Impoliteness in Digital Political Campaign Discourse: Evidence from the 2026 Johor State Election

***Muhamad Fadzllah Zaini, Muhammad Faez Nurazman Amrullah, Md Zahril Nizam Md Yusoff**

Faculty Languages and Communication, Sultan Idris Education University, 35900 Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia

***Corresponding Author**

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ABSTRACT

Digital political campaign discourse increasingly relies on short-form video such as Facebook Reels, compressing policy criticism into brief utterances that create space for a shift from legitimate critique toward face attack against opponents. Drawing on Culpeper's (1996, 2005, 2011) impoliteness framework, this study examines ten Facebook Reels from a Malaysian United Democratic Alliance (MUDA) candidate's campaign for the Puteri Wangsa seat in the 16th Johor State Election (2026). A descriptive-interpretative single-case design identifies the impoliteness trigger, output strategy, superstrategy, directness and target across eleven data units. Negative impoliteness, particularly explicitly associating the other with a negative aspect and condescension or ridicule, is the dominant form, while off-record impoliteness emerges when targets are unnamed. Impoliteness is determined not by directness alone but by whether criticism also attacks a target's integrity, competence or maturity. The study contributes a systematic distinction between policy criticism and face attack in multilingual Malay-language digital political discourse.

Keywords: impoliteness; face-threatening acts; political campaign discourse; Facebook Reels; Culpeper's framework; Malaysian election discourse

INTRODUCTION

Political discourse is not merely a medium for conveying information. It is also a strategic arena in which candidates construct their identities, legitimise their parties' positions, shape voters' interpretations, and evaluate the credibility of their opponents (Welle & Shtok, 2026). In an electoral context, language functions simultaneously as an instrument of persuasion and competition, as the success of a campaign depends on a candidate's ability to influence voters' attitudes, identities, and behaviour (Mercier, 2022). Candidates must demonstrate competence, integrity, and closeness to the community while distinguishing themselves from their competitors by criticising the policies, administrative records, and political actions of others. As part of their political communication strategies, this process commonly entails constructing a positive self image alongside a negative representation of the opposition (Khajavi & Rasti, 2020). The intersection of these functions makes campaign discourse a productive domain for examining the shift from legitimate policy criticism to attacks on the target's face. In such circumstances, criticism not only evaluates policies or performance but may also threaten an opponent's social image and identity through particular linguistic strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The development of social media has transformed the form and ecology of electoral communication. Campaigns no longer depend entirely on political rallies, printed manifestos, and mainstream media coverage. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and short form video platforms enable candidates to communicate directly with voters through content that is more personal, concise, visual, and readily shareable (Tapsell, 2021). This transformation has produced political communication that is increasingly personalised, multimodal, and shaped by the technical features of individual platforms. At the same time, platform algorithms tend to increase the visibility of content that attracts attention, evokes emotion, or generates

confrontation. Digital campaigning therefore not only extends a candidate's reach but also creates an environment that may intensify the use of accusations, sarcasm, derogatory metaphors, and attacks on an opponent's credibility (Bossetta, 2018; Stier et al., 2018).

This phenomenon is particularly evident in short form videos such as Facebook Reels. Time constraints require candidates to condense problems, evidence, evaluations, and proposed solutions into brief utterances. Within this format, rhetorical questions, repetition, second person pronouns, metaphors, and forceful evaluations bec-

ome effective rhetorical resources (Southern et al., 2026). Short form content also allows candidates to project authenticity and closeness to voters through conversational language, code switching, and recordings made at actual locations. Nevertheless, the compression of messages may leave less room for explanation, mitigation, and nuance. This approach reflects the broader tendency of digital campaigns to prioritise rapid communication that centres on candidates' personalities and encourages user engagement (Lam et al., 2021). Consequently, the boundaries between political assertion, policy criticism, and face attack have become increasingly complex. Research on digital campaigning indicates that social platforms have shifted political discourse towards forms of communication that are more personalised, interactive, emotionally charged, and governed by algorithmic logic (Papa & Ioannidis, 2023; Wang, 2023).

This scenario was evident in the 16th Johor State Election, held on 11 July 2026. According to an announcement by the Election Commission (EC), 172 candidates contested 56 seats in the Johor State Legislative Assembly, with 42 constituencies involving contests among more than two candidates. This situation demonstrated the highly competitive nature of the election (Election Commission [EC], 2026). Puteri Wangsa, a demographically diverse urban constituency in Johor Bahru, emerged as one of the key battlegrounds, with five candidates contesting the seat. The constituency was particularly important to the Malaysian United Democratic Alliance (MUDA), as it was the only seat won by the party in the 2022 Johor State Election. In the 2026 election, MUDA competed directly against Pakatan Harapan (PH), whereas its victory in 2022 had occurred within the context of an electoral understanding with PH. This shift in their relationship created a more intense competitive environment in the contest for urban voters, younger voters, and supporters of political reform.

