# The impact of politeness on conversational outcomes in mobile dating apps

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## Abstract

*Mobile dating applications like Bumble and Tinder have grown in popularity, increasingly attracting scholarly attention. Our study focuses on the impact of politeness strategies and imposition on conversational outcomes on mobile dating apps. Using a 2 by 2 factorial design we examine the impact of degree of directness and imposition impact on perceptions of potential romantic partners and attitudes toward intensifying a relationship. We found that indirectness (a higher-order politeness strategy) and requests for face-to-face dates (high imposition) were positively associated with 1) attitudes toward intensifying a relationship, and 2) the perceived likeability of an interactional partner. Indirect politeness strategies more often resulted in request compliance and rejection strategies varied based on degrees of directness and the nature of the requests. Further exploration of how individuals evaluate imposition as it relates to requests for transitioning conversations from a mobile dating platform to face-to-face, is needed.*

**Keywords:** online dating, mobile apps, mobile dating, politeness theory.

## 1. Introduction

It became clear after a decade since Tinder was launched that there are drawbacks and benefits to online mobile dating apps involve; one of the major drawbacks is "rudeness" (Fetters, 2018). Advancements in technology are fueling changes to the way we find and evaluate potential romantic partners. Romantic relationship development have been a long-standing interest to scholars (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Bevan, 2003), and research examining the impact of mobile dating applications on the way we find romantic partners is ever-increasing (Gibbs *et al.*, 2011; Mortensen, 2017; Zytko, Grandhi, & Jones, 2016;). Although this work has illuminated the ways that dating platforms provide unique opportunities for self-presentation (Ward, 2016; Ward, 2017) and influence the way potential partners are matched, less is known about how mobile dating matches successfully turn into romantic possibilities.

Examinations of online dating profiles have been primarily concerned with self-presentation, romantic identity construction (Ward, 2017), and deception (Ellison *et al.*, 2012). Scholars have demonstrated that during the profile-building stage users are focused on developing an "ideal authentic self" where individuals construct dating identities that highlight their best traits while downplaying other less desirable traits (Ward, 2016). Control over self-presentation has been a motivating factor for using online platforms because it provides individuals who may be anxious about dating to highlight attractive features of their physical appearance or personality (Lawson & Leck, 2006). Since mobile dating affords users an opportunity to review and evaluate personality traits of potential partners before ever engaging in conversation, self-presentation plays an important role in influencing how mobile dating app users are matched. Studies examining the factors that influence matching have found that gender, age, attractiveness, and personality traits, which are on display on dating profiles, were predictors of the rate at which people initiated or received messages from other users (Fiore *et al.*, 2008; Fiore *et al.*, 2010).

The least studied stage of online and mobile dating is the discovery stage, which is the period after being matched and before relationship initiation (Markowitz *et al.*, 2018). It is during this stage that potential partners first engage in conversations. In this stage users seek to find more information about their matches through active (e.g., Google search), passive (e.g., profile re-examination), and interactive (e.g., engaging in conversation) means (Gibbs *et al.*, 2011). Individuals use tools like Google or social media to find information about potential partners and determine whether the information provided in conversation aligns with aspects of their profile and online presence (Gibbs *et al.*, 2011). Still, these studies do not provide a clear picture of how mobile

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conversation and interaction convey compatibility and engender intimacy.

Nevertheless, research has demonstrated that the linguistic choices individuals make in conversations do have an impact on relationship development and can be strong indicators of relationship initiation and longevity (Ireland *et al.,* 2011), at least in face-to-face dating settings. Moreover, expert interviews with dating coaches demonstrated that platform profiles and messaging did not provide adequate means for potential romantic partners to evaluate the personality and compatibility (Zytko *et al.*, 2016). For this reason, dating experts recommended developing canned opening sequences for initial contact aimed at maximizing the efficacy of messages in securing face-to-face dates (Zytko *et al.*, 2016). We are left with an incomplete understanding of how the subtleties of an individual's linguistic choices impact conversational outcomes and how these choices relate to the way relationship development is negotiated in mobile dating app settings. Our study is addressing this gap, answering the question:

> *What impact do linguistic politeness strategies have on the outcomes of mobile dating conversations?*

## 2. Background

The present study examines the imposition of a request to intensify a relationship poses, the directness of the politeness strategy employed, and how these factors impact conversational outcomes in online dating. Politeness strategies are instrumental for helping us understand the discovery stage of mobile dating and how relationships develop on mobile dating environments since the conversational moves and choices that potential romantic partners heavily influence relationship initiation and longevity (Ireland *et al.*, 2011). Thus, the following section discusses linguistic politeness theory, as well as prior scholarly work on politeness strategies and imposition in romantic interactions.

