



**Linguistic strategies for managing online reputation in the era of
political trolling: The case of Twitter-discourse between
Zimbabwean political actors.**

By

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to:

1. God, Almighty, on whose mercy I live.
2. My wife Faith, children Makayla and Marcusjay who endured loneliness during the writing of this thesis.
3. My parents Peter Tshetu and Stelah Tshetu, the Tsaura's, Dube's, Mutero's, Mupakairi's and the Makore's for being pillars of strength.

Abstract

The issue of personal attacks is pronounced in political contexts, with the discourse being instrumentalised for reputational warfare and reputational capital. In many cases, the victims of such discourse are character assassinated, defamed, humiliated, and demeaned. Thus, currently, there is an existing risk of losing a network of relationships which enables the political society to function effectively, as expected in a democracy such as Zimbabwe. The study aims at establishing strategies for linguistically managing online reputation within political discourses. It has the following main objectives: (1) To identify the non-politic linguistic strategies utilised in political trolling by Zimbabwean political actors on *Twitter* (now *X*). (2) To establish the component of face predominantly targeted in personal attacks on *Twitter* by Zimbabwean political trolls and (3) To establish linguistic strategies which can be utilised to redress face-threatening acts on digital platforms such as *Twitter*.

The study takes a qualitative paradigm which informs the data collection and analysis, with the selection of data based on purposive sampling. Three theories underlie this study, namely: the Face Constituting Theory (FCT) (Arundale, 2010), the Politeness Theory (PT) (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and the Public Sphere Theory (PST) (Habermas, 1964) plus Culpeper (2011)'s four key aspects of impoliteness and Culpeper (2005)'s super-strategies for obtaining impoliteness. The research also takes a two-tier approach differentiating between a first- and a second-order level of analysis.

The findings of this study are threefold. Firstly, there are six non-politic linguistic strategies commonly employed in political trolling within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere; these include: insults, pointed criticisms, unpalatable questions, condescensions, dismissals, and threats. Secondly, the study reveals that the positive face is the predominantly targeted face in personal attacks on *Twitter*. Thirdly, the study establishes three face-saving strategies. These are, claiming common ground, conveying that speaker and addressee are co-operators and fulfilling the addressee's want.

Key words: Discursive relational work, politeness, face, non-politic, political trolling, discourse analysis, *Twitter* (now *X*), Zimbabwe, face-saving strategies

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List of abbreviations

AIPPA: Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act

BAZ: Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe

BCA: Broadcasting Corporation Act

BSA: Broadcast Services Act

CCC: Citizens Coalition for Change

CCMC: Conjoint Co-constituting Model of Communication

CIO: Central Intelligence Organization

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis

CMP: Common Moral Position

CP: Cooperative Principle

CZC: Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition

ESAP: Economic Structural Adjustment Programme

FCT: Face Constituting Theory

FTA: Face Threatening Act

ICA: Interceptions of Communications Act

LEAD: Labour Economists and African Democrats

LOMA: Law and Order Maintenance Act

MDC: Movement for Democratic Change

MIC: Media and Information Commission

MOPB: Maintenance of Peace and Order Bill

NERA: National Electoral Reform Agenda

POSA: Public Order and Security Act

PST: Public Sphere Theory

PT: Politeness Theory

RSA: Republic of South Africa

SAS: Special Air Services

UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UQs: Unpalatable Questions

WHO: World Health Organization

ZANU-PF: Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front

ZAPU: Zimbabwe African People's Union

ZDF: Zimbabwe Defence Forces

ZINASU: Zimbabwe National Students Union

ZLHR: Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights

ZUM: Zimbabwe Unity Movement

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Chapter one

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Discourse is a central concept within the humanities and social sciences. Through an understanding of discourse, we gain insight into the ways in which language mediates and shapes human interactions. Furthermore, we come to appreciate how social, political, and cultural conventions of societies are negotiated and formed across temporal, geographical, and cultural divides. The investigation of online discourse adds a new layer of excitement to the well-established yet perpetually innovative field of discourse studies because online discourse creates its own conventions.

The current thesis carefully analyses a corpus of contentious political discourse in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere with the overall aim of establishing linguistic face-saving strategies that can be utilised by political actors in the face of political trolling.

To achieve this aim, I apply available pivotal theories that have been developed on the Global North to online discourse that engages interactants from the Global South, specifically Zimbabwean political actors. By doing so, I hope to gain a better understanding of the applicability of the linguistic face-saving strategies that emerge from such theories and potentially uncover their limitations outside the context of their origin. The thesis begins by discussing the main concept of this study.

1.2 Trolling: clarifying the key concept

Trolling is a term used to describe the posting of any content on the internet that is provocative and offensive (Bishop 2014: 1). For the purposes of my study, I adopt Fichman and Sanfillippo's (2015: 163) definition, which observes trolling as deviant and antisocial online behaviour. In this behaviour, the deviant user acts provocatively and outside normative expectations within a particular community, aiming to elicit responses from the community and intentionally cause disruption or trigger conflict among community members. From Sanfillippo's (2015) definition, I take it to mean that trolling is an assumed behaviour that occurs in online spaces with the intention to cause despondence. I argue, therefore, that as an assumed behaviour trolling is not only

employed by trolls (sociopathic individuals) but by any ordinary person who assumes deviant and antisocial behaviour to provoke and offend others intentionally, even if temporarily.

I argue that the idea that trolling is caused only by people who self-identify as trolls and that it can be eradicated by banning these users is flawed. Trolls are considered people who engage repeatedly in trolling behaviour to the point of establishing an identity through a recognisable repeated pattern (de Seta 2018: 392). This perspective is accurately captured in Shachaf and Hara's (2010: 363) definition of trolling as: "repetitive, intentional and harmful actions," and they label the people who perform such disruptive acts as trolls. Hardaker (2013) states that trolls post naive, arrogant, dangerous, or incoherent comments alongside personal insults.

However, many of the people who find themselves being labelled as 'trolls' may be ordinary people just having a bad day (Cheng, Bernstein, Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil & Leskovec 2017). I further assert that in environments of a political nature which are contentious, ordinary interactants may temporarily appropriate the trolling behaviour to score political points. To put it differently, "to troll" means to have negative intents, to wish harm or at least discomfort upon one's audience (Bergstrom 2011). Conversely, "to be trolled" means being made a victim, caught in the undertow, and being the victim of someone else's attack (Bergstrom 2011).

Thus, trolling is a behaviour that thrives on online public platforms where it is considered to have the potential to disrupt constructive discussions (Cheng et al. 2017). Studies such as that of Bishop (2014: 2) state that for an utterance to be considered as trolling, the speaker must intend for it to be perceived by a wider audience. The implication is that if an utterance is sent to a private space, then it is not trolling. I posit that trolling is context-centred and varies with respect to platforms and communities. In this sense, what constitutes trolling and what does not is local and contextual within any online public space (Sanfilippo, Yang & Fichman 2017: 1802). This understanding means that there is no blanket approach to linguistic behaviours considered as trolling, as norms vary from one society to another as guided by frames of expectations. Hence, I am interested in establishing impolite strategies that are used, not necessarily by trolls but also by anyone who assumes trolling behaviour.

The issue of frames of expectations is discussed in Section 3.2.2. According to the concept of frames of expectation, a behaviour should deviate from what is expected given the relational circumstances to be considered trolling. Among other factors, the social distance between the speaker and addressee may determine what can be considered trolling. Additionally, certain utterances may or may not be considered trolling based on the topic under discussion.

Trolling is regarded as contagious behaviour by scholars such as Cheng et al. (2017). These scholars conclude that one interactant's outburst may lead to multiple interactants participating in a flame war. This is likely to be common in political spheres where interactants take sides based on their political orientation. An attack to one interactant is seen as an attack on the reputation of the political organisation they represent. Often, interactants who troll do so to defend a political position while simultaneously inviting the trolling vitriol of their addressees who equally seek to defend their own political position. Huddy and Bankert (2017: 1) state that political partisanship exerts a powerful influence on political behaviour within democracies. Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes (1960) define partisanship as a set of beliefs and feelings culminating in a psychological attachment to a political party. In political partisanship, the psychological attachment serves as the basis for behaviours exhibited when engaging with interactants of different political affiliations.

1.3 Background of study

As highlighted in the abstract, the Zimbabwean political arenas, whether physical or virtual, are contentious and often volatile discursive fields in which political actors interact both with the public and with each other. Notably, digital platforms such as *Twitter* (now *X*) provide an ideal setting for the discourse of political trolling (Antoci, Delfino, Paglieri, Panebianco & Sabatini 2016: 2). It is worth noting that the name *Twitter* will be employed throughout this study instead of the new name *X*.

It is against the backdrop of political trolling that many political actors around the world have been forced to employ aggressive and rude behaviours or temporarily/permanently leave online platforms as face-saving strategies when their self-presentation is threatened.

A recent case of the latter strategy is observed in the behaviour of Hellen Zille, a South African politician, who on February 17, 2020, shut down her *Twitter* account. Zille commented that the platform had degenerated into a stage for irrationality and mob-lynching (Mlambo 2020). In a related case, Glyn Davies, the Conservative politician, and Member of Parliament (MP) for Montgomeryshire in the United Kingdom, quit *Twitter* and advised the other MPs to do the same. His decision was based on what he regarded as abusive comments posted by keyboard warriors, often with a total disregard for the truth, which created a cesspool of vileness on the platform (The Guardian 2019).

In the view of Antoci, Sacco and Vanin's (2007), the growing number of trolling behaviours on virtual platforms has led to a significant decline of the much-needed social capital that emerges from the productive cross-pollination of ideas between political actors and their followers, as well

as the loss of potential positive self-presentation that political actors require. In this context, I concur with Conway, Kenski and Wang (2015: 365) who argue that virtual platforms are the new avenue of influence for every 21st-century political actor and, therefore, a useful tool which should be used in a manner that both manages reputation and encourages harmonious co-existence with opposition actors.

As a result of the pervasive problem of personal attacks, the need for discursive relational work arises. Locher and Watts (2008: 77) define discursive relational work as

the effort people invest in negotiating their relationships in interactions (Locher 2004; 2006; Locher and Watts 2005). This approach is not restricted to studying merely the polite variant of the interpersonal aspect of a communication, as Brown and Levinson ([1978] 1987) have predominantly done. It can equally focus on impolite, or rude aspects of social behaviour. Relational work, in other words, encompasses the entire spectrum of the interpersonal side of social practice.

By following the discursive relational work approach, I aim to comprehensively investigate the issues of linguistic social behaviours as they arise in the Zimbabwean political context.

1.3.1 Location of the study

The study is situated within the Zimbabwean *Twitter* virtual space and examines a subset of *Twitter* users who can be circumscribed as the people engaging in discourse on Zimbabwean current politics. The sample population for this study includes a variety of political actors, ranging from politicians and their supporters, to journalists, human rights activists, political activists, leaders of social movements, and government institutional leaders. These political actors engage virtually on *Twitter* about Zimbabwean political issues, either in their personal capacity or through their *Twitter* handlers. The part of the Twittersphere where these interactions occur serves as the focal point of this study.