Previous studies of digital campaign discourse in Malaysia have largely focused on political communication and the construction of candidates' public images (Ghazali et al., 2019; Mohamed & Abdul Manan, 2020; Idid et al., 2017; Tapsell, 2018). By contrast, impoliteness strategies, particularly the shift from policy criticism to face attacks in short form video content such as Facebook Reels, have yet to receive sustained scholarly attention. This study addresses this gap by examining the impoliteness strategies employed in ten Facebook Reels published as part of the MUDA candidate's election campaign. Culpeper's framework is employed to identify the impoliteness triggers, output strategies, impoliteness superstrategies, degree of directness, and target of each utterance. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How are impoliteness strategies realised in the candidate's campaign videos?

RQ2: How do context, target, and degree of directness distinguish policy criticism from face attacks?

Related Studies

Political Discourse and Digital Campaigning

Research on political discourse and digital campaigning has examined the transformation of electoral communication from conventional media to platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or X, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Bossetta (2018) compared the use of several social media platforms during the 2016 United States presidential election and demonstrated that campaign strategies were adapted to the network structures, technical functions, and user characteristics of each platform. Stier et al. (2018) examined communication between politicians and audiences on Facebook and Twitter, while Kreiss et al. (2018)

explained how political practitioners selected platforms, content genres, and publication schedules according to their target campaign groups. These studies demonstrate that digital platforms are used strategically to communicate political messages to different audiences (Bossetta, 2018; Kreiss et al., 2018; Stier et al., 2018).

Other studies have focused on the personalisation of candidates, user engagement, and differences in communication across platforms. McGregor (2018) conducted an experimental study on the effects of candidate self personalisation on public perceptions and voting intentions. Larsson (2020) compared political posts that became widely circulated across several platforms, while Oz et al. (2018) compared elements of incivility, impoliteness, and deliberation in political interactions on Facebook and Twitter. Veneti et al. (2022) examined the integration of field campaigning, traditional media, and social media during elections in Greece.

Collectively, these studies investigated how candidates constructed their public images, communicated policies, interacted with users, and adapted their messages to digital media formats (Larsson, 2020; McGregor, 2018; Oz et al., 2018; Veneti et al., 2022).

Within the Malaysian context, Idid et al. (2017) examined the relationship between the use of traditional and new media and voters' political efficacy and participation. Tapsell (2018) investigated the use of smartphones, Facebook, and WhatsApp in disseminating information and facilitating political mobilisation during Malaysia's 14th General Election. These studies demonstrate that digital media have become important channels for candidates' communication, the dissemination of political issues, and the development of relationships with voters. Meanwhile, Mohamed and Abdul Manan (2020) found that candidates actively used Facebook not only to communicate campaign information but also to construct personal images, strengthen voters' trust, and maintain direct relationships with their audiences. This finding is supported by Ghazali et al. (2019), who explained that Facebook and Instagram have encouraged the practice of personalised campaigning, a strategy that places greater emphasis on the individual identity of a candidate than on party identity when seeking electoral support. These developments indicate that social media are no longer merely channels for disseminating political information but have become important spaces for constructing candidates' images, relationships, and communication strategies.

Nevertheless, previous studies have continued to focus predominantly on political communication and the construction of candidates' public images. Impoliteness strategies, particularly the shift from policy criticism to face attacks in short form video content such as Facebook Reels, have yet to receive specific scholarly attention. In view of these developments, the use of Facebook Reels in the MUDA candidate's campaign warrants further investigation to explain how language is employed in short form videos, particularly through rhetorical questions, repetition, metaphors, accusations, and the explicit naming of criticised parties (Idid et al., 2017; Tapsell, 2018).

Culpeper's Theory of Impoliteness and the Concept of Face

Research on impoliteness is grounded in the concept of face introduced by Goffman (1967), which refers to the positive social value that an individual claim during interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987) further developed this concept by distinguishing between positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to an individual's desire to be accepted, appreciated, and approved of, whereas negative face refers to the desire to maintain freedom of action and remain free from imposition. Arundale (2006) subsequently examined face as a relational phenomenon constructed through the actions and relationships of participants in communication. These studies provide a foundation for understanding how identity, position, and social image are constructed or challenged through language (Arundale, 2006; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967).

Culpeper (1996) developed a model of impoliteness to identify linguistic strategies directed at an individual's face. The model comprises bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and the withholding of politeness. Culpeper et al. (2003) extended this line of research by analysing the roles of intonation, vocal stress, and the development of interaction in

the realisation of impoliteness. Culpeper (2005) subsequently examined interactions in the television quiz programme The Weakest Link to investigate how criticism and ridicule functioned as part of its entertainment structure. These studies demonstrate that impoliteness can be analysed through the form of an utterance, its manner of delivery, and its communicative context (Culpeper, 1996, 2005; Culpeper et al., 2003).

Culpeper et al. (2010) conducted a cross cultural study of impoliteness events reported by students from England, China, Finland, Germany, and Türkiye. Culpeper (2011) subsequently discussed conventionalised impoliteness formulae, their contexts of use, speaker intentions, recipient interpretations, and the distinction between an Impoliteness Trigger and an Impoliteness Effect. Dynel (2015) reviewed the application of impoliteness theory across conversational, institutional, entertainment, and media contexts. Drawing on this body of research, Culpeper's framework is suitable for identifying the Output Strategies, Impoliteness Superstrategies, degree of Directness, and Targets present in political campaign videos. The concept of face also facilitates the analysis of attacks directed at political integrity, honesty, competence, maturity, and concern for the public (Culpeper, 2011; Culpeper et al., 2010; Dynel, 2015).