### 2.1 Politeness theory

Linguistic politeness theory posits that individuals perform politeness strategies in an attempt to balance the tension between desire to be liked by others and the need to be autonomous (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Moreover, there a number of factors that influence the kind of politeness strategy an interlocuter chooses including the degree of intimacy between two individuals, power dynamics in the relationship, and the degree of imposition a face-threat poses. There a multitude of different combinations of politeness strategies that can be employed. The primary focus of our examination is the degree of directness an individual uses.

### 2.2 Imposition

Historically, imposition has been discussed in terms of the amount of effort that a requester is placing on an individual. For instance, researchers have operationalized imposition in terms of monetary value (e.g., a nickel as low imposition and a hundred dollars as high imposition) (Vergis & Pell, 2020) or asking friends to restrain the cell phone usage during interactions (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2017). However, dating is rife with face threatening acts that are necessary to build and intensify a relationship. For instance, Stokoe's (2010) investigation of strategies to mitigate the face-threat of asking for a potential partner's romantic history. While such a question can impose on a partner's desire to remain invulnerable, it is necessary for deepening the intimacy of two partners. Thus, what is more or less face threatening as a result for the assumed shared desire for romantic intimacy is unclear.

More generally, there, there are different kinds of politeness strategies that could be used to ask someone intensify a relationship. Table 1 shows three different examples of indirectness that could be used for an individual to make a request for a face-to-face date. The first example shows a direct imperative with no redressive action. The second shows a more indirect approach in which hedging is used to soften the request. Finally, the most indirect request, is shown in the third request in which the request is never explicitly stated (i.e., off-record), but is only hinted at. These strategies are a reflection of how a speaker perceives the gravity of the face-threat and their relationship to the individual to whom they are speaking. Despite the way that desire for romantic intimacy muddies what may be more or less imposing, for this examination we operationalize imposition as the amount of physical effort a request to intensify a relationship may impose.

| Politeness Strategies (Ranked from most direct to indirect) | Example |
|---|---|
| Bald, on-record Request prefaced by an unsolicited favor | *"Go on a date with me."* *"I will buy the first round tonight and then when you go out with me you can buy the drinks."* |
| Hedging | *"Would you like to go on a date with me sometime?"* |
| Giving hints of date activities (Off-record) | *"There's a new restaurant that just opened. I really want to check it out."* |

**Table 1. Examples of Politeness strategies that could be used to request a date**

## 2.3 Romantic interactions & indirectness

Scholars have demonstrated that indirect politeness strategies play a role in facilitating flirtatious interactions and soften potentially face-threatening requests for biographical information or as a means to playfully suggest future, imagined dates (Mortensen, 2017; Stokoe, 2010). In the interactions observed, indirectness was used as a mechanism for reframing a date request as a hypothetical situation (e.g., "we should check out that restaurant sometime?"). In doing so, requesters simultaneously steeled themselves against rejection and attempted to reduce the possible threat to the hearer's autonomy.

Research examining dating requests have demonstrated that higher levels of relationship uncertainty (e.g., individuals are barely acquainted vs. individuals know each other) and explicitness or directness of messages had negative associations with hearer's perceptions of connection or affliativeness (Knobloch & DiDomenico, 2006). As relationship uncertainty and directness of a message increased the hearer's sense of alignment with the speaker decreased. These examinations demonstrate that indirect strategies are commonly used as mechanisms for suggesting intensification of a relationship (e.g., dating or being in a romantic relationship) in dating conversations and that directness of an utterance is indirectly related to conversational outcomes, such as perceived connection. We hypothesize that a similar negative relationship would likely be observed between the directness of a politeness strategy and a hearer's perception of an interlocutor's likeability, an indicator of interpersonal attraction (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). We also hypothesize that a similar negative relationship between the directness of a politeness strategy and a hearer's attitude toward intensifying a relationship.

## 2.4 Imposition & intensifying a relationship

While Knobloch and DiDomenico's (2006) examination explored the relationship between intimacy, politeness strategy, and conversational outcomes, we are interested in exploring the relationship between a request's imposition, politeness strategy, and conversational outcomes. Prior investigations of politeness strategies and requests for intensifying a relationship have not investigated different gradations of imposition for requests to intensify a relationship and how it impacts the conversational outcomes of an interaction. Research interested in imposition in romantic relationships have focused on date requests (Hendrickson & Goei, 2009; Tom Tong and Walther, 2009).

