated. Positive face is one’s desire to be acknowledged and appreciated by others. A thank you after helping someone, and a compliment after a job well done are some of the examples of acknowledging someone’s positive face. On the other hand, negative face is one’s desire not to be impeded by others. Negative in the term does not mean bad; it is actually the solidarity that one has over him/herself. A person not wanting a stranger to stand too close to him/her, or a teacher not wanting the parents to tell them how to teach their children are a few examples of actions that may violate one’s negative face.

This study is based on the impoliteness theory proposed by Jonathan Culpeper in 1996. According to Culpeper, there are six strategies in human interaction 1) Bald on record, 2) Positive impoliteness, 3) Negative impoliteness, 4) Off record, 5) Withhold impoliteness, and 6) Impoliteness Meta-strategy (sarcasm). These strategies are used as the classification of each interaction in data gathered for the study. Further explanation of each of these strategies are as follows; This study is based on the impoliteness theory proposed by Jonathan Culpeper in 1996. According to Culpeper, there are six strategies in human interaction 1) Bald on record, 2) Positive impoliteness, 3) Negative impoliteness, 4) off record, 5) Withhold impoliteness, and 6) Impoliteness Meta-strategy (sarcasm). These strategies are used as the classification of each interaction in data gathered for the study. Further explanation of each of these strategies are as follows;

1. Bald on Record

A face threatening act is performed in a direct, clear and unambiguous way without the regard for the possibility of the intended receiver’s face image. This strategy is used when the sender does not care whether he/she would challenge the receiver’s negative face. For example, a direct insult calling a person “kau bodoh lah” (you’re stupid) in front of other people is bald on record.

2. Positive Impoliteness

This is an act intended to damage the receiver's positive face. It has been used primarily to exclude the receiver from his/her desire to be appreciated or recognised by others. For example, an employee that had been working hard all year long but was denied of salary increment.

3. Negative Impoliteness

In contrast to positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness intends to damage the receiver's negative face. Negative face is a person's desire for his/her action to be unimpeded by others. For example, a stranger interrupts your speech or when a parent is telling a teacher, "This is not how you should teach a kid."

4. Off record

Off record is a politeness strategy that relies upon implication. This strategy is very indirect and involves breaking conversational norms to imply a particular recommended course of action. However, the sender is not blamed to be the one who is asking for the action to be done. For example, "It is very hot out here, isn't it?" The receiver has to decipher the message to understand that it is time to go inside. However, the sender was not the one asking them to go inside, the receiver was the one that understood it that way.

5. Withhold impoliteness

Withhold impoliteness is a situation where the norms of politeness are not carried out. For example, failing to thank somebody for doing something for you, or compliments for a job well done can be taken as deliberate impoliteness.

6. Sarcasm/Impoliteness meta-strategy

Sarcasm or mocking. This is when a sender sends out messages that sound like compliments but filled with insincerity, and the addresser makes it clear that he/she is insincere to the receiver. For example, when someone points out something obvious then, the speaker replies, "Well, thank you, Sherlock."

The Curtain of Anonymity

There have been various studies pointing out the change of behaviour among social media users in the state of anonymity (Bernstein et al. 2011; Postmes et al. 1998). Although Social Networking Sites have set specific rules to avoid total anonymity, the system has an easy workaround for the users to create an anonymous account. In social psychology, it has long been established that the state of anonymity greatly influences a person's behaviour. According to Philip Zimbardo (1969), people tend to act more aggressively and more violently when they are anonymous instead of when their identities are identifiable. People are constrained by social norms, and their actions are accounted for when their identities are known. However, in the state of anonymity, they are not bound to the social standards to behave in certain ways; thus, they exhibit more aggressive behaviour.

Anonymity on social media also exhibits similar anti-normative behaviour. According to Bernstein et al. (2011), anonymous social media users' posts tend to be more offensive, including crude, violent, sexual, or otherwise inappropriate images. Similarly, social media users tend to be more expressive and share more aggressive words in the state of anonymity. Interacting through social media provides users with invisible walls that make them feel unbound by certain norms of face-to-face communication. Although the users can be identified through their social media account, the anonymity provided through not having a face-to-face interaction encourages social media users to communicate more aggressively.