1.4 Research problem

The issue of personal attacks has become more pronounced in current virtual political interactions globally, as such discourse is instrumentalised for reputational warfare and reputational capital. The victims of such discourse, in many cases, are subjected to character assassination, defamation, humiliation, and demeaning (Samoilenko 2016). The vitriol often leads victims to either adopt the perpetrator's ad hominem discourse, shut down their social media accounts, or "unfollow" and "unfriend" the perpetrators as a face management and face-saving strategy (Antoci, Sacco & Vanini 2007: 128). As a result, the extreme measures of unfriending or shutting down social media

accounts are perceived as preferable compared to preserving social capital or maintaining the network of relations that enable society to function effectively. Thus, there is an existing risk of losing the network of relationships that allows political society to function effectively, as expected in a democracy such as Zimbabwe. All of this, arguably, weakens the Zimbabwean social fabric in Mutero's (2017: 4) perspective. Therefore, the extreme linguistic conditions mentioned above, along with their resulting effects, underscore the need to delve into discursive relational work within the context of Zimbabwean virtual political communities. This exploration aims to identify linguistic strategies that can enhance and strengthen social capital.

1.5 The significance of the study

This research is based on the belief that, contrary to the criticisms of political contestations by scholars such as Karatas and Saka (2017), political actors should critically consider the perspective that political trolling is an indirect and deliberate form of political advertising, which holds equal significance to the construction of one's image (Waldahl 2005). Hence, considering political trolling and its associated linguistic negativity, political actors should equip themselves with reputation management strategies to navigate this hostile yet essential virtual landscape.

The underlying assumption is that political actors are better positioned to influence the dynamics of social interaction in a way that aligns with their objectives of accruing political capital, provided they can effectively manage their discursive relational work through language (Baumeister & Hutton 1987: 453). According to Locher, Bolander and Horn (2015: 1), discursive relational work is a concept aimed at exploring how social actors or interactants utilize language to shape and cultivate relationships in specific situations. Thus, the significance of this study lies in establishing linguistic face-saving strategies that emerge from contextualising seminal politeness theories from the Global North within the Global South's political sphere, where political trolling is prevalent. The purpose is to explore the applicability of these theories in contexts beyond their original setting and to suggest how these linguistic face-saving strategies can be effectively employed within this specific context. The fusion of politeness and trolling to analyse African political discourses is a rarity. Hence, the significance of this study rests in its capacity to provide a contextual interpretation to concepts that have predominantly been understood from a Western standpoint.

1.6 Research aim

The aim of this study is to establish pragmatic linguistic face-saving strategies that can be employed by political actors, considering the threat posed by political trolling to their self-image and self-preservation during virtual political discussions.

Loader and Mercea (2011) assert that virtual spaces offer an opportunity for democracy to thrive. However, threats arise due to lack of attention on discursive virtual relational work between political actors, from a linguistic perspective. This study also aims to emphasise that language has a role in fostering harmonious co-existence of political actors online. Thus, the study contributes to existing knowledge on language as a valuable tool not only for promoting peaceful interactions but also for encouraging respectful virtual co-existence. In this study, the significance of language becomes apparent through the theoretical lenses of the Face Constituting Theory (FCT), Politeness Theory (PT) and the Public Sphere Theory (PST). These lenses are employed to derive linguistic pragmatic face-saving strategies that political actors can utilize to redress “face” threats posed by political trolling.

1.7 Research objectives

The objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the non-politic linguistic strategies utilised in political trolling by Zimbabwean political actors on *Twitter*.
2. To establish the component of face predominantly targeted in personal attacks on *Twitter* by Zimbabwean political actors.
3. To establish linguistic face-saving strategies which political actors can utilise to redress face threatening acts on digital platforms such as *Twitter*.

1.8 Research questions

This study seeks to answer the following three research questions:

1. Which non-politic linguistic strategies are utilised in political trolling within the Zimbabwean *Twitter* sphere.
 - a. How does political trolling on *Twitter* employ non-politic linguistic strategies in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors?
 - b. Why may political trolling be used in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors on *Twitter*?
2. Which component of face is predominantly targeted in personal attacks on *Twitter* by Zimbabwean political actors engaged in trolling behaviour?
 - a. How is the identified component of face being attacked?
 - b. Why might these aspects of face be the ones that are targeted?
3. Which linguistic face-saving strategies can political actors utilise to redress face threatening acts on digital platforms such as *Twitter*?

- a. How can the face-saving strategies be utilised to redress Face threatening acts on digital platforms such as *Twitter*?
- b. Why are these face-saving strategies important?

1.9 Overview of the thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introductory chapter of the thesis sets the stage for the research by focusing on the concept of discourse and its importance in understanding human interactions, particularly within the context of online platforms. It highlights the emergence of online discourse conventions and introduces the specific research focus: analysing political discourse in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere with the goal of identifying linguistic strategies used by political actors to manage face-threatening situations caused by political trolling.

The chapter outlines the study's objectives, which include identifying linguistic strategies employed in political trolling, determining the targeted components of face in personal attacks, and establishing face-saving strategies for political actors. The research questions posed in the chapter help guide the investigation, covering topics such as the linguistic strategies used in political trolling, the components of face that are targeted, and potential face-saving strategies.

The chapter also emphasizes the significance of the study, highlighting the need for political actors to navigate online discourse effectively in the face of political trolling. The choice of theoretical frameworks, including Face Constituting Theory (FCT), Politeness Theory (PT), and Public Sphere Theory (PST), is introduced, with an explanation of how these frameworks will be used to derive pragmatic linguistic strategies for managing face-threatening situations.

The overall structure of the thesis is outlined, detailing the content and purpose of each chapter. The chapter-by-chapter overview provides readers with a roadmap of the research journey, from examining the socio-political and socio-cultural landscape of Zimbabwe to presenting and analysing data, discussing findings, and concluding the study with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: The socio-political and socio-cultural landscape in Zimbabwe

In this chapter, a comprehensive exploration of Zimbabwe's socio-political and socio-cultural landscape unfolds, unveiling the intricate backdrop against which the linguistic inquiry of this study is set. Tracing its evolution from the colonial era to the present, the chapter meticulously charts

the dynamic shifts in political communication spaces, laying the foundation for the linguistic analysis to come. Delving deeper, it illuminates the genesis of the prevailing political discourse, a product of the country's historical struggles and contemporary political context. This discourse, whether virtual or physical, gains its resonance from the profound political circumstances that birthed it.

Moreover, the chapter weaves in a discussion of Zimbabwe's socio-cultural norms, casting light on the nuanced tapestry of discursive practices and their boundaries. By deciphering what is deemed conventional or off-limits within Zimbabwean discourse, the narrative paints a vivid picture of the society's communicative norms. Importantly, this chapter serves as a bridge to the subsequent chapters, where politeness concepts will be dissected. Furthermore, the chapter bestows a crucial understanding of the political actors, enriching both the methodology and data analysis sections with insights into their roles and affiliations. Ultimately, this chapter emerges as a key to unlocking the complexities that underpin the linguistic dynamics in the chapters that follow.

Chapters 3: Literature review

This chapter serves as a scholarly compass, navigating through the rich terrain of existing research to contextualize the study's focus on linguistic reputation management. With a keen eye on politeness and impoliteness, the chapter embarks on a journey through the evolution of these concepts, tracing their treatment from traditional viewpoints to the dynamic perspectives of the post-modern era. Delving deeper, it intricately explores the interplay between politeness, impoliteness, and the realm of political discourse, shedding light on facets like the role of violence within these dialogues.

The chapter then shifts its gaze to the digital realm, shining a spotlight on *Twitter* (now X) as a crucible for political conversation and the platform's stance on hate speech. In tandem, it unveils the undercurrents of reputation smearing within the political landscape, unearthing the strategies and motives behind these reputation-tarnishing manoeuvres. Focusing on the key players—the speaker, the audience, and the addressee—within the sphere of online interactions, the chapter skilfully dissects their roles, motivations, and linguistic choices. Its culmination lies in an exploration of language preferences in Zimbabwean online spaces.

The chapter masterfully aligns the current study within the larger tapestry of academic inquiry while deftly highlighting gaps that this research endeavours to fill. By bridging tradition and

innovation, this chapter invites readers on a riveting intellectual journey, priming them to grasp the study's significance and paving the way for deeper exploration into the chapters ahead.

Chapter 4: Theoretical framework

Nestled at the core of this chapter is the unveiling of the study's intellectual scaffolding—its theoretical framework. This chapter serves as a gateway to understanding the guiding principles that underpin the research. In this exploration, each theory is not merely introduced, but vividly defined, their essence distilled for clarity.

With precision, the chapter paints a canvas where each theory finds its place, meticulously illustrating how they are harnessed within the study's context. The interplay between these theories and the study's central concepts is masterfully illuminated, forging crucial connections that enrich the reader's comprehension.

A remarkable journey unfolds as the chapter delves into the practical applications of these theories, offering insightful glimpses into how they harmonize with the research's aims. The grand finale of the chapter revolves around the implications of these selected theories, showcasing how their integration shapes the study's intellectual landscape. Through this exploration, readers are primed to embrace the conceptual framework underpinning the study, setting the stage for a deeper engagement with the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5: Research methodology

This chapter maps out the research design. It casts a spotlight on the methodological architecture, unveiling each crucial facet in meticulous detail.

From the vast landscape of potential participants, the chapter carves out the population, underlining the sampling method's rationale and its intricate connection to the study's objectives. It unfurls the essence of the chosen data gathering site and unveils the research instrument's significance.

The chapter then navigates through the data collection method, offering a compelling rationale for the curated selection of *Twitter* handles. Within this dataset, it unveils the delicate threads weaving the nature of relations between interactants, the discourse's character, the linguistic palette, and the participants' gender. The chapter's narrative crescendos with a glimpse into the quantitative analysis, capturing the occurrence frequency of non-political linguistic strategies.

Nearing its conclusion, the chapter outlines the data analysis procedure, setting the stage for the analytical journey ahead. A profound resonance emanates as the chapter ethically foregrounds

quality considerations, ensuring scholarly integrity. Ultimately, this chapter unveils the blueprint of the study's construction while inviting readers into a captivating exploration of its analytical dimensions, grounded in both rigor and ethical mindfulness.

Chapter 6: Data presentation and analysis

In this chapter, the narrative navigates the path to unravelling the study's core questions through a lens of data analysis. With precision, the chapter embarks on a journey of identification, examination, and interpretation, gleaning patterns from the textual data sourced from the study's participants.

At its core, the chapter achieves three pivotal objectives. Firstly, it exposes the arsenal of non-politic and inappropriate linguistic tactics employed by Zimbabwean political trolls on *Twitter*. Secondly, it unearths the delicate facets of "face" that become targets in personal attacks on Zimbabwean political figures within the *Twitter* realm. Thirdly, and no less significant, it sheds light on the face-saving strategies employed to counterbalance the impact of these non-politic linguistic tactics.

Through this analytical voyage, the chapter forms a powerful nexus between patterns and research questions, underscoring their interconnectedness. It paints a vivid picture of linguistic strategies and their implications, driving the study forward while offering readers an engaging and enlightening perspective on the intricacies of political discourse in the digital age.

Chapter 7: Data discussion

This chapter takes the reader on an intellectual journey, where the findings unearthed in Chapter 6 come under the spotlight of critical analysis and interpretation. The tapestry of the research questions gains depth as the chapter delves into the profound significance of these findings. Moreover, the chapter unveils the far-reaching implications of the results, inviting readers to contemplate their broader ramifications.