Investigations examining the channel in which refusals and requests are made have found that the channel that one chooses to intensify a relationship whether it be another mediated channel or meeting face-to-face poses a certain degree of imposition (Tom & Walther, 2009). Researchers have also found that online daters' expressed a preference for interaction on mediated channels increased when self-presentation was threatened (O'Sullivan et al., 2000). Moreover, other examinations of communication channel ecologies and romantic relationships demonstrate that at times channels that foster ambiguity (e.g., low richness channels) were preferred to media rich channels for accomplishing particular relationship tasks (Jung & Lyytinen, 2014; Scissors & Gergle, 2013). As such, individuals may find moving a conversation to another mediated channel less imposing than a face-to-face date, since mobile daters cannot exert as much control over their self-presentation in a face-to-face setting. We hypothesize that a request to intensify the relationship by switching the conversation to a different mediated channel will have a stronger positive impact on conversational outcomes, such as likeability and attitude toward intensifying a relationship, while a request to switch to a face-to-face interaction, will be perceived as a higher imposition, and result in lower likeability and negative attitude toward intensifying a relationship. a relationship with a potential partner.

Knobloch and DiDomenico (2006) also suggest that there is a linear relationship between intimacy and politeness strategy and demonstrated that this relationship has an impact on conversational outcomes. In addition to the level of intimacy, Brown and Levinson (1987) also stipulated that the level of imposition influences the politeness strategies used by interlocutors, where the higher the imposition of a request the more likely an interlocutor was to select a higher-order politeness strategy, such as being more indirect. However, it is unclear how the combination of degrees of indirectness and imposition affect conversational outcomes. It is possible that one mitigates or exacerbates the other

Furthermore, Tom and Walther (2009) found that the type of communication channel selected for dating requests influenced the care individuals put into refusals, where Match.com refusals were more likely to come in the form of a short, "No thank you" or no response at all. They also argued that the increased likelihood of seeing acquaintances for whom an individual already had their contact information (e.g., email address) in the future impacted the complexity of the strategy employed. While their study compared face-to-face and mobile interactions, we were interested in responses in which all conversations are assumed to occur between individuals meeting for the first time over a dating app, and thus the degree of

intimacy or level acquaintanceship was held constant. We are specifically interested in identifying the range of individual's responses to requests with different degrees of imposition and directness. Particularly we aimed at identifying variations in request compliance and refusal strategies employed as a result of the level of directness and imposition a request posed.

## 3. Method
### 3.1. Data Collection
Participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk and screened to determine whether they met the following criteria: were at least 18 years of age and had experience with mobile dating applications (Table 2). Participants were given an incentive of $3.00 to participate in a study that took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Although 506 individuals expressed interest, 487 were eligible for participation, and only 482 completed their tasks. Of participants that had complete responses, 43 individuals failed attention check and screener measures and their responses were excluded from the analysis. After exclusions, 439 participant responses remained for analysis. Participants were asked to provide general demographic information including their age, gender, and education. Due to the sensitive nature of the sexuality, participants were not asked about their sexual orientation (e.g., heterosexual, asexual, homosexual, etc…) or current relationship status (e.g., single, married, polyamorous relationship).

| Category | | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| **Age** | 18-24 | 10% |
| | 25-30 | 50% |
| | 30-39 | 30% |
| | 40 or older | 9% |
| **Gender** | Female | 34% |
| | Male | 66% |
| | Other | 0.5% |
| | Did not respond | 0.2% |
| **Education** | Some high school | 0.2% |
| | High school diploma | 7% |
| | Some college | 23% |
| | Bachelor's degree | 57% |
| | Advanced degree | 13% |

**Table 2. Sample Demographics**

### 3.2. Research Design
A 2 by 2 factorial design was used to examine the impact of politeness strategies, impositions, and their combined effect on likeability and attitudes toward progressing a relationship. To do this, participants were asked to read the text of two hypothetical dating conversations and to respond to the last message of each interaction as if they were engaging in a dating conversation. Afterward, participants were asked to give a response to an open-ended question prompting them to provide the rationale behind their response. Participants were also asked to rate their perceptions of the message sender's likability and attitudes toward progressing a relationship with the message sender.