Impoliteness in Political Discourse

Studies of impoliteness in political discourse have drawn on data from electoral debates, parliamentary debates, political speeches, interviews, and social media. Alemi and Latifi (2019) examined conflict between members of the Democratic Party and the Republican Party concerning the United States government shutdown. The study applied Culpeper's framework to identify strategies such as rejection, challenges, accusations, and the association of opponents with negative attributes. Bartłomiejczyk (2020) examined impoliteness in parliamentary debates and how interpreters conveyed the pragmatic force of utterances. These studies demonstrate that political impoliteness occurs within contexts involving debate, ideological competition, and institutional communication (Alemi & Latifi, 2019; Bartłomiejczyk, 2020).

Research on political impoliteness has also examined interactions on social media. Mortazavi et al. (2024) analysed politeness and impoliteness in political communication on Twitter or X, with particular attention to the construction of speakers' positions and the evaluation of opponents. Teneketzi (2022) compared conflict on YouTube and Reddit, while Oz et al. (2018) compared impoliteness in political comments on Facebook and Twitter. These studies analysed the relationships among linguistic forms, user identities, interactional structures, and platform characteristics. Their findings demonstrate that accusations, sarcasm, ridicule, rejection, and creative language are also realised through concise and readily shareable digital media (Mortazavi et al., 2024; Oz et al., 2018; Teneketzi, 2022).

Previous studies have also examined the functions of impoliteness in constructing political identities, challenging opponents, defending political positions, and strengthening relationships with supporters. Strategies such as sarcasm, mock politeness, name calling, metaphors, challenges, and the association of targets with negative attributes are employed in political discourse to communicate evaluations of individuals or groups. Against this background, the campaign videos of the MUDA candidate warrant investigation because they combine electoral discourse, social media communication, and attacks on face. The analysis can explain how rhetorical questions, accusations, repetition, metaphors, and implicatures are employed in Malay political discourse that also incorporates English language elements. This study can further demonstrate how policy criticism may be distinguished from attacks directed at the concern, competence, maturity, and integrity of the targeted parties (Alemi & Latifi, 2019; Culpeper, 2011; Mortazavi et al., 2024).

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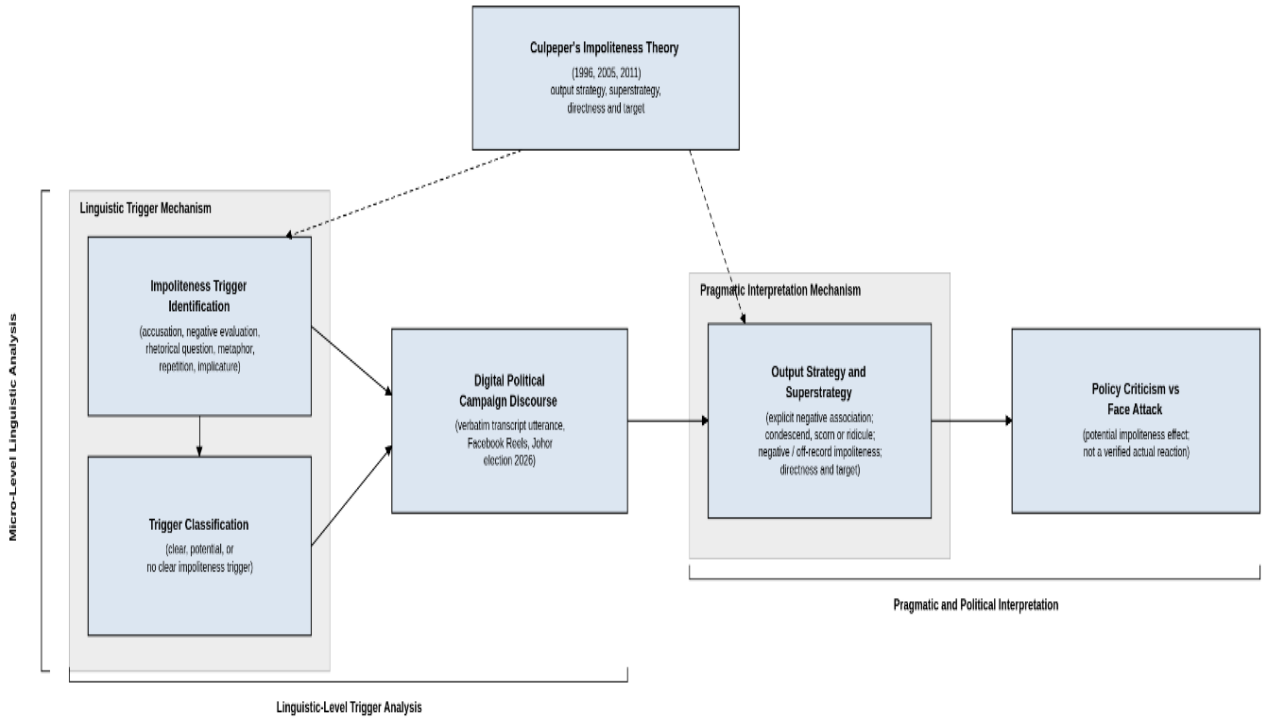

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study's analysis of impoliteness in digital political campaign discourse. The framework is anchored in Culpeper's (1996, 2005, 2011) impoliteness theory, which informs two interrelated analytical mechanisms operating on the data.