In this space of intellectual exploration, the chapter doesn't merely conclude the narrative; it also acts as a launching pad for future inquiries. By identifying potential areas for future research, the chapter propels the reader's imagination, inviting them to delve even deeper into the ever-evolving landscape of linguistic reputation management and digital political discourse. Through this comprehensive exploration, the chapter beckons readers to appreciate the full scope and implications of the study's discoveries.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and recommendations

In this chapter, the research problem regains the spotlight, and the study's overarching aim is deftly reaffirmed. With precision, the chapter breathes new life into the thesis statements, underscoring their significance in the realm of linguistics. This chapter serves as an intellectual crescendo, magnifying the study's contributions to the field by highlighting its pivotal areas of impact.

Beyond solidifying its place in the scholarly discourse, the chapter stretches its hand towards the future, seeding potential avenues for further research. With its parting recommendations, the chapter becomes a beacon, guiding future scholars in their pursuit of knowledge. As the study's journey culminates, this chapter both magnifies its reach and lays the foundation for the inquiries that are yet to come.

1.10 Summary of the chapter

This introductory chapter serves as a compass, orienting readers within the research's landscape. It not only contextualizes the study but also illuminates its ambitions through the crisp outline of objectives. The chapter unfurls the tapestry of theoretical frameworks, weaving a conceptual foundation that underpins the subsequent chapters' exploration.

Akin to a map, the chapter intricately sketches the contours of the thesis structure, offering readers a preview of the immersive journey ahead. Within its pages, the groundwork is meticulously laid, readying the reader for the captivating expedition through the research's terrain, where each ensuing chapter unveils the multifaceted dimensions of the research topic.

Chapter two

The socio-political and socio-cultural landscape in Zimbabwe

2.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter introduces the study and outlines the structure of the thesis. This chapter highlights the current socio-political and socio-cultural situation in Zimbabwe. In accomplishing this, the chapter focuses on three pivotal areas: the political environment, the socio-cultural context, and the political discourse in Zimbabwe.

2.2 Zimbabwe's political landscape

In this section, I narrate the events that led to the transition of political communication from physical to online spaces in Zimbabwe. These changes were prompted by the unfolding political events following the emergence of the Movement of Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999. My argument revolves around the notion that the politics of controlling and regulating public communication have played a pivotal role in determining the available space for political discourse. Consequently, this dynamic significantly impacts the overall health of the country's political discourse and its democratic processes (Mazango 2017: 34). I will shed light on how the state has taken unilateral actions to reshape the media market, thereby influencing the flow of messages and content that hold sway over the political and social conversations among Zimbabwean citizens.

Since gaining independence in 1980, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) has primarily dominated the political landscape of Zimbabwe. Until the inception of MDC in 1999, only Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) had posed a significant threat to ZANU-PF's position. The enduring tenure of ZANU-PF's leadership can be attributed to several factors. Notably, within Zimbabwe, ZANU-PF holds a respected reputation as a revolutionary party that played a pivotal role in securing independence amid the backdrop of colonization and the dominance imposed by British-origin white colonialists (Chigora, Guzura & Ndimande 2015: 4). Its substantial support base traces back to the pre-independence era, during which ZANU-PF connected with the general populace by addressing issues faced by the black majority, including pervasive segregation, discriminatory policies, disenfranchisement, and land disputes (Chigora, Guzura & Ndimande 2015: 4). Serving as a beacon of hope for a more promising future for many black Zimbabweans, ZANU-PF secured victory in the 1980 elections. However, the post-colonial trajectory of ZANU-PF has fallen short of the expectations held by those who view the struggle

against colonialism as a crusade for the realization of positive values (Saul 2010: 2). Contrary to this vision, as articulated by Naidoo (2010), the post-colonial reality illustrates that ZANU-PF underwent a shift toward a self-righteous culture of entitlement among a newly emerged elite, characterized by predatory tendencies.

Despite these realities, there are still individuals who continue to lend their support to the ruling party, regardless of its shortcomings. For many of these supporters, criticizing ZANU-PF is deemed taboo due to its role in achieving independence and its steadfast nationalist stance. Additionally, since gaining independence, ZANU-PF adeptly presents populist policies concerning land, employment, economic indigenisation, and various other topics, particularly in the lead-up to elections (Sithole & Makumbe 1997: 133).

However, it is the emergence of the largest opposition party to date, the MDC in 1999, that marked significant milestones in Zimbabwe's political history (Asuelime & Simura 2014: 69), giving rise to pronounced contestations. Shortly after its establishment, the MDC swiftly embarked on challenging the hegemony of ZANU-PF and successfully secured nearly the entire urban vote in the subsequent election of 2000 (Asuelime & Simura 2014: 70). This led to substantial shifts in the country's political landscape. As such, intense power struggles have unfolded, and violence has become deeply ingrained as a political tool in numerous campaigns to the present day (ibid).

The establishment of the MDC became feasible due to the socio-economic challenges attributed to the ZANU-PF government. Ndlovu (2004) asserts that the implementation of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in the early 1990s eroded the living standards of Zimbabweans and gave rise to the first broad-based opposition party. While the ESAP created an ideal ground for this, Asuelime and Simura (2014: 71) argue that the economic 'hara-kiri' resulting from granting War veterans ZW\$50 000 gratuities without budgetary allocation that led to economic chaos, ultimately triggering an economic downturn. The aftermath witnessed the decline in the living conditions of many Zimbabweans and the commencement of significant urban uprisings. Thus, the MDC is arguably a product of uprising forces to an unstable economy. In that regard, the MDC can be considered a manifestation of the forces of upheaval in response to an unstable economy. The inception of the MDC witnessed substantial urban support from a populace that had borne the brunt of Zimbabwe's economic deterioration (Asuelime & Simura 2014: 70). It is worth pointing that in recent times, the MDC, historically Zimbabwe's primary opposition party, has undergone multiple divisions and reorganizations. A smaller faction, lacking

substantial political backing, has adopted the name MDC-T, reminiscent of a previous, more influential version of the party. Employing legal manoeuvres, this faction has succeeded in stripping the more widely supported opposition entity, MDC Alliance, of its assets, which include its headquarters, public funding, and the parliamentary seats it gained in the 2018 elections (Gavin 2020). By January 2022, the MDC Alliance disbanded, with the majority of its members forming the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) party. To ensure clarity, the term “MDC” will be consistently used in this thesis to denote the primary opposition party in Zimbabwe.

Evidently, ZANU-PF has not remained complacent in response to political opposition. As previously mentioned, intricate political communication strategies have been employed to curb burgeoning political dissent and uphold ZANU-PF’s dominance in Zimbabwe (Mazango 2017: 33). The control of public communication for almost 22 years since the formation of the MDC remains one of the most important sources of this ruling party’s hold to power. This restriction on critical media forms the groundwork for the regulation of freedom of expression, a factor that obstructs the envisioned transition to an alternative democracy in the present day (Mazango 2017: 33).

Zimbabwe has undergone democratic backsliding since the establishment of the MDC. This has led to persistent power struggles, resulting in an extended period of conflict between the incumbent ZANU-PF and the opposing forces, the oppositionists. The manipulation of public communication for political purposes has been applied in two crucial spheres, equally vital for the expression of political preferences (Mazango 2017: 35). One sphere pertains to the right of freedom of association and assembly, encompassing the entitlement to hold meetings, sit-ins, strikes, rallies, events, or protests. Moreover, this right also extends to individuals’ ability to interact and organize collectively, enabling them to express, promote, pursue, and safeguard common interests (United Nations 2022: np). The second sphere encompasses the right to freedom of conscience, expression, and communication, emphasising the existence of critical and independent mass media that fosters the potential for political engagement among diverse citizens (Mazango 2017: 35). The interpretation of democracy in contemporary Zimbabwe is intrinsically linked to the practices within the aforementioned spheres.

2.3 The shifting of spaces for political communication in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, the landscape of electoral politics is moulded by the available spaces for public communication (Levisky & Way 2002). The metaphor of ‘space’ vividly encapsulates the social,

political, and physical contexts within which dynamics of power, dominance, and marginalization are negotiated and perpetuated (Barnett 2003). In an ideal context, as articulated by Mazango (2017: 36), a necessary prerequisite for a functional democracy is the existence of political communicative spaces where individuals engage freely and on equal footing in deliberations, negotiations, and discussions concerning shared yet often contentious matters. However, spanning back to the Rhodesian era, the need to access and govern these spaces has been the underlying cause of disputes and conflicts witnessed in the nation's political arenas. From post-independence until the present, as asserted by Mazango (2017: 33), intricate media strategies are employed to curtail burgeoning political opposition and to preserve the supremacy of ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe.

Randall (1999) proposes that the role of public communication holds crucial significance in educating individuals about the array of political parties and candidates available for selection. In this context, spaces of public communication additionally function as oversight centres, shedding light on electoral malpractices. Mazango (2017: 36) contends that in both democratic, and less democratic societies, there invariably exists a concerted effort by those in positions of power to manipulate communicative spaces in an endeavour to present themselves in the most favourable light. Nonetheless, this manipulation inevitably results in the diminished voices of the less powerful, fostering suppressed frustration and bottled-up resentment.

The decline of democracy in Zimbabwe gained momentum in February of the year 2000 when Zimbabwean voters rejected a ZANU-PF government-sponsored draft for a new constitution (Mazango 2017: 36). This rejection signalled that ZANU-PF was losing its status as the preferred party for many. In the 2000 election, the newly formed opposition party, MDC, achieved substantial progress and came close to surpassing ZANU-PF, securing 57 out of the 120 seats (Mazango 2017: 37). These results marked a notable departure from the preceding voting patterns observed since Zimbabwe's independence from Britain. In response, ZANU-PF initiated a backlash, leading to the gradual and systematic erosion of democracy through the manipulation of electoral processes and suppression of political dissent. Since then, an unstable atmosphere characterized by heightened political radicalization, polarization, and societal deprivation became the norm in Zimbabwe (Mazango 2017: 37).

Leveraging its parliamentary majority, ZANU-PF enacted substantial statutes aimed at consolidating state authority in organizing political dynamics. In the ensuing discussion, I will elaborate on how certain partisan legislative provisions curtailed civil liberties and equipped the government with tools to address perceived "enemies of the state" and advocates of "regime change". By the conclusion of this section, the impact of these legislations on the transformation

of spaces for political communication in Zimbabwe will be evident. In the meantime, it is worth reiterating that the legislative measures I will discuss were enacted within the context of a nation marked by an unsettled citizenry demanding the restoration of civil liberties (Saunders 1999).

2.3.1 The Broadcast Services Act (BSA) (2001)

In democracies around the world, the insistence on the independence of the media is evident both in principle and in practice (Mapuva & Muyengwa 2012: 141). Consequently, the exertion of political control over broadcasting is regarded as a violation of the right to freedom of expression within any society that professes democratic ideals (Magaisa 2003). In Zimbabwe, the incumbent government enacted the Broadcast Services Act of 2001 into law to suppress the voices of oppositionists in the mainstream media. As stipulated in the Broadcasting Services Act [Chapter 12:06]:

“The act provides for the functions, powers and duties of the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ); to provide for the constitution of the Authority; to provide for the planning, management, allocation, regulation and protection of the broadcasting frequency spectrum and the regulation and licensing of broadcasting services and systems; to provide for programme standards; to regulate and license signal carriers; to encourage and develop the creative arts through broadcasting content standards; to create a sense of national identity through broadcasting services; to create a Broadcasting Fund to help finance local broadcasting and for related purposes; and to provide for matters incidental to or connected with the foregoing.”