Eight different conversation stimuli used in the study, organized based on content, politeness strategy, and imposition level. Each dating conversation presented either an indirect politeness strategy or a more direct politeness strategy. Individuals in the indirect politeness condition experienced a positive politeness strategy in the form of a compliment and an indirect request ("Your profile looked interesting and I wanted to get to know you") in the opening statement. Participants in this condition were also exposed to a hedged request at the end of the conversation ("Wanna hangout?"). Meanwhile, in the direct politeness condition, participants were exposed to a greeting in the form of a command ("Two truths and a lie: ready set go!"). Individuals in the direct politeness condition were also exposed to a direct request at the end of the conversation, where another command was used ("Hang out with me"). The conversational openers discussed in these conditions were selected based on common mobile dating advice and their recurrence on sites that post examples of mobile dating conversations, such as the Instagram feeds of @tindercovos and @bumbleoverheard. Each conversation also presented different levels of imposition for intensifying a relationship. For the high imposition condition, the final request of the conversation was a request for a face-to-face meeting. The low imposition conversation presented a final request to move the conversation to another mediated channel. Snapchat was chosen as the mediated channel based on prior work that discussed Snapchat as a form of media associated with mobile dating interactions (Zhao *et al.*, 2016). Since participants were exposed to two conversations, two different types of content were presented as a counterbalance method (see stimuli: https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1ANtKf8BNhcY_Ck_3OfnB4ASAnBVorFi-).

| | Content A | Content B | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Condition 1:** **Direct Politeness** **High Imposition** | n = 108 | n = 111 | n = 219 |
| **Condition 2:** **Direct Politeness** **Low Imposition** | n = 111 | n = 109 | n = 220 |
| **Condition 3:** **Indirect politeness** **High Imposition** | n = 109 | n = 111 | n = 220 |
| **Condition 4:** **Indirect Politeness** **Low Imposition** | n = 111 | n = 108 | n = 219 |

**Table 3. Total number of participants in each condition**

Each participant was randomly assigned to each condition and experienced two of eight possible conversation scenarios. Each participant experienced both types of content (e.g., Content A or Content B), politeness strategies (e.g., indirect or direct), and imposition levels (e.g., high or low), and the order in which the stimuli were presented was randomized. A total of 878 observations from 439 participants were included in the analysis. Table 3 enumerates the number of participants in each condition.

### 3.3. Measurements

The five-item likeability scale was adapted from social interpersonal attraction scales used by McCroskey and McCain (1974). Table 4 shows Cronbach's alpha and mean for the scales of these two measurements as well as, the mean and item. Participants completed two five-item scales that measured likeability (alpha = 0.70) and attitudes toward progressing a relationship (alpha = 0.89). The response scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Likeability items 3 and 4 were reverse coded from 5 (strongly disagree) to 1 (strongly agree).

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Responses to measures of likeability and attitudes toward intensifying a relationship were analyzed using multi-level mixed effect models. A multi-level mixed effect model was chosen due to the nested nature of the data. The data were visually inspected and a quadratic transformation was performed to ensure that the data conformed to the models used. Likeability and attitudes toward intensifying a relationship were dependent variables in separate models. Each model included politeness strategy, imposition, and their interaction as independent variables and estimated random intercepts by participant. Gender was also accounted for. However, differences in gender did not have a noticeable effect on the outcomes, with the exception of individuals who declined to indicate gender. For this reason, gender is not discussed in the results section. The models were estimated using the *lme4* package in R (Bates *et al.*, 2015). Degrees of freedom were estimated using the Kenward-Roger approximation (Kenward & Roger, 1997).

| | Alpha | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Likeability** | 0.70 | 3.4 | 0.74 |
| This person is someone that could become a friend of mine. | | 3.6 | 0.97 |
| This person is someone I would like to have a friendly chat with. | | 3.7 | 1.05 |
| This person just would not fit into my circle of friends | | 2.9 | 1.22 |
| I could never establish a personal friendship with this person. | | 3.0 | 1.27 |
| This person would be pleasant to be with | | 3.6 | 0.96 |
| **Attitudes toward intensifying a relationship** | 0.89 | 3.4 | 1.0 |
| I would be interested in continuing this conversation on the same mobile dating app | | 3.7 | 1.0 |
| I would be interested in meeting this person face-to-face | | 3.4 | 1.2 |
| I would be in adding this person my personal phone number | | 3.1 | 1.3 |
| I would be interested in adding this person to another messaging app like WhatsApp | | 3.4 | 1.2 |
| I would be interested in adding this person to my social media friends (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat) | | 3.3 | 1.3 |

**Table 4. Cronbach's alpha, mean and standard deviation for likeability and attitudes toward intensifying a relationship measure**