All in all, anonymity on social media does impact the way users interact. They become less constrained and less bound by social norms. Even when the account is created using their name and identity, social media still provides a certain level of anonymity that is non-existent in face-to-face communication. This encourages the users to be more expressive and aggressive in interacting.

Strategies in Power Relations

It takes two parties to establish a chain of power relation as each party has their own agenda in the relationship. Therefore, these two parties might do whatever it takes to control the other party in order to pursue their own agenda. To put it in another way, perhaps they might implement several strategies in power relations. Some of the methods that can be used as a strategy in power relations are the means to obtain victory (Foucault, 2002). In addition, Foucault mentioned that “strategy ... (is used) to designate the procedures used in a situation of confrontation to deprive the rival of his means of contest and to reduce him to giving up struggle” (Foucault, 2002: 346)

One of the most vital elements in power relations is autonomy. Power is instilled only over free subjects, and only to an extent as they are “free” (Foucault, 2002: 342). Meaning, both parties have various possibilities to act and react towards each other’s action in power relations. Additionally, when there is power, there is also resistance (Foucault, 1990).

To sum up, Foucault studies of power relations emphasise the idea that power is not undiluted, but instead, it diffuses through the whole society. It can be seen at work in every human interaction, and therefore the existence of resistance always shows up. With that, power is seen as a more volatile, fluid element, which can always be challenged, so power relations must always be renewed and reaffirmed (Balan, 2010).

Problem Statement

CMC or Computer-Mediated Communication is a huge part of today’s life. The evolution of communicating with the royal family has evolved since the creation of social networking sites. A study based on this phenomenon is imperative as society needs to understand why this phenomenon occurs and formulate a better communication method between the citizens and the royal family. Although a vast number of studies have focused on CMC, there is a lack of focus on the interaction involving the royal family in Malaysia. This data is also unique in a way that it provides insight into the reaction of Malaysian citizens towards a specific social event involving the Royal Official on social media.

Research Objectives

To identify the impoliteness strategies used by social media users in reacting towards the royal family’s social media interactions.

Methodology Of Research

The current study adopts a qualitative research design using a descriptive approach. First, the data was collected through purposive sampling. Next, the tweets were gathered through purposive sampling in reaction to certain events involving royal officials on social media. Then, the data were classified through the strategies in impoliteness theory by Culpeper (1996). Finally, the analysed data went through descriptive analysis to find the background and the reasons behind the use of the impoliteness theories by Twitter users.

Findings of The Study

This chapter presents the results of the study based on the analysis conducted on the data. The data has been classified into six categories, with a few of the categories dominating the list. The six classifications of impoliteness theory are 1) bald on record, 2) negative impoliteness, 3) positive impoliteness, 4) off record, 5) sarcasm/impoliteness meta-data, and 6) withhold impoliteness. The results of the classification are as follows;

Table 1: Data Classification Based on 242 Tweets

Impoliteness Strategies	Count	Percentage %
Bald on record	39	16.1
Positive Impoliteness	32	13.2
Negative Impoliteness	41	16.9
Off record	75	31
Sarcasm/Impoliteness meta-data	55	22.7
Withhold Impoliteness	0	0

4.1. Bald on record

Bald on record refers to the strategy where the act is done in a direct, clear, concise and unambiguous way where the addressee's face is not diminished. Based on the data, 39 bald on record occurrences were recorded.

- where got other donation? IMAGINE ABLE TO WEAR 200k NECKLACE YOU ONLY GIVE CUPCAKES FOR "MORALE SUPPORT" 🤔🤔🤔🤔 (User A1)

sorry Tuanku, but we don't want your cakes. we want more money to make sure our doctors, nurses, frontlines are equipped. we want hospital beds, we want faster vaccinations. when there's a house on fire, you don't put the fire out using flour, eggs, and sugar. (User A2)

THEY NEED MORE BEDS, MORE PAY, MORE WORKFORCE, MORE EQUIPMENT! Not a freaking cupcake goddamit. (User A3)

