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Politeness Strategies in WhatsApp Cancellation Messages: A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis in the Central Java Tourism Industry

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Abstract

This study investigates the politeness strategies employed by Indonesian hotel and travel agent reservation staff in responding to reservation cancellations communicated via WhatsApp by prospective guests and tourists. Focusing on service providers' responses, the study explores how politeness is pragmatically constructed in informal digital interactions within the Central Java tourism industry Drawing on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, the research employs a qualitative descriptive method. Data were collected from authentic WhatsApp conversations between service staff and Indonesian clients, particularly concerning cancellation messages initiated by the clients. The analysis reveals the dominant use of both negative and positive politeness strategies, including indirect expressions, apologies, expressions of gratitude, empathy, and hedging. These strategies reflect culturally grounded efforts to maintain social harmony, express professionalism, and mitigate face-threatening acts. Linguistic features such as mohon maaf sebelumnya ("we apologize in advance'3 and personalized honorifics like Pak, Bu, Mas, and Mbak, alongside informal tones, illustrate the hybrid nature of politeness in digital service discourse in Central Java. The study demonstrates that politeness functions as both a linguistic and strategic tool for managing client relationships, and that it embodies the

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high-context communicative norms of Javanese culture. These findings contribute to a socio-pragmatic understanding of politeness in mediated tourism communication and offer practical insights for improving client engagement in digital service encounters.

Keywords: *politeness strategies, WhaoApp discourse, socio-pmgmatics, Indonesian tourism, service interaction*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the proliferation of digital communication platforms has significantly transformed the landscape of service interactions within the Indonesian tourism industry. Among these platforms, WhatsApp has emerged as a predominant medium for facilitating communication between prospective guests and hotel reservation staff, as well as between prospective tourists and travel agent reservation staff. This shift from traditional face-to-face interactions to text-based messaging necessitates a re-evaluation of politeness strategies, as the dynamics of communication are inherently altered in digital environments.

To analyse how politeness manifests in digital service interactions, it is essential to first consider the concept of speech acts, as proposed by Austin (1962) and further developed by Searle (1969). In digital messaging contexts such as WhatsApp, communication is composed not merely of words but of actions performed through language, such as requesting apologizing declining or acknowledging. These acts may be expressed either directly or indirectly, depending on the speaker's intent and the relational dynamics involved. Indirect speech acts, in particular, are often employed to soften the force of a message or to convey meaning in a more socially acceptable manner. Within service interactions, especially during sensitive exchanges like reservation cancellations, indirectness becomes a key strategy for maintaining politeness. This pragmatic layer of communication plays a crucial role in how reservation staff manage client relationships and mitigate face-threatening acts in text-based settings.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theoiy builds on the concept *of face,* which is a person's public self-image. They identify two aspects of face: *positive face,* which reflects the desire to be liked and approved of by others, and *negative face,* which reflects the desire

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to maintain autonomy and freedom from imposition. When communication threatens either of these faces, speakers may employ various politeness strategies to reduce the potential social friction. Positive politeness strategies work to satisfy the addressee's need for approval and solidarity by demonstrating friendliness, attending to their interests, using inclusive language, offering compliments or sympathy, and maintaining optimism. Conversely, negative politeness strategies focus on respecting the addressee's need for freedom and minimizing imposition. These include using indirect language, hedging statements, apologizing showing deference, and generalizing potentially face-threatening acts. In digital service interactions, such as WhatsApp messages responding to reservation cancellations, these strategies manifest through indirectness, culturally appropriate linguistic markers, and careful phrasing to preserve professionalism and positive customer relations.

The concept of politeness, as articulated by Brown and Levinson (1987), encompasses strategies employed to mitigate face-threatening acts and maintain social harmony. In the context of reservation cancellations, such acts inherently pose a threat to the face of both the sender and the receiver. Therefore, understanding the politeness strategies utilized by service providers in response to such cancellations is crucial for maintaining positive customer relations and ensuring service quality

Existing research on politeness strategies in digital communication has predominantly focused on educational settings, with studies examining interactions between students and lecturers (Farida & Yuliana, 2019; Shalihah & Winarsih, 2023). However, there is a paucity of studies exploring the application of these strategies within the tourism sector, particularly concerning reservation cancellations. This gap in the literature underscores the need for focused research on the pragmatic aspects of digital communication in tourism services. Moreover, while numerous studies have been conducted on digital communication—previously referred to as computer-mediated communication (CMC)—such as those examining norm establishment in WhatsApp group conversations (Norwanto & Risdianto, 2022) and the norms of emotional expression

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across platforms like *Facebook, Twitter, Instagram,* and *WhatsApp* (Waterloo et al., 2018), a comparative perspective is often lacking. A broader discussion that engages with mulöple studies, including those featured in the special issue on CMC by Locher, Bolander, and Höhn (2015), which introduces the concept of relational work in Facebook and discussion boards, would enrich the understanding of politeness strategies across digital contexts.