As highlighted by the Human Rights Watch (2006), the Broadcasting Services Act of 2001 strengthens the state’s monopoly over all electronic broadcasting in Zimbabwe. This legislation grants the Minister of State for Information and Publicity the power to determine the allocation of broadcasting licenses and the conditions under which they are issued. Moreover, the law allows for the imposition of stricter controls on the content and quality of information transmitted through radio and television, as well as the authority to ban broadcasters perceived as posing a threat to national security (Human Rights Watch 2006).

In Section 6 of the act, the Minister (appointed by the president) serves as the licensing authority. Section 9(1) stipulates a limit to one the number of national free-to-air broadcasting services for each radio and television. Section 9(3) specifies that only a public broadcaster can hold both a broadcasting and a signal carrier license. Through the enactment of this act, the government aimed to secure the information gate valve, fearing the dissemination of information that could challenge

the credibility of the ZANU-PF regime (Nkomo 2018: 22). According to Magaisa (2003), within the Zimbabwean mainstream media, the electromagnetic transmission of video and audio signals, along with the available frequency spectrum, are under the control of the Zimbabwean government, as prescribed by the BSA (Chapter 12:01). Through this legislation, the government has effectively controlled access to broadcasting and information disseminated by independent broadcasting stations. The government's commitment to silencing the voices of the oppositionists is exemplified by Jonathan Moyo, a government official, who was quoted as saying:

“Why should we have a repeat of Basildon Peta on TV? Why should we have a repeat of Geoff Nyarota on television? We do not want that, and it is clear. They can cry tears of blood if they want. The evidence is clear. That means anyone who is given a channel must be vetted thoroughly. We made a mistake because we reached a stage where most newspapers in Zimbabwe were anti-Zimbabwean. Under no circumstances should we allow it in broadcasting...” (Moyo 2004: 12).

As a result, individuals who were not aligned with ZANU-PF could not be relied upon to oversee television broadcasting, due to concerns about public scrutiny and potential substantial criticism of ZANU-PF (Nkomo 2018: 142). Therefore, the aforementioned quote serves as evidence of ZANU-PF's apprehensions and its aspiration to maintain control over broadcasting for its own benefit.

2.3.2 The Public Order and Security Act (POSA) (2002)

The Public Order and Security Act (POSA) was enacted in 2002, serving as a modern counterpart to the Law-and-Order Maintenance Act (LOMA) from the Rhodesian era, which aimed to suppress dissent against the government (Mapuva & Muyengwa 2012: 135). This Act imposed limitations on the freedom of assembly and movement while granting discretionary powers to the police (Mapuva & Muyengwa 2012: 135). Under POSA, it is an offence to “cause discontent among the Police Force or Defence Force”, to “publish or communicate false statements prejudicial to the state”, and to “undermine the authority of the President”. The section of POSA primarily utilized against the opposition is titled “Public Gathering” (Sections 24-31 of POSA). Section 24 stipulates that anyone intending to organize a public gathering must notify the police four days in advance. Empowered by Section 25, the police possess the authority to impose restrictions on the gathering or even prohibit it entirely, as outlined in Section 26, if they possess reasonable grounds to believe that the gathering will lead to public disorder, breach of the peace, or obstruction of any thoroughfare.

POSA criminalised the distribution of political posters, pamphlets, or gatherings in physical public places and private homes without permission from the police (Manganga 2012). However, for many years, the provisions of POSA have been misunderstood or deliberately misapplied by the police (Mapuva & Muyengwa 2012: 135). On numerous occasions, the police have been accused of providing flimsy excuses for prohibiting gatherings (Mapuva & Muyengwa 2012: 136). Among a plethora of such excuses provided to the oppositionists, the police have falsely claimed that ZANU-PF has already booked the venue or that the gathering is likely to incite violence. At times, they have even gone to the extent of asserting that the responsible authorities for granting approval are unavailable. Notably, while opposition gatherings are routinely impeded, ZANU-PF gatherings are never subjected to prohibition (Mapuva & Muyengwa 2012: 136).

Under POSA, many oppositionists encountered significant challenges in expressing their political views without inadvertently violating one of the sections of the legislation. Sections 15-19 of POSA curtailed the following: freedom of speech, movement, and association (Mapuva & Muyengwa 2012: 135). Until its repeal and replacement by the Maintenance of Peace and Order Bill (MOPB) in 2019, POSA stood as the centrepiece of state-sanctioned repression, targeting members of the opposition and civil society as part of a comprehensive effort to curtail the ability to unite, organise and participate in mass actions (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2019).

The MOPB reveals an elaborate deceit intended to present a titular alteration as substantive reform (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2019). While the MOPB retains numerous provisions of POSA, it concurrently maintains its legislative assault on democratic freedoms (ibid.). Through this act, the government persists in implementing repressive laws while asserting the repeal of such laws, even though the MOPB effectively reintroduces POSA under a new name.

2.3.3 Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) (2002)

The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) was passed by the Parliament of Zimbabwe on January 31, 2002, and signed into law by President Mugabe on March 15, 2002. It was enacted during the same period as the POSA. According to Mapuva and Mutengwa (2012: 128), these two legislations complement each other in entrenching ZANU-PF hegemony and suppressing dissenting voices. The aim of AIPPA was to control the dissemination of information to the citizens, particularly the information accessible to the public. In enacting AIPPA, the ZANU-PF-led government argued that it sought to prevent the publication of manufactured and manipulable information that could be employed as a weapon of Zimbabwe's stability (Magaisa 2003). However, a brief historical perspective on AIPPA offers context as to why such repressive legislation was adopted. As previously highlighted, in the early 2000, ZANU-PF faced an

escalating challenge to its political dominance in Zimbabwe. The party encountered a rising opposition force, the MDC, along with an increasingly independent and assertive print media (Mendel & Mukundu 2004: 1). This mounting challenge to ZANU-PF's political supremacy prompted the introduction of AIPPA to hinder press freedom and suppress the private media.

AIPPA aimed to exert control over independent media through several mechanisms. It vested extensive authority in a Media and Information Commission (MIC), firmly under government control, and imposed registration and licensing requisites on both media outlets and individual journalists (Mendel & Mukundu 2004: 2). Under AIPPA, engaging in journalism was conditional upon registering with the MIC, which wielded exclusive discretion in issuing or denying licenses to radio stations and journalists, contingent on their alignment with the government's interests. This legislation, encompassing sections 23-30, subjected journalists, and media houses to summons before the courts of law for publishing material perceived by the state as prejudicial to national security. Journalists covering protests marches, economic policies, and internal ZANU-PF politics were susceptible to detention, torture, and harassment (Human Rights Watch 2010).

At the heart of AIPPA was the intent to stifle news critical of ZANU-PF, thereby fostering self-censorship within the media. The ZANU-PF government, employing AIPPA, sought to monopolize and control the public media sphere. This strategy diverted attention from criticisms alleging poor governance and human rights abuses (Mazango 2017: 42). The presence of AIPPA resulted in the opposition being denied the platform to present opposing viewpoints, consequently leading to their vilification. Until its repeal in 2020, numerous journalists lost their jobs, while other media workers faced similar fates (Crisis Coalition of Zimbabwe 2014: 2). This law has since been replaced by the new Freedom of Information Bill of 2019 [*Chapter 10:27*] (The Herald 2020). In brief, the Bill harmonizes Zimbabwean information-related laws with the Declaration of Rights in the constitution (The Herald 2020). These rights safeguard individuals from unwarranted abuse by government, other entities, or organisations (Veritas 2020: 2).

2.3.4 Interception of Communications Act 6 (2007)

The Interception of Communications Act (ICA) aims to “establish an interception of communication monitoring centre whose function is to monitor and intercept certain communications in the course of their transmission through a telecommunication, postal or any other related services system” (Mapuva & Muyengwa 2012: 141). The act infringes upon the basic human rights of numerous Zimbabweans as it even contravenes the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which affirms: “No one should be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, or to attacks on his integrity or reputation,” and

furthermore “Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interferences or attacks”. Consequently, individuals opposing the government find themselves in a precarious position where all their plans of action, political positions, and information become susceptible to monitoring by the ZANU-PF-led government. The act necessitated the demand for a shift in political communication that is devoid of government regulation and interference.

2.3.5 The emergence of alternative media as new public sphere in Zimbabwe

As a result of the various strategies taken by the Zimbabwean government to constrict the public communication spaces, Alexander (2006: 46) notes that:

“In Zimbabwe, the authoritarian state is the principal player in the media and policy regulation. Because of its undemocratic nature, the public media and spaces became important tools for maintaining and extending government authority. The ruling elites mightily prejudiced mainstream media, slanting it towards their official explanation of the events unfolding in the country, leaving the oppositionists with no space to tell their own narrative. Even the indigenous communication systems of physical public gatherings, music or theatre are manipulated, with acts or performance considered too critical of the government banned.”

As a consequence, discontented oppositionists, dissatisfied with the suppression of their voices and the restricted access to the public sphere, are increasingly turning to alternative communicative spaces, independent of government control, such as *Twitter* and *Facebook* (Ndlela 2010: 87). The term “alternative media,” as used by Sabao and Chikara (2020: 772), refers to any media that falls outside the realm of formal government-controlled mainstream media. Since its inception, *Twitter* has opened political communication spaces to alternative interpretations of unfolding events. It has provided a virtual platform for Zimbabwean oppositionists to initiate sensitive political discourses that were previously- suppressed or feared to be voiced in mainstream public spaces. Oppositional forces whose expressions or voices were previously stifled by the prevailing social order have turned to *Twitter* to present their counter-discourses, thereby challenging the ruling party’s hegemony in the national political public sphere (Ndlela 2010: 89).

Confronted with the growing voices of discontent on *Twitter*, the ZANU-PF regime adopted a reactive approach by using the same platform to counter the opposition’s discourse in defence of the ZANU-PF government (Chibuwe & Ureke 2016: 2). Consequently, *Twitter* has emerged as a new frontier for political communication in Zimbabwe, serving both the ruling party and its opposition.

2.4 The political actors

In this section, I aim to outline the various actors involved in the Zimbabwean political conflict. At this juncture, my objective is not to address the question of “who are the specific actors under consideration?” (Refer to Chapter 4 for details on the political actors whose tweets form the basis for the current research). Instead, I define different types of political actors, elucidate the objectives and interests pursued by each category, and explore the interpretation of their behaviour. This involves discerning whether certain behaviours are deliberate choices or outcomes compelled by the circumstances confronting these political actors (van der Eijik 2018: 55). Furthermore, I will elaborate on the interrelationships among diverse types of political actors. This will encompass identifying which side of the conflict they align with, assessing the degrees of dependence among them, and gauging the level of relative independence, thus delineating the power dynamic at play (van der Eijik 2018: 55).

Wolfsfeld (2015: 1) defines political actors as individuals who have acquired a certain degree of political power and/or authority within a specific society. These political actors engage in activities that wield substantial influence over decisions, policies, media coverage, and outcomes associated with a given conflict. This assertion underscores the fact that political actors encompass not only elected politicians chosen by the electorate but also pivotal figures within the body politic who shape the political narrative. In the context of Zimbabwe, this category encompasses leaders from both the ruling party and the main opposition party, human rights lawyers, journalists, political activists, independent politicians, senior government officials, and former cabinet ministers.