Then, open-ended responses to the conversations were categorized, using a codebook that was initially developed and modified based on prior descriptions of negative politeness and rejection strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Tom Tong & Walther, 2009). The codebook was refined in an iterative process where randomly sampled responses were independently rated by two individuals. This was followed by a discussion among the two coders of combining, refining, removing, and defining new codes to better fit the range of responses. The final codebook included seven categories, two of which were new additions (ghosting and incomprehensible responses) (Table 5). Then, the open-ended responses were coded, and interrater reliability was calculated and found to be high at Krippendorf's alpha = 0.89 (Krippendorf, 2004).

| Category and description | Example |
|---|---|
| *Comply:* **A response that indicates that the interlocutor has accepted the request. This includes both explicit responses that use words/phrases like, "yes", and "for sure" and implicit responses that ask about the details of the request, such as "where would you like to meet" or "When?". However, if an individual expresses hesitance by using hedges such as phrases like "it depends" or "I would love to, but when do you want to meet", those are categorized as vague/non-committal (See below)** | "good" "sends link for snap chat" "Yes" |
| *Ghosting:* **A response that demonstrates that the interlocutor does not intend to respond to the request.** | [blank] "I would not respond." |

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Bald, on-record rejection:*** **A response that explicitly rejects the request without any reason or any attempts to preserve the hearer's positive face and can include insults used as a means of providing a reason for the rejection. This excludes any rejection that attempts to placate the hearer by apologizing or performing a polite decline (i.e., "no thanks) (See Vague/non-committal)** | "No"<br>"Nah I am good I will only date fun people not walking liberal trashbags." |
| ***Softened Rejection:*** **A response that rejects the request, but tries to placate the hearer's positive face by using any of the following strategies.** | **Providing a justification**<br>"I don't really give out my Snapchat."<br>**Expressing regret**<br>"Sorry, I don't have one."<br>**Expressing appreciation**<br>"Well, thanks for the offer, but nah" |
| ***Provides an alternative***: **A response that rejects the request posed but offers up an explicit (e.g., a different activity or media channel) or an implied (e.g., a future possibility for compliance) alternative.** | "Not so fast there lol. How about you send me a pic on here?" |
| ***Vague/non-committal:*** **A response that does not explicitly reject the request, but tries to redirect the conversation by posing a different request/question, by changing the subject, or not providing details.** | "I'll have to check my schedule and see if I'm available, what might you want to do if we can get together?" |
| ***Incomprehensible:*** **A response that has several spelling errors and/or is poorly constructed to the point readers find it incomprehensible. Or, the participant response demonstrates a misunderstanding of what the open ended prompt is asking.** | "i deepents meet to u so please meet him" |

**Table 5. Codebook categories, description, and examples**

### 3.5. Limitations

While the variables we study exist in a wide spectrum of gradation, we examined each in terms of two poles – high and low imposition as well as direct and indirect politeness strategies. In terms of imposition, there are a number of different goals of mobile dating that present different degrees of imposition. Similarly, politeness strategies exist in all manner of gradations. We only compared the most direct request and used hedges and modal verbs as a form of indirectness. Although a direct request is easily placed in opposition to the use of hedges and modal verbs, this is not necessarily so with other ways of making a request such as, offering an unsolicited favor before performing the request for a date.

## 4. Results

We first present the descriptive findings, then we test our hypotheses, and we end with the description of the results of our content analysis for the open-ended responses. Tables 6 presents the condition-level descriptive statistics before the data was transformed and table 7 the results of the multilevel, mixed multi-level mixed effect models, for both dependent variables. For likeability, there was a significant main effect of imposition, such that conditions with high imposition were rated as more likeable than those with low imposition ($t(435) = 2.65, p < 0.01$). The main effect of politeness was marginally significant, such that indirect strategies were rated more likable than direct strategies ($t(435) = 2.211, p\ 0.05$). All other two-way interactions and the three-way interactions were not significant ($t's < 0, p's > 0.12$).

| | | Likeability | | Attitudes toward progressing a relationship | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *N* | *Mean* | *SD* | *Mean* | *SD* |
| **Condition 1**<br>*Direct Politeness High Imposition* | | | | | |
| Content A | 108 | 3.43 | 0.83 | 3.44 | 1.07 |
| Content B | 111 | 3.28 | 0.81 | 3.33 | 0.87 |
| **Condition 2**<br>*Direct Politeness Low Imposition* | | | | | |
| Content A | 111 | 3.14 | 0.79 | 3.21 | 1.09 |
| Content B | 109 | 3.28 | 0.76 | 3.31 | 1.05 |
| **Condition 3**<br>*Indirect Politeness High Imposition* | | | | | |
| Content A | 109 | 3.40 | 0.81 | 3.47 | 1.02 |
| Content B | 111 | 3.42 | 0.52 | 3.60 | 0.83 |
| **Condition 4**<br>*Indirect Politeness Low Imposition* | | | | | |
| Content A | 111 | 3.36 | 0.69 | 3.28 | 0.95 |
| Content B | 108 | 3.43 | 0.76 | 3.35 | 1.04 |