In the context of Central Java, communication is strongly influenced by Javanese cultural values such as *andhap asor* (humility), social harmony, and indirectness, particularly in face-threatening acts like cancellations. Thèse values manifest through indirect speech acts, nuanced expressions, and the use of honorifics to maintain politeness and avoid confrontation. Such communicaöve behaviour is deeply rooted in Javanese pragmatics, as supported by previous studies (Gunarwan, 2001; Keeler, 1990; Jauhari, Djatmika, & Santosa, 2020; Norwanto, 2025), which highlight the role of social context, power distance, and cultural expectations in shaping how speakers convey criticism, disagreement, or rejection. Within the tourism industry in Central Java, thèse socio-pragmatic norms extend into digital communicaöon platforms like WhatsApp. When prospective guests or tourists cancel reservaöons via text, their message structure and politeness strategies can significantly influence the perceived professionalism and relational tone of the interaction. Therefore, analysing thèse strategies offers insights into how local cultural values continue to shape service-oriented communication in digital contexts.

This studyaims to investigate the politeness strategies employed by hotel reservaöon staff and travel agent reservation staff in Central Java when responding to reservaöon cancellations conveyed via WhatsApp. By analysing authentic WhatsApp messages exchanged between service providers and prospective guests or touriste, this research seeks to identify the specific strategies uölized and the cultural nuances influencing their applicaöon. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of digital politeness in the Javanese tourism context and offer practical implications for enhancing communicaöon pracöces within the industry.

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RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the politeness strategies utilized by CentralJavanese hotel reservation staff and travel agent reservation staff when responding to reservation cancellations via WhatsApp. A qualitative design was selected to allow for an in-depth exploration of language use, pragmatic choices, and socio-cultural nuances embedded in naturally occurring digital interactions (Setyawan, Binawan, & Nugraeni, 2020). Given that politeness is culturally sensitive and context-dependent, a qualitative method is appropriate for analysing how linguistic behaviour reflects interpersonal concerns and service values (Tarmini, Safi'i, & Nurhikmah, 2020).

The primary data were collected from authentic WhatsApp chat transcripts involving service providers and Indonesian clients. The participants included 20 hotel reservation staff members from star-rated hotels and 10 travel agent reservation staff members working with reputable travel agencies in Surakarta City, Central Java. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they had practical and frequent experience communicating with clients via WhatsApp, particularly in managing bookings and cancellations (Junita, 2020).

From an initial corpus of 300 WhatsApp utterances exchanged between hotel/travel agent reservation staff and clients in Surakarta City; Central Java, the researchers identified 72 message exchanges that explicitly involved reservation cancellations. Each exchange consisted of a client's cancellation message and the corresponding service provider's response. Of these, 48 responses were from hotel staff and 24 from travel agents. To ensure depth and representativeness, 8 excerpts were selected for detailed qualitative analysis, covering the spectrum of observed politeness strategies (positive, negative, and bald-on-record). The selection criteria included (1) clarity of politeness markers, (2) diversity of linguistic features, and (3) alignment with the study's focus on cancellation scenarios.

To ensure research ethics, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Identifying information, such as names and phone numbers, was anonymized to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality. The dataset consisted solely of messages written

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by the service providers (hotel reservation staff and travel agent reservation staff) in response to cancellation messages from prospective guests and prospective tourists. Messages from the guests/tourists were only used to provide interactional context and were not the focus of linguistic analysis (Shalihah & Winarsih, 2023).