DATA AND METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive and interpretative qualitative design using a single case study approach. This design was selected because the study aims to provide an in depth account of how impoliteness strategies are realised within a specific context of digital political communication, namely the campaign videos of a candidate contesting the 16th Johor State Election. The case study approach enables linguistic phenomena to be analysed in relation to their underlying social, political, and communicative contexts (Yin, 2018).

Research Data

The research data comprise 10 campaign videos featuring the candidate from the Malaysian United Democratic Alliance, or MUDA, for the N.41 Puteri Wangsa constituency in the 16th Johor State Election. Focusing on a single candidate allowed variations associated with speaker identity, electoral context, political constituency, and mode of communication to be controlled. Rashifa was selected because the data were appropriate for the purpose of the study, rather than because of any prior assumption that she was more impolite than other candidates.

All videos were obtained from Facebook content published in the Reels format. Each video was between one and three minutes in duration and contained spoken utterances by the candidate concerning the election campaign, integrity, youth leadership, public policy, public welfare, environmental issues, economic development, and relationships among political parties. The videos were selected according to four criteria: (1) they were used as campaign materials by the candidate during the 16th Johor State Election; (2) they contained audible utterances that could be clearly transcribed; (3) they addressed political or public service

issues; and (4) they contained evaluations, criticisms, or expressions of political positions that allowed their pragmatic functions to be analysed.

The selection was not limited to videos containing negative expressions or attacks against political opponents. Videos that were informative, persuasive, and focused on public welfare were also included. This approach was adopted to reduce selection bias and avoid creating the impression that the candidate's entire communication was impolite. Videos containing only music, posters, campaign images, or written text without spoken utterances were excluded.

The selected videos were saved using Web Downloader FB so that the recordings could be viewed repeatedly throughout the transcription and coding processes. Data collection was limited to the 10 identified videos and did not include comments, follower profiles, user reactions, or the audience's personal information. For each video, the researcher recorded its video code, duration, theme, language, principal content, and date of access. Local file storage also enabled the linguistic features to be examined consistently if the original content was subsequently deleted or modified by the account owner.

All videos were transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions retained repetition, conversational language, discourse markers, incomplete sentences, the mixing of Malay and English, and emphatic elements with pragmatic functions. Punctuation was added to improve readability and identify utterance boundaries, but the original propositional content was not altered.

The 10 videos generated 11 units of data. These units were established according to changes in theme, issue, or pragmatic action within the discourse. A single video could generate more than one unit when its content shifted to a different theme or political target. The units are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Organisation of the 11 Research Data Units*

Data Unit	Data Theme	Content Focus
Data 1	Election Campaign: Public Interests and Youth Integrity	Appeal to voters, the identity of the young candidate, and emphasis on integrity
Data 2	Trust in Youth Leadership and Service Experience	The capabilities of a young candidate, service experience, and relationships with the community
Data 3	Environmental Issues and Flooding	Criticism of the attention given by political parties to flooding and climate change
Data 4	Integrity and Public Service	Construction of personal integrity through opposition to corruption and abuse of power
Data 5	Economic Issues and Johor's Development	Unequal development, benefits enjoyed by particular groups, and hardship experienced by the public
Data 6	Criticism of the Lack of Transparency in Political Cooperation	Relationships among political parties, changes in political cooperation, and accusations of misleading voters
Data 7	Flooding and the Climate Plan	Quality of life, solutions to flooding, and the need for a climate action plan
Data 8	Solid Waste Management and Public Services	Waste management, community complaints, and service efficiency
Data 9	Education and Welfare	Tuition classes, educational opportunities, and assistance for the community
Data 10	Candidate Promotion and a Low Cost Campaign	Campaign approaches, limited resources, and direct engagement with voters
Data 11	Socioeconomic Issues and Party Policies	Cost of living, housing, development, and the part

The thematic groupings presented in Table 1 provide contextual information for each unit of utterance and do not function as categories of impoliteness. Themes such as flooding, education, or the economy are not automatically regarded as containing impoliteness. An impoliteness category is assigned only after the linguistic form, target, context, and potential face attack have been analysed.

Research Data Analysis

The data were analysed using Culpeper's framework of impoliteness (1996, 2005, 2011). This framework was selected because it provides systematic categories for identifying how language is used to produce face attacks. The principal concepts applied in the analysis were Impoliteness Trigger, Output Strategy, Impoliteness Superstrategy, Directness, Target, and Impoliteness Effect. The analysis also recognised that impoliteness does not reside exclusively in a particular word. Instead, it emerges through the relationship between linguistic form, context, target, and pragmatic interpretation (Culpeper, 2011). The coding procedure was conducted through the following seven steps:

Table 2. *Procedure*

Step	Procedure	Description
Step 1	**Define the unit of analysis**	The unit of analysis was defined as an utterance or sequence of utterances with the potential to attack the face of an individual, leader, political party, or political institution. An extract was selected as a unit of evidence when it contained features such as accusations, negative evaluations, direct prohibitions, rhetorical questions carrying negative presuppositions, derogatory metaphors, pronouns that personalised criticism, repetition that intensified an attack, or implicatures that associated particular parties with negative attributes.
Step 2	**Repeated viewing and reading**	Each video was viewed and its transcript read repeatedly to understand the issue, purpose of the utterance, and target involved. This process was completed before identifying parts of the utterance that could potentially function as Impoliteness Triggers.
Step 3	**Isolate and classify Output Strategies**	The identified utterances were isolated as units of evidence and classified according to their Output Strategies. These included Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect and Condescend, scorn or ridicule.
Step 4	**Match to Impoliteness Superstrategy**	Each unit was matched with an Impoliteness Superstrategy, namely Bald on Record Impoliteness, Positive Impoliteness, Negative Impoliteness, Off Record Impoliteness, Sarcasm or Mock Politeness, or Withhold Politeness. The degree of Directness and the Target were also recorded.
Step 5	**Classify trigger status**	Utterances that explicitly identified the target and expressed a negative evaluation were categorised as Clear Impoliteness Triggers. Utterances that did not explicitly identify the target or required inferential interpretation were categorised as Potential Impoliteness Triggers.
Step 6	**Distinguish forceful language from impoliteness**	A distinction was made between forceful language and impoliteness. Criticism directed at a manifesto, policy, or administrative performance was categorised as an Impoliteness Trigger only when the utterance also attacked the target's integrity, credibility, competence, maturity, or social standing.
Step 7	**Develop the coding matrix**	A coding matrix was developed to record the data number, theme, verbatim transcript, evidence extract, Impoliteness Trigger, Output Strategy, Impoliteness Superstrategy, Directness, Target, trigger status, and analytical explanation. This matrix served as an audit trail connecting each coding decision to the original transcript.

As the data consisted of campaign monologues and did not include responses from the targeted parties, the study identified only the potential Impoliteness Effect. It does not claim that the recipients actually experienced or perceived offence.

FINDINGS

The analysis of the transcript data indicates that impoliteness strategies were primarily employed when the speaker criticised weaknesses in public policies, the integrity of political parties, and the lack of transparency in political cooperation. Based on Culpeper's framework, the data revealed two principal forms of impoliteness, namely Negative Impoliteness and Off Record Impoliteness. In addition, several utterances were delivered directly through features of Bald on Record Impoliteness, particularly when the target was explicitly named, accused, or instructed.

Nevertheless, the presence of forceful linguistic forms does not automatically demonstrate that an utterance is impolite. The analysis considered the Impoliteness Trigger, Output Strategy, degree of Directness, Target, and political context of each utterance. As the data consisted of video monologues and did not include responses from the targeted parties, the findings identify potential attacks on face but cannot establish conclusively whether the targets actually experienced offence.

Of the 11 data units analysed, two were categorised as Clear Impoliteness Triggers, namely Data 3 and Data 6. Two units, Data 4 and Data 5, were categorised as Potential Impoliteness Triggers. The remaining seven units, comprising Data 1, Data 2, Data 7, Data 8, Data 9, Data 10, and Data 11, did not demonstrate clear Impoliteness Triggers and were therefore excluded from the impoliteness dataset. Table 3 summarises the coding of all 11 data units.

Table 3. *Impoliteness Coding Matrix for All 11 Data Units*

Data	Status	Output Strategy or Superstrategy	Directness	Target
Data 1	No clear trigger	No impoliteness strategy identified. The direct appeal is mitigated by personal acknowledgement and the word "please"	Direct but polite	Voters
Data 2	No clear trigger	The negative evaluation is presented through reported speech rather than as an attack by the speaker	Reported speech	The speaker herself
Data 3	Clear	Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect; Negative Impoliteness	Direct and Bald on Record	Pakatan Harapan as a political party
Data 4	Potential	Implicature associating others with negative attributes; Off Record Impoliteness	Indirect and inferential	Experienced politicians who are not explicitly named
Data 5	Potential	Negative implicature constructed through group contrast and the omission of the agent; Off Record Impoliteness	Indirect	"A select few" or unnamed authorities
Data 6	Clear	Condescend, scorn or ridicule; Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect; direct prohibition; Negative Impoliteness	Direct and metaphorical	Pakatan Harapan and the leader addressed as "you"
Data 7	No clear trigger	Rhetorical questions emphasise the urgency of a public issue without insulting or accusing any party	Forceful but does not attack face	Flooding as an issue rather than an individual or institution
Data 8	No clear trigger	The evaluation of behaviour is mitigated through explanation and empathy, as expressed by "I understand"	Informative explanation	Residents in general
Data 9	No clear trigger	A firm response to expressions of doubt without accusations or ridicule	Direct but not offensive	Those who questioned the initiative
Data 10	No clear trigger	Personal evaluation and acknowledgement of limitations through self deprecation	Humble	The speaker and her own party
Data 11	No clear trigger	Description of socioeconomic experiences without targeting any individual or institution	Descriptive	Socioeconomic conditions