**Table 6. Mean ratings on likability and attitudes toward relationship per each of the conditions**

| | Likeability | | | Attitudes toward progressing relationship | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Coefficient* | *SE* | *t* | *Coefficient* | *SE* | *t* |
| ***Politeness Strategy*** | 0.55* | 0.20 | 2.21 | 0.61* | 0.27 | 2.38 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(direct vs. indirect)** | | | | | |
| *Imposition* (low vs. high imposition) | 0.66** | 0.25 | 2.65 | 1.00*** | 0.26 | 3.92 |
| *Content* (A or B) | 0.13 | 0.25 | 0.51 | 0.21 | 0.26 | 0.82 |
| *Politeness Strategy *Imposition* | -1.22 | 0.79 | -1.55 | 0.74 | 1.06 | 0.69 |
| *Politeness Strategy *Content* | 0.02 | 0.79 | 0.03 | 0.93 | 1.06 | 0.87 |
| *Imposition *Content* | -1.14 | 0.79 | -1.45 | -0.90 | 1.06 | -0.84 |
| *Politeness Strategy *Imposition *Content* | 0.56 | 0.99 | 0.57 | 1.52 | 1.03 | 1.49 |

\* p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001

**Table 7. The impact of politeness, imposition, content, and interaction effect on partner's likability and attitude toward intensifying a relationship**

There was a marginally significant main effect of politeness on the measure of attitudes toward intensifying a relationship, such that indirect conditions led to higher attitudes than direct conditions ($t(435) = 2.46, p\ 0.05$). There was also a main effect of imposition such that high imposition conditions led to higher attitudes than low imposition conditions ($t(435) = 3.9,7\ p < 0.001$). All two-way and three-way interactions were not significant.

The results presented here provide support for our hypotheses that indirect politeness strategies would result in better conversational outcomes compared to direct strategies (H1 and H2). We also observed the reverse of hypotheses H3 and H4, where requests for a face-to-face date (e.g., high imposition) had a positive impact on likeability and attitudes toward intensifying a relationship compared to request to switch to Snapchat. No interactions were observed between politeness strategies and imposition on either measure. Thus, H5 and H6 were not supported.

| | High Imposition | | Low Imposition | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Direct* | *Indirect* | *Direct* | *Indirect* | |
| **Comply** | 92 | 128 | 81 | 108 | 409 |
| | *42.0%* | 58.2% | 36.8% | 49.3% | 46.6% |
| **Ghosting** | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| | 0.0% | 0.9% | 0.9% | 0.5% | 0.6% |
| **Bald on-record** | 7 | 11 | 7 | 10 | 35 |
| | 3.2% | 5.0% | 3.2% | 4.6% | 4.0% |
| **Softened** | 22 | 10 | 32 | 18 | 82 |
| | 10.0% | 4.5% | 14.5 | 8.2% | 9.3% |
| **Providing alternative** | 40 | 36 | 64 | 64 | 204 |
| | 18.3% | 16.4% | 29.1% | 29.2% | 23.2% |
| **Vague/ non-committal** | 48 | 28 | 30 | 14 | 120 |
| | 21.9% | 12.7% | 13.6 | 6.4% | 13.7% |
| **Incomprehensible** | 10 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 23 |
| | 4.6% | 2.3% | 1.8% | 1.8 | 2.6% |

**Table 8. Frequency and proportion of response categories by condition**

Examination of the open-ended responses highlighted the varied replies each strategy and request elicited. As can be seen in Table 8, overall, compliance with the requests posed was the most common (46.6% of all responses); this was followed by providing an alternative to the initial request (23.2%) and a vague or non-committal response (13.7%). The least common response types, aside from incomprehensible responses (2.6%), were bald, on-record rejections (4%) and ghosting/non-responses (0.6%). A request for a face-to-face date (high imposition) using indirectness most frequently resulted in request compliance, while a request to change the communication channel to Snapchat (low imposition) in a direct manner elicited compliance the least often.

Differences between conditions were evident in replies where participants provided an alternative to the requests posed; low imposition groups, regardless of the politeness strategy employed, more frequently provided an alternative (Table 8). Alternatives included continuing the conversation on the current channel, moving the conversation to another mediated channel other than Snapchat (e.g., Facebook messenger, SMS, or phone call), or meeting face-to-face. Although not all participants who requested an alternative provided a reason, participants often cited uncertainty around moving to another channel and reserving Snapchat for friends or family as a rationale for providing an alternative.