The analysis was conducted using the politeness framework developed by Broum and Levinson (1987), focusing on three key types of politeness strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, and negative politeness. Each WhatsApp message was coded and categorized based on the strategy employed. In addition to identifying politeness strategies, the analysis also considered sociocultural elements relevant to the Indonesian context, particularly the use of address terms or titles such as *Pak, Bu, Mas,* and *Mbak,* which indicate respect and social roles in everyday communication. The dataset included address terms such as *Pak, Bu, Mas,* and Mbar, which were frequently used by service providers. These terms were coded as markers of relational politeness. No formalJavanese honorifics (e.g., *krama inggil* registers like *panjenengan j* appeared in the data, consistent with WhatsApp's informal communicative norms.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, triangulation was applied by involving two independent researchers to cross-validate the coding and interpretation of data. Member checking was also conducted by sharing preliminaiy findings with a sample of participants to ensure that the interpretations accurately captured their communicative intent (Setyawan et al., 2020). Data were analysed manually to preserve the richness of linguistic features and the interactional flow typical in real-time WhatsApp exchanges. However, analysing authentic WhatsApp conversations also presents ethical and practical challenges. One primary concern is ensuring informed consent, especially given the private and informal nature of the pladorm. In this study, all participants were fully informed about the research objectives and voluntarily consented to share their anonymized messages. Another challenge lies in the potential loss of contextual cues, such as tone, gesture, or shared history which are often present in face-to-face communication but absent in text-based interaction. This can affect how politeness strategies are interpreted. Additionally,

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subjectivity in data interpretation may influence how pragmatic features are categorized, particularly in a high-context culture like Central Java, where indirectness is common. These issues can impact the replicability of the study in different settings, as the data are context-specific and shaped by cultural norms, digital pladorm conventions, and relational dynamics.

Despite these challenges, this methodological approach supports a culturally grounded and context-sensitive analysis of politeness in digital service discourse. It aligns with the study's goal to reveal how service providers in Central Java adapt pragmatic strategies in response to potentially face-threatening acts like reservation cancellations, thus contributing to broader discussions of digital pragmatics and politeness in tourism communication.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This section aims to explain how service providers perform face-saving acts while maintaining professional service and hospitality values during digital interactions. The analysis focuses on how the strategic use of politeness reflects the speakers' pragmatic choices and cultural considerations in a tourism service setting.

1. Positive Politeness Strategies in WhatsApp Cancellation Conversations

Positive politeness strategies, which attend to the addressee's desire to be appreciated and approved (Mills, 2004), manifest through culturally nuanced expressions in Central Javanese tourism WhatsApp interactions. These strategies serve to reduce social distance and affirm client needs during potentially face-threatening cancellation scenarios. Our analysis reveals four key manifestations of positive politeness, each demonstrating how staff maintain rapport while adhering to Javanese cultural norms.

The most prevalent strategy involves expressions of gratitude, where staff frame cancellations as cooperative acts rather than impositions. This approach aligns with Javanese values o*I andhap asor* (humility) and *tata krama* (etiquette),

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as seen in Data (1): HS's response *"Terima kasih sudah menginformasikan, Mbak..."* ("Thank you for informing us, Miss..."). Such acknowledgments reinforce the client's positive face by validating their communicative effort.

Closely related is the personalization through honorifics, where staff employ kinship terms *{Mbak, Pak, Bu j* and inclusive pronouns to create in-group affiliation. Data (2) exemplifies this: TS's message *"Terima kasih sudah memberitahukan lebih awal, Pak..."* ("Thank you for informing us in advance, Sir...") combines the honorific *Pak* with expressions of shared understanding *{kami paham),* effectively signaling both respect and solidarity.

Another significant strategy involves offers of future assistance, which strategically shift focus from the current cancellation to potential future engagements. Data (4) demonstrates this through TS's reassurance "*Tidak masalah, Pak, semoga bisa ikut tur kami di lain kesempatan"* ("No problem, Sir, hopefully you can join our tour another time"). This reflects Javanese principles of *ngajeni* (respect) and *tepo sliro* (empathy) while preserving long-term rapport.

Equally important are expressions of empathy and reassurance that validate clients' situations. Data (3) shows HS acknowledging unavoidable circumstances: *"Kami mengerti kalau ada hal yang tidak bisa dihindari..." "We* understand if there are unavoidable circumstances..."). Such statements demonstrate emotional alignment and help mitigate potential *isin* (shame) associated with cancellations.

These strategies collectively represent a hybridization of universal politeness frameworks (Brown & Levinson) with distinct Javanese cultural norms. The use of gratitude *{terima kasih}* and future-oriented offers *{semoga lain kali j* embodies the value of *guyub* (social harmony), while honorifics *{Mbak/Pak j* maintain the *unggah-ungguh* (hierarchical) relationships characteristic of Javanese society. This integration of *ewuh pekewuh* (reluctance to impose) with digital communication

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strategies creates a unique pragmatic approach to managing service interactions in Central Java's tourism sector.

The following excerpts illustrate how positive politeness is pragmatically employed to maintain customer trust and uphold service quality in digital communication.