The classification of political actors in Zimbabwe hinges on fundamental characteristics that include individual, collective, or institutional aspects. As emphasized by van der Eijik (2018: 55), these dimensions assume significance in revealing the political actor’s goals, political power, and the resources at their disposal.

The central political actors in Zimbabwe encompass the leaders of both the ruling party and the principal opposition. While other political actors hold relevance and significance, they often emerge as adjuncts to the rivalry between these two factions. In the Zimbabwean context, the country's president assumes a pivotal role within the political landscape, embodying both an individual identity and serving as the face of the collective entity, ZANU-PF.

Much like the dynamics of numerous states, the president in Zimbabwe holds dual roles as the head of state and the leader of the ruling party. Under the prevailing constitution of Zimbabwe, the president wields a spectrum of powers. These powers encompass:

- a. The authority over the legislature, entailing the ability to convene, adjourn, and dissolve parliament, along with the prerogative to appoint members of parliament.
- b. Influence over the judiciary, encompassing the appointment of judges and other judicial personnel.
- c. The capability to nominate individuals for executive positions, including cabinet ministers and administrative officers.
- d. Control over the security forces, spanning both the defence forces and the police.
- e. Legislative prowess, entailing the authority to enact legislation.
- f. Assorted additional powers, such as the discretion to grant amnesty, reflecting the ability to exercise mercy (Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013).

Endowed with such extensive powers, the president occupies a central position within Zimbabwe's political landscape. However, as earlier mentioned, this authority has been wrongly wielded to align with the president's objectives and the interests of upholding his party's hegemony. Given the prevailing political climate and the challenges to his authority, the president's actions are construed as influenced by the circumstances faced by both his party and him. Chifamba (2021) asserts that the president unilaterally enacts laws that serve his own and his party's interests, effectively closing avenues for dissent, thereby rendering citizens and legislators incapacitated.

Another significant political actor in Zimbabwe is the leader of the main opposition party. Many of the contestations and events of political nature are shaped by the stance taken by the leader of the opposition party as an individual, as well as by the party as a collective. Within Zimbabwean politics, the opposition leader assumes the role of representing all opposing forces aimed at unseating the president and his ruling party. Despite posing a challenge to the ruling party's hegemony, the opposition leader possesses limited authority to shape the nation's political landscape in comparison to their counterpart. However, they garner the support of the populace, which views their party as a viable alternative to ZANU-PF. As an opposition leader, their objective is to champion the interests of the opposition population. Any action or decision undertaken by such a leader is deemed political and is bound to elicit responses from other political factions, including the ruling party (Laakso 2003).

Journalists hold significant roles as political actors in Zimbabwe, functioning as the public's eyes and ears. Much of the public's understanding of Zimbabwean politics is derived from their investigative efforts. They play a crucial role in informing the public about governance issues and

the behaviour of public officials. However, their political stance tends to align with one side of the political conflict, evident in how they shape their reporting. Based on the framing of their coverage, journalists are perceived as having political leanings. They are often categorized as either supportive of the government or aligned with the opposition. Their credibility is often judged based on the perceived stance they uphold. As a result, journalists can be classified into two groups — those who endorse the regime and those who oppose it. Presently in Zimbabwe, the journalists presumed to oppose the regime are those who offer critical analysis. Frequently, they have faced persecution on political grounds (Reuters Staff 2021).

Lawyers play a crucial role in upholding the rule of law and safeguarding human rights, including the rights to effective remedy, due process of law, fair trial, and the right to freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment (Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights – ZLHR 2021: 3). In a polarized country like Zimbabwe, lawyers are found on either side of the conflict, with the side they choose to represent largely determining their fate. In a nation where government suppresses protests and civic actions, the work of lawyers is profoundly affected (ZLHR 2021: 5).

Many lawyers who opt to represent the opposition face reprisals, threats, and intimidation in fulfilling their duties. The government frequently clashes with human rights lawyers, particularly those who are vocal about governance issues, in an attempt to silence them. These targeted human rights lawyers have historically defended human rights advocates, journalists, and opposition figures, marking them as targets and branding them enablers within the realm of political contestation (ZLHR 2021: 5).

Conversely, lawyers who advocate for the ruling party or its supporters are often seen as enablers. The public perception of lawyers in Zimbabwe is shaped by the political affiliations of the politicians they have represented in the past (ZLHR 2021: 5). As political actors, lawyers hold significance due to the perception that their perspectives on political events are rooted in a legal framework.

Another significant group of political actors in Zimbabwe are political activists who hold a certain degree of political power and authority. Their activities carry influence over decisions, policies, media coverage, and outcomes. Political activists are individuals who engage in activities motivated by disinterest, including supporting minority rights, advocating for political parties, combating discrimination, injustice, corruption, and misgovernance (Drozd 2015: 229).

Political activism gained prominence during the latter years of Mugabe's regime, with figures like Pastor Evan Mawarire leading mass political demonstrations for Mugabe's removal (Kademaunga 2019). Since then, political activists have become key players in Zimbabwe's political landscape. Based on Drozd's (2015) definition, political activists often find themselves at odds with the ruling party and government. In Zimbabwe, this is particularly true, as most political activists are vocal advocates of the anti-ZANU-PF/government narrative. Their opposition stance has subjected many of them to adverse outcomes such as death, imprisonment, and victimization (Kademaunga 2019). Political activists are perceived differently by the two political factions. Those in opposition view them as heroes, while ZANU-PF and the government regard them as villains (Kademaunga 2019).

Zimbabwe operates within a party-based political system, where dominant political parties have maintained control over elections for over 40 years (Machirori 2018). Despite this political landscape, independent candidates continue to contest in elections, albeit as marginal vote-getters. Ehin, Madise, Solvak, Taagepera, Vassil, and Vinkel (2013: 11) define an independent candidate as an individual whose nomination is not subject to appointment or endorsement by a political party or its equivalent.

Though numerous individuals have contested elections as independents, only a few have left a significant impact. Throughout Zimbabwean history, only three independent candidates—Themba P. Mliswa, Jonathan Moyo, and Margaret Dongo—have managed to secure seats (Machirori 2018). Notably, these successful independent candidates had prior affiliations with ZANU-PF, as highlighted by Machirori (2018).

Inclusion of independent candidates in my data corpus is motivated by their non-party alignment, which provides a seemingly neutral perspective on the unfolding political conflict in Zimbabwe. These candidates position themselves as opposition figures to both main parties, such as ZANU-PF and MDC, thereby exerting a considerable influence on decisions, policies, media coverage, and outcomes. Consequently, they elicit diverse reactions from the electorate.

Contrasting the above assertions, scholars like Ehin et al. (2013: 1) argue that independent candidates frequently find themselves standing as independents not due to principled positions, but rather as a temporary status resulting from circumstantial choices they make (Ehin et al. 2013: 1). These political actors, despite viewing themselves as independent candidates, are often perceived through the lens of the main political parties whose ideologies they resonate with. On numerous occasions, following their election, independent candidates join or re-join mainstream parties such as ZANU-PF and MDC (Ehin et al. 2013: 1).

Amidst the Zimbabwean political landscape, senior government officials who serve as civil or public servants are typically expected to maintain a non-partisan stance. However, many of these officials wield significant influence over political decisions, policies, media coverage, and outcomes. Among these senior government officials are the presidential spokesperson, permanent secretaries of various ministries, provincial and district administrators, magistrates, police, and army personnel, among others (Munhende 2020). Despite their anticipated non-partisanship, some of these officials have been observed openly supporting and defending ZANU-PF, the ruling party, as well as the actions of the Zimbabwean president and party leader (Munhende 2020). Many of them frequently appear in the media, dismissing opposition parties by attributing their motivations to Western colonial powers.

It is argued that a significant number of these officials align themselves with ZANU-PF to secure their positions and strive for upward mobility within the hierarchy (Anti-Corruption Trust of Southern Africa 2017). However, a special report by the Anti-Corruption Trust of Southern Africa in 2017 indicates that this politicization of civil servants is a result of their exploitation by the ruling party. The report asserts that the careers of these senior government officials within the public service are contingent upon their political affiliations (Anti-Corruption Trust 2017: 2).

2.5 Public political discourse in Zimbabwe

This section highlights the state of public political discourse in Zimbabwe, with a particular focus on the role of social media plays in the country's political discourse considering the political circumstances the country finds itself in.

2.5.1 The role of social media

The advent of social media platforms in Zimbabwe introduced new avenues for people to express themselves (Alodat, Al-Qora'n & Hamoud 2023: 1). During the tenure of former President Robert Mugabe, the prevailing government perspective was that social media served as a tool of dissent aimed at undermining the regime (Marima 2019: 3). According to Moyo (2021), Zimbabweans turned to social media to voice their dissatisfaction with the government's use of 'lawfare' against dissenting opinions. Consequently, in 2017, the government established the Ministry of Cyber-Security, Mitigation and Threat Detection to monitor online communications. This ministry, however, lost its significance when President Emmerson Mnangagwa assumed leadership (Marima 2019: 3). In 2019, the new administration introduced the Cybersecurity and Data Protection Bill [H.B. 18 2019.] aimed at curbing online criminal activities and targeting users of social media who disseminate fake news and defamatory content. This bill was passed into law in 2021 and it is now

called the Data and Cyber Protection Act of 2021. Recently, the government of Zimbabwe signed into law the Patriotic Act of 2023. This new law governs interaction on social media and face-to-face. The Act creates a new crime, “wilfully injuring the sovereignty and national interest of Zimbabwe.” It allows for monitoring and suppressing of any discourse critical of the government and carries harsh sentences, including death, for acts the government deems to be unpatriotic (The Conversation 2023).

Since its inception in Zimbabwe, social media has surpassed traditional formats such as radio, newspapers, and television (Mugari 2020: 1). Approximately six million people, out of a population of 15.3 million, are estimated to have access to social media, with *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* dominating the market, followed by *Twitter* and *YouTube* (Marima 2019: 1). While there are regulations governing social media usage, these laws primarily prioritize safeguarding the state rather than shielding individuals from the aggressive digital mobs (Mpofu & Chimhenga 2013: 2). Nevertheless, these platforms continue to serve as an outlet for citizens to express frustration towards the state and to organize civil action against economic, social, or political challenges (Marima 2019: 1).

ZANU-PF, historically less responsive to public engagement efforts in the months leading up to the 2018 elections, displayed a growing adeptness and strategic approach to social media manoeuvring (Kataneksa 2018). The president refined his social media platforms, transitioning from a medium primarily used for conveying seasonal compliments and party propaganda to verified platforms where he articulated his political vision, agenda, plans, and achievements (Kataneksa 2018).

Instances of stark polarity are readily observable on various social media platforms, often instigated by leaders of political parties themselves. On December 14, 2018, President Mnangagwa urged the youth of his party to remain vigilant and confront dissenting voices on social media, a call that notably intensified the prevailing polarity within Zimbabwean social media (Mungwari & Ndhlebe 2019: 285). Social media users have divided into two factions: ZANU-PF supporters, colloquially referred to as *Varakashi* or ‘thrashers’, and backers of the main opposition leader, the oppositionists (Marima 2019: 4). Exploiting the anonymity offered by many social media platforms, these platforms have transformed into tools for targeting unpopular public figures through character assassinations. Presently, social media is harnessed to rally support for respective parties and to disseminate disparaging messages about opposing parties, aimed at discrediting them (Tshuma, Tshuma & Ndlovu 2022: 2).