Data Units Without a Clear Impoliteness Trigger

Seven of the 11 data units, namely Data 1, Data 2, Data 7, Data 8, Data 9, Data 10, and Data 11, did not demonstrate a clear Impoliteness Trigger, although some of the utterances were delivered firmly or directly. This finding is important because it demonstrates that the forcefulness of an utterance alone is insufficient to establish impoliteness in the absence of an attack on another party's face. Data 1 and Data 10 contain political appeals and personal promotion that are communicated directly. However, their force is mitigated by the speaker's acknowledgement of her own limitations, as demonstrated in "*mungkin saya tak berpengalaman*" ("perhaps I am inexperienced") and "*saya pun bukan orang yang kaya*" ("I am not a wealthy person either"), as well as by politeness markers such as "*tolong*" ("please"). Data 2 contains negative evaluations, including "*kurang matang*" ("less mature") and "*terlalu muda, tidak berpengalaman*" ("too young and inexperienced"). However, these evaluations are presented as remarks made by others about the speaker herself through reported speech. They do not constitute attacks initiated by the speaker against an external target and are immediately mitigated by the expression "*saya faham*" ("I understand").

Data 7, Data 8, Data 9, and Data 11 focus on explanations of public policies and issues concerning flooding, solid waste management, education, and socioeconomic conditions without naming or insulting any particular party. The rhetorical question in Data 7, "*Sampai bila kualiti hidup rakyat di sini akan menurun sebab banjir?*" ("How long will the quality of life of the people here continue to deteriorate because of flooding?"), emphasises the need for a solution rather than questioning anyone's integrity. This function differs fundamentally from the rhetorical question in Data 3, which explicitly names a political party and conveys a negative presupposition. Data 8 also contains an evaluation of behaviour concerning "*membuang sampah merata*" ("discarding rubbish indiscriminately"). However, the speaker immediately provides an explanation through "*tak tahu*" ("do not know") and expresses empathy, thereby preventing the utterance

from being interpreted as a face attack. This comparison supports the argument that the distinction between policy criticism and a face attack depends on the explicit identification of a target, the presence of direct accusations, and the absence of mitigation. It does not depend solely on the use of rhetorical questions or the forcefulness of an utterance.

Negative Impoliteness in Criticism of Environmental Issues and Flooding

Data 3 demonstrates the use of Negative Impoliteness through the Output Strategy Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect. This strategy is realised when the speaker directly associates Pakatan Harapan with a lack of concern about climate change and flooding.

Malay Language Data	*:*	*"Kenapa parti besar seperti Pakatan Harapan tak ambil berat langsung tentang perubahan iklim tentang isu banjir?"*
English Translation	*:*	*"Why does a major party such as Pakatan Harapan not care at all about climate change and the issue of flooding?"*

This utterance contains several Impoliteness Triggers, namely a rhetorical question, the explicit identification of the target, and a negative evaluation through the phrase "*tak ambil berat langsung*" ("does not care at all"). The phrase does not merely question the substance of the party's policies. Instead, it constructs an image of Pakatan Harapan as lacking concern for the problems experienced by the public.

In theoretical terms, the strategy Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect occurs when a speaker explicitly associates a target with a negative characteristic or action. In this context, the target is associated with negligence or a failure to address climate change and flooding. The utterance is also direct because the political party is explicitly named. It therefore demonstrates features of Bald on Record Impoliteness, as the attack on face is expressed openly, clearly, and without ambiguity. Although it takes the form of a question, its propositional content conveys the accusation that the party does not care about flooding.

This negative evaluation is reinforced by a second piece of evidence:

Malay Language Data	*:*	*"Dekat lapan muka surat manifesto Pakatan Harapan tak ada langsung perkataan banjir alam sekitar dan juga perabuhan iklim"*
English Translation	*:*	*"Across nearly eight pages of Pakatan Harapan's manifesto, the terms flooding, the environment, and climate change do not appear at all"*

The phrase "*tak ada langsung*" ("do not appear at all") functions as a complete denial concerning the content of the party's manifesto. The repetition of "*langsung*" ("at all") across both utterances intensifies the negative evaluation. The speaker does not merely claim that flooding has received insufficient attention but presents it as having received no attention whatsoever.

Nevertheless, the degree of impoliteness in this data unit may be regarded as low to moderate. The criticism remains focused on the party's manifesto, policies, and priorities rather than insulting the personal characteristics of an individual political leader. The utterances therefore constitute a Clear Impoliteness Trigger, although their primary function remains within the scope of political criticism directed at public policy.

Off Record Impoliteness in the Construction of Personal Integrity

Data 4 demonstrates a more indirect form of impoliteness through Off Record Impoliteness. The speaker does not explicitly identify any particular target, but the structure of the utterance allows listeners to form negative inferences about other politicians.

Malay Language Data	*:*	*"Mungkin saya tak berpengalaman tapi saya pun tak berpengalaman untuk ambil rasuah. Saya tak berpengalaman untuk*

		salah guna kuasa. Saya tak berpengalaman untuk korupsi."
English Translation	*:*	*"Perhaps I am inexperienced, but I am also inexperienced in accepting bribes. I have no experience in abusing power. I have no experience in corruption."*

At the literal level, this utterance functions as a strategy for constructing the speaker's identity and personal integrity. The speaker acknowledges her lack of political experience but transforms this limitation into a moral advantage. Nevertheless, the contrast between being "*tidak berpengalaman*" ("inexperienced") and engaging in corruption produces a particular implicature. Listeners may infer that more experienced politicians might have experience in accepting bribes, abusing power, or engaging in corruption.