Unfortunately A LOT of people are struggling and in need of help, but you know what? Just give them cakes, that will solve everything. (User A4)

So tone deaf and out of touch with people (User A5)

Our country's healthcare system is at the edge of collapsing, people are dying, struggling and crying. Our queen just decided to bake cupcakes in her 60,000 USD necklace. (User A6)

#DengkiKek shows that they will need more than crumbs to rehabilitate their selfish, arrogant image. (User A7)

Tweets by User A1-A7 were imposed to the addressee, which they think was acting inappropriately at the time of the occurrence. The tweets were aimed to insult the act of the addressee that was felt as unbecoming. User A3 and A7 are seen to use churlish words to a royalty (godd*mit, selfish and arrogant) in their postings to express resentment and frustration towards the addressee. This is a very direct insult or attack to the addressee's face. Furthermore, User A5 labelled the addressee as 'tone deaf' and 'out of touch' to imply that the addressee was ignorant of the current situation. This can also be seen in User A2, A3 and A4 and A6's tweets.

All of the other tweets also implied bald on record strategy in expressing their resentment towards the addressee. This portrays that the users have some issues concerning what the addressee did or said via the addressee's social media platforms.

4.2. Negative Impoliteness.

Negative impoliteness is the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants. Based on the data, there are 30 occurrences which Twitter users carry out the strategy.

Teruk dia set taraf dia sndri- (User B1)

Twitter user B1 uses negative impoliteness to express his/her resentment towards the "Dengki ke?" comment on the addressee's Instagram account. Referring to the tweet, user B1 tried to invade the addressee's social space by demeaning her social standard. According to Culpepper (1996), invading one's space either literally or figuratively falls under negative impoliteness as it goes against one's desire to be impeded upon. User B1 obviously tried to discredit the addressee of her social standard as user B1 thought that somebody in the addressee's position should not act that way in public. This goes against the addressee's desire to act however she wanted without the impediment from others.

Elaun(duit rakyat) dapat berjuta. Mampu bg cake je? (User B2)

Translation: You received millions of people's money and you can only offer cupcakes? (User B2)

On the other hand, user B2 used negative impoliteness by belittling the good gesture made by the addressee. User B2 used the diminutive expression 'je', which degraded the addressee's effort of offering cupcakes to the Covid-19 frontline workers. The diminutive expression used by user B2 indicated that the gesture made by the addressee was insufficient and inappreciable as compared to the wealth that they have allegedly received from the country. This situation also goes against the addressee's negative face of not wanting to be ridiculed by others for her effort.

The best they could offer? Clearly obsolete. (User B3)

Similarly, user B3 also belittled the gesture offered by the addressee by questioning whether it was the best that they could do to appreciate the frontliners. However, user B3 took his tweet a bit further by saying that the royal institution is obsolete (...*Clearly obsolete*). Recently, the uproar against the royal institution in Malaysia has been at an all-time high. There were even arguments made by individuals on social media claiming that Malaysia should move on from the current system.

Most of the other tweets that use negative impoliteness in expressing their resentment towards the royal family also use the belittling strategy. Users tried to impede upon the addressee's want by degrading the effort made by the addressee and tried to damage her negative face.

4.3. Positive Impoliteness

Positive impoliteness is the strategy used to specifically damage the addressee's positive face want. Positive face is a person's need to be acknowledged by others. Based on the analysis, there are 32 occurrences of this strategy.

"it's funny no infact this is stupid because she thinks its okay to actually do this? I mean-..."
(User C1)

The tweet above is one of the tweets that used the impoliteness strategy bald on record. The user pointed out that the cupcakes rewarded by Malaysian Royalties to the Covid-19

frontline workers was not a good idea. This challenges the addressee's positive face want of being acknowledged by others for one's effort.

Semakin Hari semakin kimak perangai. Mentang2 untouchable, boleh panggil polis anytime dia ni non stop menganjing orang dah (User C2)

Orang tua kutuk. Da nyanyuk la tu (User C3)

The second excerpt was from the same issue as the first one. Twitter users A02 and A03 also pointed out the idea of rewarding the cupcakes to the Covid-19 frontline workers was not a good idea. However, this time, both Twitter users were more vulgar in expressing their resentment.