Vague/non-committal responses were most frequent among direct requests for a face-to-face date and more common when direct strategies were used. These responses illustrate that when requesting a date, direct strategies more frequently elicited an indirect rejection strategy. Interestingly, direct strategies that requested Snapchat information were the only strategy type to elicit specific comments on how the request was phrased. Although responses such as these were rare, they only occurred in direct requests for Snapchat information.

## 5. Discussion

This examination was aimed at understanding the impact of politeness strategies and the degree of imposition on the outcomes of mobile dating conversations. The results illustrate that conversations taking place during the discovery stage of mobile dating are, in some ways, similar to those that occur in more traditional, offline settings. Our examination

suggests that indirect politeness strategies have a positive impact on how individuals perceive a potential partner, their attitudes towards a relationship with that partner, and their request compliance. This examination also demonstrates that how individuals evaluate the weight of imposition a request poses and how it relates to conversational outcomes is complex. Moreover, the kind of requests made and the imposition posed by requests also relates to how potential romantic partners negotiate how a mobile dating relationship develops.

Support for our expectations that indirect strategies would have a significant positive effect on likeability and an individuals' attitudes toward intensifying a relationship illustrates the importance of indirect strategies in contexts where familiarity and intimacy are low and relative power is nebulous. In addition to the main effect observed, the open-ended responses illustrate how individuals exposed to a more direct strategy less frequently complied with a request, regardless of the kind of imposition that a request posed. Moreover, when individuals experienced a direct strategy and rejected a request, they more often responded by trying to soften their rejection by using higher-order politeness strategies, like expressing appreciation or providing a justification for their rejection, and direct strategies with little redress were the only strategies for which participants expressed displeasure in their open-ended responses. These results align with previous studies where indirect politeness strategies were favored in dating interactions offline (Stokoe, 2010) and online (Mortensen, 2017). Our study extends these scholarly discussions by demonstrating that indirectness often resulted in higher scores on measures of likeability and attitudes towards intensifying relationships. Prior research has also shown that linguistic politeness strategies affect date request compliance (Hendrickson & Goei, 2009) and our findings build on this discussion by demonstrating that indirectness is a favored strategy, as well as an effective strategy for engendering affinity from a potential partner and encouraging the development of a romantic relationship. However, our results also demonstrate that the strategy employed does not have as strong of an impact on conversational outcomes as the way a potential partner wants to intensify a relationship (e.g., face-to-face date, selecting a more intimate communication channel) and future research may explore the relationship between different kinds of strategies and requests for switching communication channels, as well as, their impact on conversational outcomes.

Contrary to our expectations, a request for a face-to-face date resulted in higher ratings of a potential partner's likability and participant's attitudes toward intensifying a relationship, than a request for another mediated platform. Although prior scholarly discussions found that online daters often preferred mediated channels because it allowed them to maintain control over their self-presentation (O'Sullivan et al., 2000), our examination found that requests for changing the communication channel to a specific mediated platform, Snapchat, resulted in lower scores of likeability and attitudes toward progressing a relationship. The differences in the expected and measured impact of imposition could be a reflection of the nuanced meanings individuals associate with different types of media. Zhao, Lampe and Ellison (2016) found that individuals associated Snapchat with new romantic relationships, whereas channels like iMessage/SMS were reserved for family members or intimate significant others. In our study, when individuals were exposed to a request to move to Snapchat, a frequent response was to provide an alternative channel for communication. Although not all individuals provided a reason for posing an alternative channel, reasons that had been provided ranged from reserving Snapchat for a particular group of individuals to not being a Snapchat user. Clearly, a number of factors contribute to the way individuals evaluate imposition and the communication channel one uses to move away from a mobile dating platform, whether it be a mediated channel or a face-to-face channel. Our results suggest that the associations one might have with a particular channel may be an important factor in how an individual evaluates the imposition of a request for a change in communication channel and the conversational outcomes associated with making such a request. Future research may try to identify the socio-technical nuances that impact choice of channel in mobile dating context.