Fabricated, biased news is circulated through social media, often leading to public discontent, exemplified by the violence on August 1, 2018, which resulted in seven fatalities and numerous injuries (Marima 2019: 4). In the aftermath of elections, social media has been instrumental in asserting claims of voting irregularities, challenging electoral outcomes, and reflecting public sentiment (Kataneksa 2018). This utilization of social media prompted the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission to advocate for the prohibition of social media from circulating electoral matters, contending that these platforms are instrumental in disseminating harmful misinformation during election periods (Kataneksa 2018).

2.5.1.1 The role of *Twitter*

Zimbabwean *Twitter* feeds have evolved into digital town halls, serving as platforms for expressing dissent, debating the objectives, merits, and strategies of political and social transformation. More recently, they have transformed into arenas for interactions between the state and its citizens (Dendere 2019: 171). Historically, ordinary Zimbabweans found it perilous to engage in political discussions critical of the government, fearing for their personal safety. However, even as recently as 2016, *Twitter* has emerged as a tool for sourcing and disseminating political information, fundamentally altering the tenor and accessibility of Zimbabwean politics (Kataneksa 2018). It has become the preferred political podium for numerous politicians to address their supporters and serves as a primary source for breaking news for their followers (Chaparadza 2019).

Twitter has enabled ordinary citizens to engage with those in authority, even in competitive and authoritarian regimes (Pindayi 2021: 187). In Zimbabwe, the government has turned to *Twitter* to assuage public fears and frustrations, while also disseminating information related to its policy initiatives, political appointments, and international involvements (Kataneksa 2018). Simultaneously, the opposition continues to utilize the same platform to assert claims of election fraud and to seek funding for its political endeavours. This becomes especially relevant since the state-controlled media offers limited space for their messages (Chaparadza 2019). Consequently, *Twitter* seems to be fostering an environment in which the opposition can press those in power to be accountable and transparent, capitalizing on the platform's capability to expose information to an ever-expanding audience (Pindayi 2021: 187).

Twitter, serving as a platform for global communication, has amplified the visibility of lesser-known politicians, their political parties, and even individuals who might otherwise struggle to access broader audiences and gain recognition, eventually transforming them into significant political actors. Through this medium ordinary citizens engage in political discourse on nearly equal footing with established political figures, as they possess the relative freedom to comment on and analyse

anyone's tweets. Furthermore, non-governmental organizations focusing on human rights issues leverage *Twitter* to amplify awareness about human rights abuses, thus enhancing their visibility (Ndawana 2023: 54). However, within the context of an authoritarian regime like Zimbabwe, where individuals can face arrest and persecution for posting tweets that are perceived as politically oppositional to the ruling authority, participants are not entirely on equal footing. Those who align with the government tend to enjoy more leniencies than those expressing opposition viewpoints or principles (Pindayi 2021: 188). Despite these challenges, citizens persist in challenging authorities and overcoming their fear of retaliation by creating anonymous and pseudonymous accounts (Ndawana 2023: 54).

According to Pindayi (2021: 189), *Twitter* has enabled various political parties, individuals, and civic organizations to unite behind specific causes through hashtags and calls for protests and reforms, exemplified by the National Electoral Reform Agenda (NERA) Zimbabwe. NERA is a coalition of political parties formed in 2016 to advocate for electoral reforms in the country. Acting as a collaborative platform, *Twitter* has provided an avenue for political actors to seek support from foreign counterparts in raising awareness about specific political issues. This demonstration of creating awareness on political matters underscores how *Twitter* functions as an amplifier of ideas and events.

Twitter is enabling members of the Zimbabwean body politic to interrogate facts and subject information to scrutiny. Political actors who try to falsely claim credit for things they did not do are being named and shamed in ways that result in some issuing public apologies or retractions (Ausserhofer & Maireder 2013: 189). *Twitter* can thus arguably be said to have a significant influence on the behaviours of political actors in public.

Twitter is making its participants engage with material from a 'historical' perspective. This indicates that participants can build reputations through their cumulative tweets which are akin to unique identifiers (Pindayi 2021: 191). Thus, some participants understand how the tweets they post cumulatively create a perceived identity which for some result in a large following. The open nature of *Twitter* and the possibility to retract old conversations or tweets and to refer to previous tweets for verification purposes is changing the political field as the political actors cannot take their audiences for granted (Pindayi 2021: 191).

The fact that *Twitter* participants can support and substantiate each other's statements or perceptions makes it an endorsement platform (Pindayi 2021: 191). Accordingly, I argue that by rallying behind the same hashtags, participants who share the same ideologies assemble into

communities through sharing or tweeting of similar views. As argued by Pindayi (2021: 192), in some instances, *Twitter* endorsements create a semblance of trust and genuine relationships.

2.5.1.2 Political discourse on social media

According to a study released by Amnesty International in 2018, *Twitter* is characterized as a toxic environment due to the prevalence of abusive messages on the platform. This description holds true for the Zimbabwean *Twitter* landscape, confirming Amnesty International's observations. These platforms have evolved into new arenas for disputes, attacks, and smear campaigns targeted at individuals with differing political orientations. Similarly, Rowe (2014) asserts that counterparts on *Twitter* employ derogatory language, with a significant portion of their discourteous and impolite comments directed at opposition figures engaged in or tagged within discussions. These interactions often take the form of antagonistic responses, marked by polarizing undertones (Pindayi 2021: 188), frequently utilizing ethically offensive language. For many Zimbabweans, *Twitter* is perceived as an adversarial platform, where conversations can become demeaning, as evidenced by the use of hateful and prejudiced remarks directed at political actors (Pindayi 2021: 189).

Irreconcilable perspectives are some of the prominent features of the discourse observed on Zimbabwean *Twitter* platforms. Scholars such as Pindayi (2021: 192) attribute this phenomenon to the presence of *Varakashi* or 'Thrashers,' who are pro-ZANU-PF versus the oppositionists. As such, opinions around topical issues such as human rights abuses, misgovernance, corruption and sanctions are sharply divided as most *Varakashi* or 'Thrashers' dismiss the talk of these issues as misguided and biased while most oppositionists feel they are genuine reprisals from the state (Pindayi 2021: 192). As a result, the prevalent discourse can be seen as primarily personal and irrational, driven by subjectivity rather than objectivity.

2.5.1.3 Politeness norms versus trolling

In this section, I define politeness norms and elucidate their correlation with trolling. I will delve into how the concept of trolling, a linguistic phenomenon, can be comprehended across different societies. To achieve this, I interrogate African culture-specific discourse-based politeness principles through the lens of Western perspectives.

Hassen (2016: 1) defines politeness norms as the communication skills that a community develops to ensure smooth communication and/or maintain an autonomous place and avoid bad consequences that could potentially harm the communication. These norms serve to uphold the coherence of communication and prevent harm to those involved in the interaction. Nevertheless,

Hassen (2016: 1) observes that these norms, which encompass the rules or principles of linguistic behaviour, are contextually specific to language and culture rather than being universally applicable. Given the variability of politeness norms across societies, in this thesis I am interested in finding out if trolling is homogeneous or assumes various forms and degrees either in different societies or platforms.

Clarke (2020: 1) presents trolling as a multifunctional phenomenon that exhibits considerable variation, encompassing diverse behaviours and eliciting varying perceptions. This variation is not only evident in the behaviours themselves and how they are perceived but also in terms of the platform and community within which they manifest. In Makoni (2015), the author explores the interactions between politeness and trolling in African cultures, examining how these interactions are shaped by social and cultural factors. The study underscores that impoliteness cannot be approached with a one-size-fits-all perspective; instead, communicative behaviour must be contextualized within the cultural norms and values of the society in which it occurs. The perspectives offered by Clarke (2020) and Makoni (2015) are grounded in linguistic practices that a society deems as either polite or impolite.

Hence, trolling can be regarded as a departure from established politeness norms, albeit varying in the extent of divergence across different societies. Considering that trolling originates from Western contexts, its applicability in the African context necessitates scrutiny to ascertain whether it aligns with the perspectives found in Western literature. As mentioned earlier in Section 1.4, the exploration of the intersection between politeness and trolling within African political discourses is notably limited in comparison to Western political discourses. Subsequently, I present a selection of scholars who have examined these concepts in the context of African political discourses. Concluding this section, I contextualize my study within the existing literature.

Olupona (2011) explores the concept of “respectability politics” within the Yoruba culture and how it shapes political discourse either in online or offline spaces. His findings reveal that politeness and decorum are highly valued in Yoruba culture, and the values are reflected in political discourse where there is an emphasis on showing respect for opponents and avoiding personal attacks. Similarly, addressing the facet of respect in political communication, Onwumehili (2013) examines the role of politeness within Nigerian politics. He contends that Nigerian politicians frequently employ politeness as a strategy to uphold power and social standing, while voters are often drawn to candidates who exhibit politeness and respectfulness.

Conversely, Patrick and Spary (2018) undertake an analysis of the utilization of trolling and various manifestations of incivility within Kenyan political discourse on social media. Their investigation

leads to the conclusion that social media platforms in Kenya offer novel avenues for political expression, which in turn has facilitated the proliferation of hate speech and other uncivil behaviors. In a related context, Chachage (2017) explores the role of trolling in the context of the 2015 Tanzanian elections, investigating how it was harnessed as a form of political expression. Chachage's study asserts that trolling was wielded by opposition supporters to contest the ruling party's media dominance and serve as a means of resistance against governmental repression.

The insights linked to context in the studies I cited suggest that the use of politeness and trolling in African political discourses is shaped by a range of social, cultural, and political factors. The studies suggest that both politeness and trolling are important features of African political discourse, but they serve very different purposes and are often shaped by unique social, cultural, and political factors. Through this study, I seek to contribute to the importance of understanding the complex cultural, social, and political contexts that shape political discourses on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere.

2.5.2 Social cultural norms

In this section, I introduce and explain the linguistic behaviours that are deemed as polite within the Zimbabwean and broader African social contexts. In this endeavour, I highlight how trolling behaviours run counter to these established norms. Subsequently, I will conclude this section with a discussion surrounding gender-related aspects that occupy a central role within the discourses on the Zimbabwean *Twitter* platforms.

2.5.2.1 Politeness norms in Zimbabwean and African cultures

Politeness is a matter of considering the feelings of others as to how they should be interactionally treated, including behaving in a manner that demonstrates appropriate concern for interactors' social status and their social relationship (Brown 2015: 326). Thus, politeness is achieved through utterances which are actions that have guiding rules and norms prescribed by the context in which they are utilised.