Data (1) Context: Conversation between a hotel reservation staff (HS) at a 5-star **hotel in Surakarta City and a prospective** guest **(PG) via WhatsApp.**

PG: *Saya ingin membatalkan reservasi saya untuk minggu depan, bagaimana prosedurnJa?* "I would like to cancel my reservation for next week, what is the procedure?"

HS: *Terima kasih sudah menginformasikan, Mbak. Kami akan segera proses pembatalan dan mengirimkan konfirmasi melalui WhatsApp.* "Thank you for **informing** us, Miss. We will process the cancellation immediately and send the confirmation via WhatsApp."

PG: *Baik, terima kasih.* "Okay, thank you."

This exchange exemplifies how positive politeness in Javanese service contexts extends beyond Brown and Levinson's (1987) face-management model to embody local maxims like andhap asor (humility) and empan papan (contextual appropriateness). The staffs gratitude *terima kasih sudah menginformasikan* ("thank you for informing us") and use of *Mbak* signal not only shows solidarity (Brown & Levinson) but also a culturally embedded deference to hierarchy and mutual respect (tots *krama).* Such strategies align with Javanese communicative ideals where *ngajeni* (showing respect) is prioritized even in informal digital spaces (Gunarwan, 2001; Norwanto, 2025).

Additionally, the use of the honorific *Mbak* (Miss) contributes to building in-group affiliation and shows attentiveness to Javanese cultural norms of politeness and hierarchy, which value respectful address forms. This demonstrates that the speaker is not merely following a service protocol but is also invested in sustaining

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a respectful and affiliative relationship. As Mills (2003, 2004) points out, politeness should be seen not only as a strategic act but also as a relational practice embedded in socio-cultural norms. In this context, positive politeness strategies are not just tools for face management, but also signals of hospitality, empathy, and professional courtesy—key expectations in Central Java tourism discourse.

Thus, the choice of words, tone, and address terms illustrates a deliberate effort to reduce social distance, reassure the guest, and preserve rapport during what could otherwise be a face-threatening situation.

Another example of the use of positive politeness in a reservation cancellation conversation is as follows:

Data (2) Context: Conversation between a travel agent reservation staff (TS) and a prospective tourist (PT) via WhatsApp.

PT: *Saya ingin membatalkan tur yang sudah saya pesan untuk besok, apakah ada* masalah?"I would like to cancel the tour I booked for tomorrow, is there any issue?"

TS: *Terima kasih sudah memberitahukan lebih awal, Pak. Kami paham, semoga bisa bertemu di lain waktu untuk ter* Marriage."Thank you for informing us in advance, Sir. We understand, and we hope to meet again for another tour in the future."

PT: *Terima kasih atas pengertiannya.* "Thank you for your understanding."

This conversation illustrates the use of positive politeness by the travel agent reservation staff, particularly in expressing appreciation for the tourist's early notification. The phrase *terima kasih sudah memberitahukan lebih awal* (thank you for informing us in advance) demonstrates an effort to reinforce the positive relationship, thus minimizing the threat posed by the cancellation. By focusing on

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future possibilities, the travel agent reservation staff aims to maintain goodwill (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The following example illustrates how indirect but cooperative communication is used to maintain politeness and efficiency in Indonesian tourism service interactions.

Data (3) Context: Conversation between a hotel reservation staff (HS) and a prospective guest (PG) via WhatsApp.

PG: *Saya ingin membatalkan reservasi saya untuk akhir pekan ini.* "I want to cancel my reservation for this weekend."

HS: *Kami akan segera mengurus pembatalannya, Pak, dan mengirimkan konfirmasi ke nomor WhatsApp Anda.* "We will handle the cancellation immediately, Sir, and send the confirmation to your WhatsApp number."

PG: *Terima kasih banyak.* "Thank you very much."

In this exchange, the hotel reservation staff uses a task-oriented yet courteous response strategy that reflects attentiveness and efficiency without explicit emotional appeals. Rather than employing an indirect or off-record strategy that implies meaning without directly stating it, the staff member responds in a clear, supportive, and deferential manner that aligns with respectful service norms in high-context cultures like Central Java. By stating *kami akan segera mengurus pembatalannya* (“we will handle the cancellation immediately"), the staff conveys promptness and respect for the guest's request, helping to preserve the guest's positive face. While the language is clear and direct, it is also considerate and

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framed with honorifics *{Pak},* which reinforces a context-sensitive politeness approach grounded in professionalism and relational harmony.

One more example of positive politeness in a reservation cancellation conversation is as follows:

Data (4) Context: Conversation between a travel agent reservation staff (TS) and a prospective tourist (PT) via WhatsApp.