We expected that when imposition was manipulated a change in the conversational outcomes of a politeness strategy would be observed. However, no such relationship was found. However, previous research demonstrated that when intimacy, power, and imposition were held constant higher-order politeness strategies (e.g., unsolicited favor) were associated with positive conversational outcomes (e.g., request compliance) (Hendrickson & Goei, 2009). Linguistic politeness theory describes a linear relationship between intimacy, power, and imposition, where the weight of an imposition is indirectly related to the level of politeness strategy employed (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The fact that we did not find a significant relationship between imposition and conversational outcomes in our study could be a result of the kind of redressive action the politeness strategies presented, the gravity of imposition posed,

or a combination of these elements. This could also be the result of the nature of romantic relationships where intimacy requires individuals to impose on another person's autonomy. Thus, intimacy as a factor of the politeness strategy chosen relates not only to the current level of intimacy between two individuals as politeness theory posits (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It also includes each individual's desire for intimacy and deepening their intimacy. Thus, further research would benefit from including theories of intimacy building such as, expectancy violation theory (Burgoon, 1978).

Our study only examines politeness strategies in terms of indirectness and directness; yet, politeness strategies can also vary in complexity and use a combination of several different redressive actions. The relationship between the complexity of politeness strategies and their efficacy in mitigating the face-threat an imposition might pose, should be further explored. Does increasing the complexity of a politeness strategy more effectively mitigate the face-threat of a high-imposition utterance? What relationship does strategy complexity have with levels of face-threats and imposition? How effective are complex strategies for improving conversational outcomes? Thus, further research should be done to further develop our understanding of the relationship between politeness strategy and imposition and their impact on conversational outcomes.

## 5.1 Limitations

While the variables we study exist in a wide spectrum of gradation, we examined each in terms of two poles – high and low imposition as well as direct and indirect politeness strategies. In terms of imposition, there are a number of different goals of mobile dating that present different degrees of imposition. Similarly, politeness strategies exist in all manner of gradations. We only compared the most direct request and used hedges and modal verbs as a form of indirectness. Although a direct request is easily placed in opposition to the use of hedges and modal verbs, this is not necessarily so with other ways of making a request such as, offering an unsolicited favor before performing the request for a date.

## 6. Conclusion

Previous research examining romantic interactions has demonstrated how important politeness strategies are for facilitating flirtatious conversations online (Mortensen, 2017) as well as, accomplishing interactional goals (Stokoe, 2010) and encouraging date request compliance (Hendrickson & Goei, 2009) in offline environments. Mobile dating research examining the discovery stage and the mechanics of interaction has been scant (Markowitz *et al.*, 2018). Our study contributes to this discussion by illuminating the goings-on of the discovery stage and explaining how conversational dynamics influence how individuals perceive potential partner's attractiveness and their attitudes toward progressing a relationship.

One way in which this examination contributes to the larger discussion of the discovery stage in mobile dating is illustrating the ways in which online and offline dating are similar. In particular, it demonstrates that higher-order politeness strategies that incorporate indirectness positively impact the perceived likeability of a potential partner and an individual's attitudes toward progressing a relationship. This aligns with previous research that also found that higher-order politeness strategies were related to date request compliance (Hendrickson & Goei, 2009). In this way, mobile and traditional dating are similar, where the politeness strategies employed play an important role in facilitating coupling. This has implications for the type of canned openings that dating coaches encourage (Zytko *et al.*, 2016), where opening sequences that employ indirect, higher-order strategies are preferred to lower-order strategies that may be more direct.

Our study also contributes a better understanding of imposition and how a mobile dating context might shift the way we evaluate the weightiness of imposition. The weight of an imposition is often seen in terms of the amount of effort or inconvenience a request might pose (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Meanwhile, the results of this study demonstrated that high-effort imposition (e.g., a face-to-face date) was positively associated with attitudes toward progressing a relationship and a potential partner's perceived likeability, when compared to a lower effort imposition (e.g., moving to another online channel). This demonstrates that the amount of effort a request poses is not the only way to evaluate how much weight an imposition has. Indeed, it demonstrates that context plays a role in how imposition is evaluated, which expands our understanding of how an imposition is interpreted.

In summary, our study demonstrates that how one evaluates the gravity of an imposition is contextually situated, and in mobile dating interactions and preserving positive face is of utmost importance. Although mobile dating apps may present novel ways of selecting and evaluating potential partners, some aspects of traditional dating also apply to mobile dating. Specifically, using higher-order politeness strategies has a positive impact on individuals' attitudes toward progressing a relationship and the perceived likeability of a potential partner. Thus, strategically using indirectness can help mobile dating

app users during the discovery phase. However, there is much we still do not know about the spectrum of strategies and mechanisms that can be used to positively impact mobile dating experiences. Therefore, more work is needed to understand politeness strategies and imposition in the mobile dating context and how it impacts relationship development.

## 7. References

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