Based on the three (3) tweets above, we can see that Twitter users use vulgar language in expressing their resentment towards the royal family. There are various offensive words that carry different linguistic intensities. The word 'stupid' is commonly used on social media, thus making it less intense. However, vulgar words like 'kimak', and 'orang tua kutuk' are some of the examples of language use that is not acceptable in any situation be it among close friends or family members (lower chance of challenging negative face) or between strangers. This phenomenon of addressing the royalties with vulgar language is very uncommon and will be discussed further in the next chapter.

4.4. Off record

Off record is a strategy that imposes meaning indirectly, which is the most used in this case. 75 utterances were recorded in getting the message delivered on Twitter.

With that in mind "Let them eat cakes" (User D1)

« Qu'ils mangent de la brioche » or « Let them eat cake » is the famous quote from Marie Antoinette, a French princess in the 17th/18th century upon being told that the peasants had no bread. (User D2)

Marie Antoinette.. is that.. is that you??? (User D3)

Taking "let them eat cakes" quite literally, it seems. (User D4)

Kek darurat (User D5)

Users D1-D5 are a few instances in the data where the addressers use metaphors (indirect). The users use 'Cake', which refers to the famous quote from Marie Antoinette, The last queen of France before the French Revolution. Her word upon hearing the news that the commoners do not have bread to eat was, "Let them eat cake", which shows the disconnection of reality between the elites and the commoners. Similarly, the word 'cake' used in the tweets references the same situation in which the royal family could not understand the situation that the citizens are currently in.

Finally i understand why my moyang did that. (User D6)

Tak boleh tengok. Rasa nak cakap benda tak baik hahahah tapi telah sat lagi pulis sampai rumah pulak (User D7)

User D6 was being ambiguous in the tweet as he/she did not give the audience the background of what his/her great grandfather did. Similarly, user D7 was also ambiguous in

delivering his/her message as she did not express clearly the bad remarks that she wanted to write pertaining to the original tweet are.

4.5. Sarcasm/Impoliteness Metadata

Identifying sarcasm requires comprehensive background knowledge of the interaction between the addresser and the addressee. Sarcasm is uttering something that one does not mean. In the case of this study, sarcasm can be identified either through hashtags, emojis, words and usually through exaggeration portrayed in the tweet.

*Kek lah yang diperlukan after all. Yes cake can pay the exhaustion. emoji: Victory hand
(User 5A)*

Alhamdulillah. Diharapkan dengan sumbangan kek ni, dapat menyelesaikan masalah katil tak cukup, hospital penuh, frontliners dah penat. Dan diharapkan juga dengan sumbangan kek ni, masalah ahli politik yang makin bangang kat malaysia ni dapat diselesaikan.

(User 5B)

The example above shows users 5A and 5B who used sarcasm to express their resentment towards the royal officials. User 5A exaggerated his/her tweet, saying that the cake can be used to cure all of the exhaustion of the frontliners during the pandemic, which is, of course, factually incorrect. Furthermore, user 5A added the victory hand emoji (👏) that further reinforced his sarcastic remarks towards the addressee. Similarly, user 5B exaggerated his/her remark by hoping that the gesture could solve all of the issues faced by the frontline workers and the nation.

Semoga kenyang setelah memakannya, dan selamat bekerja (User 5C)

WAA ALHAMDULILAHH THEY REALLY "NEED" THOSE CUPCAKES 🙄🙄🙄 (User 5D)

User 5C and 5D's tweets are instances where the sarcasm was expressed through the ingenuity of good wishes. User 5C was more subtle in his/her approach. However, the use of the word *kenyang* (full) indicated the sarcastic remark as a cupcake is not a filling food. On the other hand, user 5D was more direct in expressing his/her sarcastic remark as he/she put quotation marks between the word "need". In written interaction, especially on social media, quotation marks are usually used to indicate irony or sarcasm. User 5D used quotation marks to mark the oddities in his/her message, indicating she did not mean what he/she said.