PT: *Saya ingin membatalkan tur saya karena ada keperluan mendadak. "I* want to cancel my tour due to an urgent matter."

TS: *Tidak masalah, Pak, semoga bisa ikut tur kami di lain kesempatan.* "No problem, Sir, hopefully, you can join our tour on another occasion."

In this example, the travel agent reservation staff uses positive politeness by reassuring the tourist that the cancellation is not an issue and expressing hope for future participation. The phrase *semoga bisa ikut* fur *kami di lain kesempatan* (hopefully, you can join our tour on another occasion) emphasizes that the relationship is ongoing and that the tourist is welcome at any time. This expression demonstrates the staffis effort to preserve face and maintain positive interactions, aligning with Brown and Levinson's theory.

2. Negative Politeness Strategies in WhatsApp Cancellation Conversations

Negative politeness strategies, which aim to preserve the addressee's autonomy and minimize imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987), are strategically employed by Central Javanese tourism staff in WhatsApp cancellation dialogues. These approaches blend universal politeness principles with local Javanese cultural values such as *ewuh pekewuh* (reluctance to impose) and *tepo sliro* (mutual consideration). Our analysis reveals four key negative politeness strategies that staff use to navigate these potentially face-threatening interactions while maintaining professionalism and social harmony.

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One prominent strategy is the use of apologetic expressions, where staff explicitly acknowledge any inconvenience caused by cancellations. For example, in Data (5), the hotel staff responds: *"Mohon maaf, Mbak, kami perlu menunggu konfirmasi dari pihak yang telah memesan sebelumnya..." {"\Ve* apologize, Miss, we need to wait for confirmation from the party who booked previously..."). Here, the phrase *"Mohon maaf"* (We apologize) functions as a conventional politeness marker that recognizes the imposition while upholding professional decorum.

Another common approach is hedging and indirect language, where service providers soften transactional messages through qualifiers and tentative phrasing. In Data (6), a travel agent staff member states: *"Maafsaya tidak bisa menjamin, Pak. Itu urusan maskapai..."* ("I'm sorry I cannot guarantee, Sir. That's the airline's matter..."). The hedge *"tidak bisa menjamin"* (cannot guarantee) reduces the force of the refusal, while attributing responsibility to a third party (the airline) further minimizes the face threat to the client.

Staff also employ deferential address forms, consistently using honorifics *{Pak/Bu/Mbak)* alongside formal pronouns *{kami, Anda)* to maintain respectful distance. Data (7) illustrates this: *"Kami memahami keputusan Bapak/Ibu..."* ("We understand your decision, Sir/Madam..."). The formal address *"Bapak/Ibu"* and institutional pronoun *"kami"* create professional distance while still showing respect for the client's autonomy.

Additionally, justification and explanation are frequently used to provide rationales for procedural requirements, framing them as necessary rather than discretionary. In Data (8), a staff member explains: *"Kebij"akan pembatalan kami mengharuskan pemberitahuan 24 jam sebelumnya..."* ("Our cancellation policy requires 24-hour advance notice..."). By referencing institutional policies *"kebijakan pembatalan'),* the staff depersonalizes the imposition while demonstrating procedural fairness.

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These strategies collectively embody the Javanese cultural principle of *ajo dumeh* (avoiding presumption), where indirectness helps preserve *rukun* (social harmony). The preference for apologetic forms over direct refusals reflects Central Java's high-context communication style, where maintaining harmonious relationships often takes precedence over transactional efficiency. Notably, while formal Javanese honorifics *{krama inggil)* are absent in these digital exchanges, the retention of core respectful address forms shows an adaptation of traditional politeness norms to WhatsApp's informal medium.

From a professional standpoint, this strategic indirectness serves dual purposes: it maintains positive client relationships while upholding service standards. The frequent layering of multiple strategies—such as combining apologies with honorifics and justifications (as seen in Data 5)—demonstrates how staff skillfully navigate delicate cancellation scenarios. This nuanced approach highlights how digital service communication in Central Java's tourism sector balances universal politeness principles with deeply rooted cultural values.

The following examples show how negative politeness is used to manage delicate situations with attention to face orientation and deference to social norms, particularly within the Indonesian context, which values indirectness and respect in communication.

Data (5) Context: Conversation between a hotel reservation staff (HS) and a prospective guest (PG) via WhatsApp.

PG: *Saya ingin membatalkan pemesanan kamar saya, apakah bisa?* "I want to cancel my room booking, is that possible?"