This strategy is categorised as Off Record Impoliteness because the intention to attack is not expressed explicitly and the target is not identified. However, the utterance is more accurately classified as a Potential Impoliteness Trigger. Its literal function is to construct the speaker's credibility and integrity, while its offensive function depends on the listener's interpretation. Without a response from the target or recipient, it cannot be determined whether the utterance was actually perceived as an attack.

Off Record Impoliteness in Criticism of Economic Issues and Development

Data 5 also demonstrates Off Record Impoliteness, particularly when the speaker criticises the imbalance between state development and the economic circumstances of the public without explicitly identifying those who benefit or those responsible for the people's hardship.

Malay Language Data	*:*	*"Tapi segelintir orang a yang untung tersebut. Kita ni semakin susah di Johor."*
English Translation	*:*	*"But only a select few benefit from it. We, the people of Johor, are experiencing increasing hardship."*

This utterance constructs a contrast between two groups, namely "*segelintir orang*" ("a select few") who benefit and "*kita*" ("we"), referring to members of the public whose lives are becoming increasingly difficult. This strategy produces a negative implicature concerning those who benefit from development, but their identities are not specified. Since the target is not explicitly named, the utterance is categorised as Off Record Impoliteness and a Potential Impoliteness Trigger.

The criticism continues through a rhetorical question:

Malay Language Data	*:*	*"Kenapa? Kenapa disusahkan rakyat di sini?"*
English Translation	*:*	*"Why? Why are the people here being subjected to hardship?"*

The passive verb "*disusahkan*" ("being subjected to hardship") suggests that the people's difficulties have not arisen naturally but have resulted from the actions or failures of a particular party. However, the agent responsible for causing the hardship is omitted through the use of the passive construction.

This omission makes the utterance less direct, as the speaker implies that a particular party is responsible without explicitly identifying it. The utterance therefore demonstrates Off Record Impoliteness because its negative meaning must be inferred. It remains a Potential Impoliteness Trigger because its target is unclear.

Negative Impoliteness in Criticism of Political Cooperation

Data 6 contains the clearest and strongest impoliteness strategies in the dataset. In this data unit, the speaker uses metaphors, accusations of deception, second person pronouns, repetition, and direct prohibitions to attack the credibility of the targeted parties.

Malay Language Data	:	*"Saya nak tanya kenapa nak guna PRN ni sebagai taman rekreasi mereka?"*
English Translation	:	*"I want to ask why they are using this state election as their recreational park?"*

The metaphor "*taman rekreasi*" ("recreational park") represents the election as a space for play and entertainment, thereby diminishing the seriousness of the electoral process. The Output Strategy employed is Condescend, scorn or ridicule. This metaphor functions as Negative Impoliteness because it attacks the target's dignity, maturity, and political credibility. The same strategy becomes more forceful in the following English utterance:

"Why are you using elections as your playground to make friends, to make enemies?"

The use of the second person pronoun "you" makes the criticism more personal than the earlier use of "*mereka*" ("they"). The metaphor "playground" conveys a meaning similar to "*taman rekreasi*" ("recreational park") and presents the target's actions as immature and lacking seriousness. This utterance combines two forms of Directness. The pronoun "you" produces a direct attack, while the metaphor "playground" produces an indirect attack that requires interpretation.

Accusations of Deception as Explicit Negative Association

The impoliteness strategy in Data 6 becomes more explicit when the speaker repeatedly uses the word "ditipu" ("deceived"):

Malay Language Data	:	*"So sangat sangat tidak adil untuk rakyat ditipu dan ditipu sebagai pilihan parti politik mereka."*
English Translation	:	*"So, it is extremely unfair for the people to be deceived repeatedly concerning their choice of political party."*

The repetition of "*ditipu*" ("deceived") constitutes a strong Impoliteness Trigger. The Output Strategy is Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect. Within a political context, an accusation of deception goes beyond criticism of differences in opinion or policy.

It attacks the target's integrity, honesty, and credibility. This utterance is delivered directly and demonstrates features of Bald on Record Impoliteness because the negative evaluation is not concealed through implicature.

Direct Prohibition and Repetition of the Word "Tipu"

Malay Language Data	:	*"Tolonglah jangan tipu rakyat... Tolong jangan tipu rakyat."*
English Translation	:	*"Please do not deceive the people... Please do not deceive the people."*

The word "*tolong*" ("please") generally functions as a politeness marker. However, its presence does not remove the offensive content of the utterance, as the principal proposition still conveys an accusation that the target is deceiving or may deceive the public.

The Output Strategies employed in this utterance are Direct prohibition and Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect. Repetition increases the pressure placed on the target and strengthens the accusation. A polite linguistic form does not necessarily produce a polite effect.

Bald on Record Impoliteness through an Explicit Accusation

The most direct degree of impoliteness can be observed in the following utterance:

Malay Language Data	:	*"Pilihan raya ni digunakan untuk tipu rakyat."*
English Translation	:	*"This election is being used to deceive the people."*

This utterance contains an explicit accusation that the electoral process is being used as an instrument to deceive the public. It contains no significant mitigation or ambiguity and therefore demonstrates features of Bald on Record Impoliteness. The Output Strategy employed is Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect. This accusation threatens the target's face because it challenges the fundamental values expected of political parties and leaders, namely integrity, transparency, and honesty. In contrast to Data 3, which focuses more specifically on policy deficiencies, Data 6 attacks the moral credibility of the targeted parties.