To conclude, out of six strategies of impoliteness introduced by Culpepper (1996), five of the strategies were used by Twitter users to express their resentment towards the Malaysians' Royal Family. The five strategies used were also being practised in various ways and for numerous reasons. Further discussion regarding the relationship between Malaysians and the royalties and how the impoliteness strategies applied in the interaction relating to the power relation of the addressers and the addressee will be discussed in the next section of this report.

Conclusion

Despite the shift of paradigm and its complexity due to the existence of social interaction through the Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) in the power relation between the people and the royalties in Malaysia, Malaysians notably, the Malays themselves, still uphold the idea and the concept of 'Derhaka'. In the Malays political culture, *murka*, or wrath, is generally related to royal anger. The triggering act of *derhaka*, disloyalty or treason can lead to

a royal murka. It is a well-known ideology that has been inherited culturally, that the actions of going against the rulers, especially the royalty, is deeply disapproved.

However, based on the findings of this study, it can be observed that the social media users expressed their resentment while disregarding the concept of 'derhaka'. Instead of addressing the royal family member with the appropriate title or using the proper words in their tweet, social media users directly challenged the notion of face of the royalties. This might be due to several reasons; the internet era, age group and political belief. Starting off with the first reason for impoliteness towards royalties in Malaysia, which is the Internet, the Internet is the most significant contributing factor to this phenomenon as the nature of the Internet itself enables everyone to obtain political information. The news of the shift of political trends from other countries can be easily found on the Internet. This fueled the revolution agenda within the country, which also affected the interaction of social media users with the authorities.

The age group one belongs to can also be the factor creating this phenomenon. Most political and social movements are spearheaded by young people. For evidence, Tarana Burke launched the #MeToo Movement when she was 33 years old in 2006, Thai Protest 2020-2021 was founded by students, and Joshua Wong, born in 1996, led the Hong Kong Protest in 2014. Besides that, youth also engages in participatory politics, in which political news and opinions are expressed, consumed, and remixed peer-to-peer through online social networks (Cohen, Kahne, Bowyer, Middaugh, & Rogowski, 2012). The youth in general (different countries have different definitions of youth) has been known to lead movements that demands a change in the existing status quo within the society. Although social media interaction may not be as organised and as effective as a social movement, it is the evidence proving that a group of Malaysians use impoliteness strategies to express their resentment towards the Malaysian royalties. To put things into perspective, 55% of Twitter (17.1% :18-24, 38.5% :25-34) users come from the age group of 18-34 year-olds, which falls under the youth category in Malaysia. So, it is not surprising to see that this phenomenon happens almost regularly on Twitter.

Lastly, the factor affecting the impoliteness towards Malaysian royalties on Twitter is political belief. Bear in mind that one's political view does not come from 'direct family transmission' (A theory Introduced by MK Jennings in 1968). Parents usually provide the core political value, but one will shape his/her view based on other political stimuli (Jennings, et.al, 2009). In this case, the older generation was more respectful in their interactions with the royalties, but the younger generation has not inherited the value. Through the researchers' observation on social media, the younger generation sees less value offered by the Malaysian royalties in different aspects of their lives. The older generations value the security of their religion and the Bumiputra Privileges as the determinants in building their political belief. However, the younger generations value economic well-being and direct involvement in national policy-making more. These latter determinants are not within the jurisdiction of the Malaysian royalties.

To conclude, the factors influencing the impoliteness phenomenon towards Malaysian royalties by Twitter users are 1) the Internet era, 2) age group and 3) political belief. Last but not least, Twitter users are more expressive in exhibiting their resentment towards the royalties, but they tend to use a more subtle approach as off-record and sarcasm are the two most used strategies. Finally, although social media platform is a space where everybody can express their views and opinions freely, it is also imperative that Malaysian users express their thought in a proper manner which is in line with the fifth Rukun Negara; Kesopanan dan Kesusilaan (good behaviour and morality) especially in the interaction involving the royalties.

Recommendation

This study only focuses on this phenomenon among Twitter users. So, for future research, data from other social media platforms can be analysed to provide broader insight into this phenomenon across different social media users and their social media behaviour towards Malaysian royalties.

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