HS: *Mohon maaf, Mbak, kami perlu menunggu konfirmasi dari pihak yang telah memesan sebelumnya, karena beliau adalah pelanggan tetap kami. "*I'm sorry, Miss,

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we need to wait for confirmation from the person who has booked it previously, as they are a regular customer."

PG: *Baik, terima kasih atas penjelasannya.* "Alright, thank you for the explanation."

The apology *mohon* maafand justification reflect negative politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987) but are also rooted in the Javanese principle of ojo *dumeh* (avoiding presumption) and *ngalah* (yielding to others). By deferring to the client's autonomy while acknowledging a 'regular customer's prior claim, the staff navigates *tata krama* (etiquette) norms that require balancing *isin* (shame avoidance) and *rukun* (social harmony). This dual pragmatic-cultural function underscores how digital politeness in Central Java hybridizes universal FTA mitigation with local relational ethics (Jauhari et a1., 2020).

Another example of negative politeness in cancellation conversation is as follows:

Data (6) Context: Conversation between a travel agent reservation staff (TS) and a prospective tourist (PT) via WhatsApp.

PT: *Saya terpaksa membatalkan tur yang sudah saya pesan, mohon maaf.* "I'm forced to cancel the tour I booked; I apologize."

TS: *Tidak masalah, Pak. Terima kasih sudah memberi kabar. Semoga bisa ikut tur lain di waktu mendatang.* "No problem, Sir. Thank you for letting us know. Hopefully, you can join another tour in the future."

PT: *Terima kasih atas pengertiannya.* "Thank you for your understanding."

This is another example of negative politeness, where the travel agent reservation staff minimizes the face threat by saying *tidak masalah* (no problem) and *semoga bisa ikut tur lain di waktu mendatang* (hopefully, you can join another tour in the future). By doing so, the guide shows understanding and reduces the embarrassment or discomfort the tourist might feel due to the cancellation. This

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strategy focuses on maintaining respect and avoiding imposing upon the tourist's decisions (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

3. Bald-on Record Strategies in WhatsApp Cancellation Conversations

Bald on-record strategies are used when clarity and efficiency are prioritized, typically in situations where the message must be delivered directly and without ambiguity. In WhatsApp interactions involving reservation cancellations, this strategy often appears in straightforward acknowledgements or confirmations. Although less mitigated than other strategies, bald on-record expressions can still be perceived as polite when delivered in a context of shared understanding and professional familiarity.

The following excerpt illustrates the use of this strategy in practical service communication:

Data (7) Context: Conversation between a hotel reservation staff (HS) and a prospective guest (PG) via WhatsApp.

PG: *Saya ingin membatalkan pemesanan saya untuk tanggal 15 Juni.*
"I want to cancel my reservation for June 15."
HS: *Baik, pemesanan Anda untuk tanggal 15 Juni sudah kami batalkan.*
"Okay, your reservation for June 15 has been cancelled."

While bald-on-record strategies prioritize efficiency (Brown & Levinson, 1987), their acceptability here is mediated by Javanese norms of *tegas nanging ajeg* (firm but consistent) professionalism. The staffs directness avoids *kekeran* (excessive indirectness), which could imply distrust, while still adhering to *sabar* (patience) through prompt compliance. This illustrates how 'bald' responses in Javanese service contexts are not face-neutral but are culturally licensed by expectations of clarity in transactional duties *{kewajiban).*

In this context, the directness does not come across as impolite, as the communication occurs within a professional setting where such clarity is often

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appreciated. The absence of politeness markers like apologies or empathy suggests that the message's primary function is transactional rather than relational. Nonetheless, because of the formal and service-oriented context, the concise response still aligns with professional decorum, achieving its goal without risking face loss.

Another example of bald on-record politeness in cancellation conversation is as follows:

Data (8) Context: Conversation between a travel agent reservation staff (TS) and a prospective tourist (PT) via WhatsApp.

PT: *Saya harus membatalkan tur saya karena ada keperluan mendadak, mohon maaf.*
"I have to cancel my tour due to an urgent matter, I apologize."

TS: *Tidak apa-apa, Pak, semoga lain kali bisa ikut tur kami.* "It's okay, Sir, hopefully, you can join our tour next time."

The travel agent reservation staff in this example used a bald-on-record strategy by providing a simple response that directly acknowledges the cancellation. The phrase *tidak apa-apa* (it's okay) is a direct and clear response to the cancellation, which avoids unnecessary politeness but still conveys understanding. This strategy fits the bald-on-record category, as it is blunt and does not attempt to mask the face threat involved.