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates that impoliteness strategies were used selectively in the MUDA candidate's campaign videos and did not represent her overall communication style. Most of the data units concerned explanations of policies, service experience, education, public welfare, flooding, waste management, and socioeconomic issues. Impoliteness emerged when the discourse shifted from explaining a problem to evaluating the parties considered responsible for it. Negative Impoliteness was the most dominant strategy, particularly through Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect and Condescend, scorn or ridicule. Utterances such as "tak ambil berat langsung" ("does not care at all"), "rakyat ditipu" ("the people are being deceived"), and "jangan tipu rakyat" ("do not deceive the people") associate the targets with negligence and dishonesty. The metaphors "taman rekreasi" ("recreational park") and "playground" portray the political actions of opponents as a game, thereby attacking their maturity and seriousness. These findings are consistent with Culpeper (1996, 2011) and Alemi and Latifi (2019), who demonstrate that negative evaluations, ridicule, and accusations are employed in political discourse to undermine the image of political opponents.

The analysis also demonstrates that impoliteness cannot be determined solely by sentence structure, negative words, or the degree of Directness. The rhetorical question "Kenapa parti besar seperti Pakatan Harapan tak ambil berat langsung tentang perubahan iklim tentang isu banjir?" ("Why does a major party such as Pakatan Harapan not care at all about climate change and the issue of flooding?") functions as an attack because the target is explicitly identified and the question conveys a negative presupposition. By contrast, the question "Sampai bila kualiti hidup rakyat di sini akan menurun sebab banjir?" ("How long will the quality of life of the people here continue to deteriorate because of flooding?") primarily emphasises the need for a solution and

does not directly attack the face of any particular party. Direct utterances are also not necessarily impolite. Appeals to vote for the candidate and commitments to provide free tuition are expressed directly but do not attack anyone's social identity. Conversely, the utterance "jangan tipu rakyat" ("do not deceive the people") conveys an accusation against the target's integrity. Off Record Impoliteness was also identified in utterances such as "Saya tak berpengalaman untuk ambil rasuah" ("I have no experience in accepting bribes"), which constructs the speaker's integrity while producing a negative implicature concerning other politicians. These findings support the view that face and impoliteness must be interpreted according to the target, context, and relevant inferences rather than on the basis of isolated linguistic forms (Arundale, 2006; Culpeper, 2011).

The context of Facebook Reels also influenced how these strategies were realised. Short videos require candidates to communicate issues and political positions in a concise, accessible, and readily shareable form. Repetition, metaphors, rhetorical questions, direct accusations, and language mixing therefore become prominent rhetorical resources. In the utterance "Why are you using elections as your playground to make friends, to make enemies?", the second person pronoun "you" personalises the criticism, while the metaphor "playground" diminishes the seriousness of the target's political actions. The subsequent repetition of "tipu" ("deceive") transforms metaphorical criticism into a more explicit accusation. These findings are consistent with studies demonstrating that digital political communication is shaped by platform affordances, candidate

personalisation, and the need to attract audience attention (Bossetta, 2018; McGregor, 2018; Oz et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the research data also demonstrate that Facebook Reels were used to explain policies and develop relationships with voters. The shift from policy criticism to a face attack occurred when policy weaknesses were associated with the honesty, competence, maturity, or concern demonstrated by political opponents.

CONCLUSION

This study addresses the two research questions presented in the Introduction. In response to RQ1, the findings demonstrate that impoliteness strategies were primarily realised through Negative Impoliteness, particularly Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect and Condescend, scorn or ridicule, as well as Off Record Impoliteness. Rhetorical questions, metaphors, repetition, and second person pronouns functioned as rhetorical resources within the short video format. In response to RQ2, the findings demonstrate that the distinction between policy criticism and a face attack depends on whether the target is explicitly identified, whether the evaluation addresses the target's integrity, competence, or maturity, and whether the negative meaning is communicated directly or requires inference. This distinction does not depend solely on the forcefulness of the sentence.

From a theoretical perspective, this study operationalises Impoliteness Trigger, Output Strategy, Impoliteness Superstrategy, Directness, and Target as separate analytical components. Empirically, the study contributes further evidence concerning impoliteness in multilingual Malay campaign discourse involving a young political candidate. Methodologically, the distinction between Clear and Potential Impoliteness Triggers helps prevent classifications based solely on the presence of negative words. In practical terms, the findings demonstrate that forceful language is not necessarily impolite. Impoliteness occurs when criticism also attacks the integrity, competence, or social legitimacy of the target.

This study is limited to one candidate and 10 monologue videos from a single political campaign. Consequently, the findings explain the potential Impoliteness Effect rather than the actual reactions of the targeted parties. The data also do not include responses from political opponents, meaning that the actual effect on face could not be empirically verified. Future studies should examine campaigns involving multiple candidates and political parties to enable comparisons across cases. They should also incorporate analyses of audience responses, such as public comments, to determine whether Potential Impoliteness Triggers are actually perceived as attacks by recipients.

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