According to Hicham (2013: 9), many speech acts are culturally specific. In Zimbabwe, there exist expectations tied to communicative behaviours, with rules governing desirable and valued conduct within public interactions. These rules contribute to a culture characterized by dignity, respect, and tolerance, shared among the nation's various tribes, including Korekore, Manyika, Karanga, Ndebele, Kalanga, Venda, Ndau, Chewa, and Tonga, among others (Kadenge & Mugari 2015: 24). Despite the diversity of these tribes and their respective traditions, they generally concur on numerous norms of social etiquette (Hicham 2013: 9). Hodza and Mararike (2015) emphasize that

Korekore, Manyika, and Karanga traditions place significant importance on family and community, underscoring values like mutuality, reciprocity, and respect, which contribute to social cohesion. This resonates with Hofstede's observation (1980) that Zimbabwean cultures, akin to many other African cultures such as Zulu, Yoruba, Swahili and Tswana, prioritize collectivism and community, whereas Western cultures tend to emphasize individualism and personal autonomy.

Zimbabwe, much like several other African countries, including South Africa subscribes to the principle of *Ubuntu* or 'humanness' philosophy, which is anchored in the culture of showing respect for fellow human beings (Letseka 2013). Mangena (2012: 11) defines *Ubuntu* as an ethical framework that governs the linguistic conduct of *Vanhu/Abantu* 'human beings' in the Shona and Ndebele languages. In Zimbabwe, these ethics are embodied in what Mangena (2012) terms the "Common Moral Position" (CMP). Within CMP, the community serves as the source, author, and custodian of linguistic moral standards whose objective is to create a selfless person who can live harmoniously with others (Mangena 2012: 61). Thus, CMP reflects all the widely accepted behaviours. Respecting others is deemed an essential principle in many Zimbabwean traditional and religious societies, as they uphold a non-violent co-existence within the community.

In discussing the African cultures, I do not presuppose that all African cultures have the same understanding of politeness. Rather, I contend that there are underlying similarities shared by numerous African societies which when contrasted with other cultures, reveal differences and similarities (Idang 2015: 97). In African cultures politeness is viewed as a set of communicative behaviours designed to reduce or prevent friction among interactants. However, according to Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness is a more complex concept that involves not only the avoidance of conflict but also the preservation of face during interactions. Traditional African societies are structured to ensure the respect, safety, and well-being of every individual. Owomoyela (2002: 111) says whatever ritual or ceremony we might examine in African cultures, we will find that its goal serves to formally establish the place and role of the individual or individuals concerned in the scheme of things, in order to maintain harmony and good order among humans. For example, among Ghanaians, politeness entails employing communicative behaviours that expresses respect or deference (Thompson & Anderson 2019: 101). During interactions, Ghanaians emphasise that a speaker must consider the elders and those in authority as more respectable than his or her co-equals (Thompson & Anderson 2019: 101). In this context, any breach of such social norms can readily be interpreted as impolite or even as trolling.

In South Africa, Zulu culture expresses politeness through *ukublonipha* which means "to respect." This code of respect is typically directed towards older or senior individuals, whether living or

deceased (Nene 2017: 6). In the Zulu society, politeness varies based on age, power dynamics and social status. According to Nene (2017: 28), in Zulu culture, if a speaker is of a lower status, they must consistently show politeness. For example, when addressing someone of higher status, a Zulu speaker may use honorifics such as *Nkosi* “King” or *Makhulu* “Elder” to convey respect and deference (Kunene 1990).

Similarly, respect for others is deeply ingrained in Zimbabwe’s culture. Chivaura and Muponde (2007) highlight the practice of greeting others and showing interest for their well-being, even if they are strangers. This value is instilled from a young age, with Chakanetsa (2017: np) noting that at a young age children are taught to interact with others in a particular respectful manner. Failing to do so is frowned upon and is taken as a sign of a poor upbringing or lack of respect (Chakanetsa 2017: np). Above all, this practice reflects the importance of mutual respect and solidarity within Zimbabwean culture.

In Shona culture, just like in several other cultures, the use of offensive words in everyday speech is unacceptable (Chabata & Mavhu 2005: 258). Within the Zimbabwean cultural context such Shona and Ndebele, the offensive words form a lexicon of terms that speakers are discouraged from using as these words are considered vulgar, obscene, impolite, insulting, or derogatory. Using such words contradicts the norms of good behaviour, as they harm the dignity or hurt the feelings of an individual or social group they reference (Chabata & Mavhu 2005:257). Such words are considered socially inappropriate, as their public use can bring embarrassment not only to the speaker and the listener but also their entire family, clan, and community. Violating these restrictions is seen as an act of impoliteness.

2.5.2.2 Gender and political discourse in Zimbabwe

Politics in Zimbabwe is systematically gendered. While all individuals are considered political beings, the treatment of women in politics conveys another message in Zimbabwe (Machingura & Machingura 2011: 120). Since its independence, the country, with a deeply conservative stance, consistently observes a lower percentage of women participating in politics compared to men, even though women make up over half of the electorate and of the total population of 15 million (Nyavaya 2022: np).

The expected politeness norms within the Zimbabwean cultural context are consistently violated in the realm of politics. Gendered notions, rooted in the aim to either exclude women entirely from politics or confine them to subordinate roles, permeate the political discourse (Changachirere 2020). This gendered aspect of politics in Zimbabwe is reinforced by patriarchal traditional beliefs,

which serve as a justification for this phenomenon. The political landscape is dominated by a masculine atmosphere, with the mainstream political arena being notably male dominated (Zigomo 2022: 527).

This gender bias is compounded by various forms of discrimination, stemming from both gender and other intersecting factors, that act as significant barriers preventing many women from fully engaging in Zimbabwean politics. Women's capabilities are often undermined through stereotypes that question their suitability for political involvement (Nyavaya 2022). While a few women manage to navigate this challenging environment, they often do so by aligning themselves with or tolerating the prevailing misogyny in these political spaces. In some cases, women active in Zimbabwean politics are perceived as being under the influence of male figures, casting doubt on their autonomy (Maphosa, Tshuma, and Maviza 2015: 128). The participation of women in politics, according to Maphosa, Tshuma, and Maviza (2015: 128), is sometimes seen as more of a manipulation tactic than a genuine effort to promote gender equality and equity.

The Zimbabwean society has often treated women in politics, whether leaders or supporters, with hostility. Women are frequently subjected to degrading discourse that portrays them as inferior beings. Nyavaya (2022) points out that women are either depicted as too weak to lead or are unfairly labelled as having loose morals. Kanji and Jazdowska (2010: 100) note that in Zimbabwe, there is a prevailing notion that women should be confined to domestic duties. Even when women choose to participate in politics, their moral character is often scrutinized. For instance, Sekai Holland, a politician from the MDC, has faced derogatory labels such as "whore," despite being married for 40 years (Machingura & Machingura 2011: 137).

In a more recent incident, Fadzai Mahere, a spokesperson for the Citizen Coalition for Change (CCC), took legal action in 2022 against online writer Edmund Kudzayi. She demanded USD100,000 in damages for his false allegation that she had engaged in an extramarital affair (Nyavaya 2022). This case exemplifies the extent to which women are targeted and falsely portrayed, using derogatory language and unfounded accusations, within the political discourse in Zimbabwe.

Women in politics often become targets of hate language and derogatory name-calling. This form of political hostility leads to the denigration of women's roles in politics, using various forms of language such as idioms, proverbs, and similes (Machingura & Machingura 2011: 137). Unfortunately, much of this hate language is directed not at women's political ideologies, but at their personal lives and femininity. They are subjected to derogatory terms such as "prostitutes," "uncultured," "childless," "witches," and "violent" (Machingura & Machingura 2011: 121), all of

which serve the patriarchal agenda. These negative labels reflect the broader societal attitudes concerning gender and power in Zimbabwe. Despite efforts to advance gender equality in the country, deeply entrenched cultural and traditional norms persist, continuing to marginalize women in the realm of politics.

Political discussions involving women often take a troubling turn when male opponents resort to targeting womanhood during disagreements. Linda Masarira (a Zimbabwean female politician and human rights activist who is the current president of the Labour, Economists, and African Democrats party (LEAD), which she founded in 2019) highlighted this issue in an interview with Al Jazeera, explaining that women often experience body shaming, invasive questioning about their personal lives, and other forms of violence that are rarely directed at their male counterparts (Nyavaya 2022).

In this thesis, I aim to explore how men in Zimbabwean political discourses respond to trolling when they become targets or victims. To achieve this, I focus on analysing a corpus dominated by male voices. This approach does not diminish the importance of women's discourse; rather, it is intended to provide a cohesive understanding of how gender influences trolling and reputation management.

While the internet has brought about positive changes to humanity, it has also facilitated harmful and hurtful gendered behaviours. It has enabled the perpetuation of psychological, emotional, and sexually explicit violent language against women, reinforcing patriarchal biases rooted in culture and religion. Ncube and Yemurai (2020: 59) established that women are on the receiving end of men's trolling in Zimbabwean social media spaces. They argue that women who find themselves in the male dominated field of politics often become victims of sexist harassment online. They suggest that trolling, mostly perpetrated by men, aims to subject women to the authority of patriarchal figures in the political sphere (Ncube and Yemurai 2020: 59).

It would be inaccurate to claim that trolling exclusively targets women, as men also face such experiences. However, the prevalence of trolling against women surpasses that against men. Cornell et al. (2022: 309) suggest that, on average, women tend to use more respectful language compared to their male counterparts. Ncube and Yemurai (2020) emphasize that Zimbabwean societal norms often expect men to demonstrate authority and dominate over women. They argue that this gendered linguistic behaviour is shaped by cultural norms, positioning women as expected to be submissive and passive in their speech. This perception of feminine qualities as weak and vulnerable creates a platform for toxic behaviours, allowing men to assert superiority over women. This contradicts the principles of politeness and *ubuntu*, as these behaviours disregard respect and

kindness towards women. Politeness and *ubuntu* entail treating all individuals with respect and kindness, regardless of their gender.

According to Wagner (2020: 1), scholars widely agree that the internet has given rise to a new type of abuse known as trolling, particularly targeting women within the Zimbabwean political context. Chemaly (2014) asserts that trolling disproportionately affects women compared to men. Women involved in politics, whether as leaders or supporters, confront various forms of sexist, misogynistic, degrading, and stereotypical portrayals (Siddiqua, Gong & Aksar 2023: 19). The prevalence of trolling primarily aimed at females by males prompts an exploration of gender and power dynamics within Zimbabwean societies. Given this context, it is pertinent to examine this matter through a male-oriented perspective, focusing on a male corpus, to understand how men's engagement in trolling may relate to their perception of masculinity and power.

The targeting of women by trolling from men in Zimbabwe has its roots in societal factors. It is argued that prevailing social realities, including patriarchy, discourage women's participation and contribute to the trolling aimed at women who challenge patriarchal norms. As highlighted by Siddiqua, Gong and Aksar (2023: 19), when women enter the traditionally male-dominated sphere of politics, they symbolically challenge masculine power and dominance. Zimbabwe has yet to achieve a balance of ideas and roles between genders (Ncube & Yemurai 2020: 59), resulting in women who engage in politics, a domain traditionally dominated by men, becoming targets of trolling by male opponents based on their gender. This form of trolling often involves sexist, misogynistic, degrading, and stereotypical portrayals, as previously mentioned.

Numerous Zimbabwean online political platforms are under the control of males, reinforcing patriarchal dominance. In comparison to men, women's experiences in Zimbabwean politics are shaped by societal norms that position men as leaders and women as subordinates. Scholars like Hungwe (2006: 43) frequently assert that politics in Zimbabwe is a contentious arena, particularly so for women. Most political conflicts are predominantly among men, as many women avoid the gender-biased hostility they encounter from their male counterparts and even from other women who uphold the patriarchal structure.