To illustrate these findings more concretely, Table 1 summarizes the distribution and examples of politeness strategies employed by hotel reservation staff and travel agent reservation staff in responding to cancellation-related messages through WhatsApp. The table categorizes provider responses according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategy typology and includes selected examples, each comprising the original Indonesian excerpt and its English translation. These examples are drawn from a total of 72 provider responses

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specifically related to cancellation scenarios and serve to contextualize the pragmatic realization of politeness in digital tourism discourse.

Table 1. Summary of Politeness Strategies in WhatsApp Cancellation Conversations (n = 72 provider responses)

No.	Politeness Strategies	Examples of Conversation	Frequency (out of 72)
1	**Positive Politeness**	*Terima kasih sudah menginformasikan, Mbak.* "Thank you for informing us, Miss." *Terima kasih sudah memberitahukan lebih awal, Pak.* "Thank you for informing us in advance, Sir." *Kami mengerti kalau ada hal yang tidak bisa dihindari, semoga bisa bertemu lagi dalam kesempatan yang lain.* "We understand if there are unavoidable circumstances, we hope to meet again on another occasion." *Mungkin lain kali kami bisa menawarkan tur yang lebih sesuai dengan jadwal Anda.* "Perhaps next time we can offer a tour that better suits your schedule."	31 (43%)
2	**Negative Politeness**	*Mohon maaf, kami harus menunggu konfirmasi dari pihak yang telah memesan sebelumnya, karena beliau adalah pelanggan tetap kami.* "I'm sorry, we need to wait for confirmation from the person who has booked it previously, as they are a regular	30 (42%)

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No.	Politeness Strategies	Examples of Conversation	Frequency (out of 72)
		customer.” *Maaf saya tidak bisa menjamin, Pak. Itu urusan maskapai, kami hanya menjualkan tiketnya.* “I'm sorry I cannot guarantee it, Sir. It's the airline's business; we only sell the ticket.”	
3	Bald on-record	*Baik, pemesanan Anda untuk tanggal 15 Juni sudah kami batalkan.* “Okay, your reservation for June 15 has been cancelled.” *Tidak masalah, Pak, semoga bisa ikut tur kami di lain kesempatan.* “No problem, Sir, hopefully you can join our tour on another occasion.”	11 (15%)

The findings presented in Table 1 reveal how politeness strategies are pragmatically realized in digital communication between Central Javanese hotel reservation staff and travel agent reservation staff and their prospective clients during reservation cancellations. These findings contribute to our understanding of how face-threatening acts (FTAs) are managed in WhatsApp-based service interactions within Central Java's tourism sector.

The study reveals a balanced use of positive (43%) and negative politeness strategies (42%), with bald-on-record strategies being significantly less frequent (15%) (see Table 1). This distribution reflects Central Javanese cultural norms, where social harmony *@uyub j* and reluctance to impose *{ewuh pekewuh j* prioritize relational maintenance over transactional efficiency. The near-equal prevalence of positive and negative politeness underscores their complementary roles: positive

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strategies (e.g., gratitude, personalization) foster solidarity, while negative strategies (e.g., hedging, deference) mitigate face threats—both aligning with the Javanese principles of *tepo sliro* (empathy) and *andhap asor* (humility). The rarity of bald-on-record responses, though pragmatically licensed for clarity in transactional duties *{ngajeni j,* highlights a cultural aversion to perceived abruptness *{kasar j,* as indirectness preserves mutual respect *{tata krama).* This challenges universal politeness frameworks (Brown & Levinson, 1987) by demonstrating how high-context cultures like Java embed facework within broader relational ethics (Mills, 2004; Norwanto, 2025).

Importantly, the findings reinforce the socio-pragmatic observation that Central Javanese culture favours indirectness and deference, especially in professional and service-oriented interactions. This is evident in the frequent use of honorifics such as *Pak* (a respectful term for men) and *Mbak* (a respectful term for women), which serve not only as markers of politeness but also as subtle mitigation strategies that acknowledge social hierarchy and convey respect. For instance, in Data [6], the use of *Pad* precedes apologies, thereby softening the illocutionary force of the message and reducing potential face threats. Such usage reflects a high-context communication style in which maintaining harmonious social relations is paramount (Holmes, 2013; Yule, 1996). Moreover, the inclusion of emojis and informal tones in some WhatsApp responses illustrates the hybrid nature of mediated communication, where expressions of professionalism coexist with elements of personal warmth. As Rahmawati (2021) observed, digital discourse often blends formal service language with informal pragmatic cues to ensure accessibility, relatability, and user-friendly interaction.

However, the growing use of casual greetings and friendly markers in WhatsApp messages reflects an emerging trend often described as a shift in digital professionalism—a move toward more relational and personalized communication styles even within service contexts (Farnan et al., 2013). In this study, such elements

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are evident in expressions like *"Selamat pagi, Mbak", "Siap, Pak. Terima kasih sebelumnya",* and *"Baik, Kak. Kami tunggu kehadirannya ya",* where informal salutations and courteous phrases contribute to a tone of friendliness and approachability. These markers help reduce social distance and humanize interactions, fostering a more empathetic service environment. However, they may also raise concerns about appropriateness and credibility, particularly among clients who expect a more formal register in professional communication. These evolving dynamic underscores the need for service providers to carefully calibrate their tone based on the client's expectations and situational context, striking a balance between relational warmth and professional decorum to preserve institutional trust and ensure respectful service delivery.

While this study confirms and builds upon previous research on digital politeness in Indonesian communication—such as Shalihah and Winarsih (2023) on lecturers' use of empathy and understanding in student interactions, and Farida and Yuliana (2019), who highlighted the strategic use of gratitude and apologies in WhatsApp messages—it also offers new insights within the domain of tourism discourse. Specifically, it shows that politeness in digital tourism interactions is not merely about linguistic choices, but also about performing and projecting service values. Hotel and travel agent reservation staff use politeness not only to manage face-threatening acts, but to reinforce a hospitable brand identity—even during cancellations. This reflects a pragmatic sensitivity that transcends functional communication, embodying both cultural norms and service ethics.

Nonetheless, the current study's analytical scope is limited by its focus on messages from service providers alone. By excluding guest or tourist responses from the core analysis, the study does not fully capture the reciprocal nature of politeness strategies and facework negotiations. Since politeness is co-constructed between interlocutors, future studies should examine interactional dynamics in both directions to better understand how clients respond to, interpret, and

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potentially mirror politeness strategies. Including both sides of the exchange would allow a more comprehensive view of relational alignment, misunderstandings, or shifts in tone over time, thus enriching the socio-pragmatic interpretation of digital tourism discourse.

In light of these insights, it is evident that politeness in digital service communication is an adaptive and strategic tool. Service providers not only accommodate client expectations but also reflect deeper cultural and institutional values. This suggests a convergence between linguistic pragmatics and service ethics in digital tourism discourse in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the politeness strategies employed by hotel reservation staff and travel agent reservation staff in Surakarta City, Central Java, Indonesia, when responding to reservation cancellations conveyed via WhatsApp. By analysing authentic digital interactions between service providers and prospective guests or tourists, this research identified a range of politeness strategies and explored how these strategies are shaped by cultural and contextual factors in Central Javanese service discourse.

Drawing upon Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, the findings reveal that service providers strategically employed positive politeness, negative politeness, and bald on-record strategies to manage the face-threatening nature of cancellations. Positive politeness was used to foster rapport and express empathy—such as through gratitude, concern, or inclusive language—while negative politeness emphasized deference and minimized imposition through indirect language and apologies. Although less frequent, bald on-record strategies were employed for clarity and efficiency, particularly in situations requiring direct acknowledgment or confirmation. These strategic choices demonstrate not only linguistic competence but also a heightened sensitivity to relational harmony and customer satisfaction in Indonesian service interactions.

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However, while Brown and Levinson's framework provides a useful starting point for categorizing politeness strategies, its emphasis on individual face needs may not fully capture the relational and cultural dynamics of Indonesian digital service interactions. The prominence of indirect refusals, honorifics (e.g., *Bapak, Ibn, Mas, Mbak),* deferential tone, and relational markers such as softening particles highlights a deeper communicative orientation rooted in respect, social hierarchy, and communal values. These cultural practices suggest that politeness in Indonesian tourism discourse goes beyond strategic mitigation—it reflects a relational ethos in which maintaining harmony and preserving interpersonal connections often take precedence over clarity or efficiency.

The findings contribute to the field of socio-pragmatics by providing empirical insight into how politeness is enacted in real-world, digital hospitality exchanges in a culturally rich setting. They also hold practical implications for communication training in the tourism industry, particularly in the development of customer service guidelines and English-for-Tourism materials that are culturally sensitive and pragmatically effective.

Future studies could expand this research by examining responses from tourists themselves, comparing service discourse across different regions or cultures, or analysing similar interactions on other digital platforms such as email, chatbots, or booking apps. Investigating how politeness strategies vary according to institutional hierarchy (e.g., junior vs. senior staff) may also offer further insights into how status and power shape digital communication in the tourism sector.

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