Due to the potential for demeaning treatment in the public sphere (Machingura & Machingura 2011: 143), many women opt to avoid politics. This disparaging discourse functions as a means of asserting the relative social power that males hold over females. Irrespective of their political affiliations, women are frequently subjected to degrading language, a contrast to their male counterparts. Women who excel or challenge the prevailing male narrative are frequently dismissed as "men," effectively erasing their female identity. As Machingura and Machingura (2011: 137)

explain, a widely used saying in Zimbabwe is “*Murume pachake*,” which translates to “she is a man.” This saying implies that masculinity is more esteemed than femininity.

Given the points discussed in this section, it is important to acknowledge that the research design of this study does not permit a comprehensive exploration of the degree to which gendered aspects are present in trolling within Zimbabwean political discourse on *Twitter*.

2.5.2.3 Clash between “Africanness” and global online discourse

To better understand linguistic strategies for managing online reputation the discussion here centres around what it means to be an African political actor who embodies African political thoughts within a global online platform. Guy (2012: 17) defines African political thought as the original ideas, values, theories, and ideologies developed by various African thinkers to inform African political behaviours and institutions of today. Within values, I am interested mainly in the moral values. Idang (2015: 104) states that African culture has a moral code such as *ubuntu* that forbids doing harm to a relative, a kinsman, an in-law, a foreigner, and a stranger, except when such a person is involved in an immoral act.

Idang (2015: 104) points out that African culture upholds a moral framework that prohibits harming relatives, kin, in-laws, foreigners, and strangers, unless these individuals engage in immoral acts. Turning to political discourse, Lajul (2020: 177) highlights how political thought is mirrored in the way a system or practice is discussed. In this light, African political thought encompasses ideologies developed by various African scholars and states people in their political exchanges. Notably, the emphasis is on ideas rather than individual personalities (Guy 2012: 17). According to Van Dijk (2006: 734), political discourses find expression and propagation through textual and spoken structures.

When examining Africanness, it is essential to avoid assuming uniform explanations for expected behaviours across all African societies. Instead, numerous shared underlying similarities exist among many African cultures. These similarities, when juxtaposed against other cultural contexts, can highlight substantial disparities (Idang 2015: 97). For instance, in much of Southern Africa, the concept of *ubuntu* assumes a central role in shaping political discussions. *Ubuntu's* inclusive ethos binds individuals to moral and ethical responsibilities. Eliastam (2015: 1) states that *ubuntu* offers possibilities for nation building and social cohesion in Southern African states. However, though African people engage with others in online global platforms, their experiences have hardly been explored from an *ubuntu* perspective within online political discussions.

All forms of discursive practices are understood to be context-specific to some extent and contribute to the well-being of both individuals and the society they exist within. This implies that no particular discursive practice should be considered inherently superior to others. However, historical instances demonstrate that etiquette systems imposed by colonizing powers often positioned themselves as the sole legitimate forms of discourse, thereby excluding the discursive practices of the colonized (Murove 2021). For instance, the concept of “face,” which is central to this study and the examination of politeness, has predominantly been asserted by Brown and Levinson (1987: 62) as a universal concept, with its strategies for preserving one’s dignity seen as universally applicable. This assertion is noteworthy, given that the concept originates from an individualistic society, which contrasts with many African societies that have a collectivistic orientation (Brown 2007).

Trolling issues within African contexts have often been analysed through the lens of Eurocentric individualistic societies, often overlooking the significance of African ethnic life experiences. In this thesis, I contend that discourses and practices related to trolling and relational dynamics are adopted, contested, and transformed based on specific situations and relationships. Through this study, my aim is to determine whether there are any similarities or differences between discursive practices observed on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere and those in the broader global context.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has highlighted the current socio-political and socio-cultural landscape in Zimbabwe. To comprehend the prevailing political status quo, I provided an overview of the political terrain by detailing the historical struggles that have shaped the country’s current political situation. I explained the evolution of political communication spaces from colonial to post-colonial times. This narrative is vital as it furnishes a backdrop to the linguistic aspects investigated in this study.

Subsequently, I delved into the emergence of political public discourse stemming from the aforementioned socio-political context. Given the existing political conditions, it became crucial to elucidate how these conditions have contributed to the development of political discourse in both virtual and physical public arenas. Following the discussion on political discourse, I explored the socio-cultural norms prevalent in Zimbabwe. This discourse offered insights into the normative discursive practices of Zimbabwean people, shedding light on what is considered “normal” or “taboo” within Zimbabwean discursive contexts. These norms are particularly influential in shaping the interactions, expectations, and limitations of political actors, especially in relation to gender roles.

The significance of this section lies in its ability to lay a clear foundation for comprehending the politeness concepts to be further discussed in the subsequent chapters. Through this chapter, I provided a description of political actors, enhancing the understanding and appreciation of the selected political actors outlined in the methodology section (in terms of the political conflict side they represent) and facilitating data analysis (in terms of appreciating and comprehending their behaviour).

Chapter three

Literature review

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provides an overview of the socio-political and socio-cultural landscape in Zimbabwe, serving as a foundation for understanding the political discourse present in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. This chapter aims to position the current study within the existing literature, shedding light on its key concepts such as linguistic im-/politeness, online reputation, and the significance of *Twitter* as a platform. Additionally, it emphasizes the necessity for African scholarship to address topics relevant to this study.

3.2 Linguistic politeness in online reputation management.

Within the existing literature, the integration of linguistic politeness with reputation management has been a seldom explored area. Yule (2010: 135) defines linguistic politeness as “displaying awareness and consideration of another person’s preferred reputation through minimizing the possibility of conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange”. In this sense, politeness is viewed as speech, guided by the basic pragmatic rules of a specific language system, which determines the social appropriateness of an utterance. Thus, politeness is showcased as a framework that underscores the interpersonal aspect of our everyday language use. In this thesis, I probe into verbal linguistic politeness as it manifests in written text, a manifestation termed “written politeness” (Pratama 2019: 1). Moreover, I adopt the perspective of (online) reputation management as defined by Pak (2010: 2051), wherein it pertains to how individuals or organizations navigate potentially damaging content on the internet to safeguard their reputation.

Numerous politeness theories such as the Grice (1975) co-operative principle and Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory were formulated prior to the rise of online platforms, and their emphasis largely pertains to in-person interactions. Nevertheless, as human communication transitions from face-to-face exchanges to digital engagements, it becomes evident from existing literature that there exists a requirement for investigations into the application of politeness theories in digital interactions. This study contributes to the larger research sphere that aims to fill this gap.

While a lot has changed because of the transition from face-to-face to online interactions, the challenge of social friction has remained (Pratama 2019: 2). Many online interactions are tainted by this social friction, and I concur with Pratama (2019: 5) in asserting that upholding a positive

online reputation has become increasingly elusive. The following literature explores further how the aspect of linguistic politeness and online reputation management might be treated.

I initiate this discussion with an examination of the central concepts of relational work and interpersonal pragmatics. These concepts play a pivotal role in advancing my subsequent analysis, as they offer a deeper comprehension of the essence of linguistic politeness and online reputation management. Following this, I critically evaluate the theoretical constructs of politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987; Arundale 2010) and trolling in the public sphere (Habermas 1964) against the background of this thesis.

3.2.1 Relational work and interpersonal pragmatics

In any research involving interactions, the understanding of politeness is intrinsically linked to the concept of relational work. Relational work is a fundamental aspect of reputation management and can be defined as “the efforts individuals invest in negotiating their desired images and relationships during interactions, encompassing the entire range of interpersonal dynamics, including both polite and impolite forms of communication” (Locher 2005: 10). In this section, I discuss relational work within the confines of impoliteness studies. Additionally, I aim to connect the concept to the aspects of online reputation management and interpersonal pragmatics as they play out in the digital space.

Locher and Graham (2010: 2) offer the term “interpersonal pragmatics” for research interested in studying the relational side of language in use. This suggests that social beings express, communicate, and ultimately negotiate preferred reputations through using language and other semiotic means (Locher 2008: 509). As such, the concepts of relational work and interpersonal pragmatics are inherently intertwined with the realms of linguistic politeness and reputation management. The way language is used plays a crucial role in enhancing, maintaining, and challenging both reputations and relationships in interpersonal communication.

In social contexts, “relational work” refers to the conscious effort made by individuals to shape an image for themselves or others. According to Locher (2008: 510), the term “relational work” indicates that interlocutors invest work into their ways of communicating by adapting their language to different speech goals they are pursuing. This implies that participants consider the impression they intend to convey by meticulously choosing linguistic elements. Against this backdrop I argue that relational work does not only refer to polite linguistic behaviour but is meant to cover the entire spectrum of interpersonal linguistic behaviour.

The examination of relational work within the realm of interpersonal pragmatics is firmly established in linguistic research (Locher 2013: 146). Classic literature such as Brown and Levinson (1978/1987) and Leech (1983) privileges the harmonious aspects of linguistic interaction, being based on the Gricean Co-operative Principle (CP) (Grice 1975). The CP implies that the primary purpose of speakers is to cooperate. While much of the classic literature centres on maintaining or enhancing relationships, it does not emphasize the impact of aggressive language on an individual's reputation or identity, as pursued in my study. Studies that investigate cases in which language is used not to cooperate, but to cause harm, are rare (Locher 2008: 78). Through this study, I aim to address this gap.

Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004: 2) state that violence is present as a capability in each of us, as much as its opposite – the rejection of violence. However, a few studies such as Culpeper's (2011) focus on conflictual aggravating behaviour with respect to identity construction more generally. Within the interpersonal pragmatics rubric, Culpeper seeks to address the question of how identity is constructed, sustained, debased, and threatened in impolite interactions (Silva 2013: 257). While many scholars concentrate on cooperative exchanges, Culpeper (2011) centres his study on aggressive and offensive relational behaviour that lies at the fringes of linguistic theories (Silk 2013: 257). In alignment with Culpeper (2011), I contend that assuming harmony as the default mode of online interaction is biased and fails to mirror the reality of less-than-ideal discourse. However, the existing literature in the field of relational work and interpersonal pragmatics falls short in addressing this crucial issue. Therefore, there is a pressing need for further academic exploration and critical analysis of non-ideal speech in online communication, to challenge and denounce the notion of harmonious communication as the normative standard.

Culpeper (2011) notably investigates the intricate relationship between language and violence, aiming to unravel how language is linked to violence and whether it can be wielded as a form of violence or a means to counter it. His findings reveal that language itself can be deployed as violence in interpersonal interactions (Silva 2013: 259). Culpeper (2011) observes that expressions of racism, misogyny, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination, which constitute a significant portion of trolling discourse, exert their own brand of violence that inflicts wounds, harm, or lasting damage to the reputation of the targeted individual. Thus, any discourse of trolling is regarded as a verbal assault and the uttering of offensive or disparaging words is viewed as an enactment of violence.

Culpeper (2011) engages in the analysis of impolite discourse that is similar to the *Twitter* exchanges I am interrogating; however, he branches off by focusing on general interpersonal encounters

without regard to a specific context. In contrast, I explore online interpersonal encounters to understand how language used by interactants influences reputation and interpersonal relationships. Nonetheless, the ideal I replicate from Culpeper's study is his denouncement of classic relational theories as tending to give the impression that impoliteness in interpersonal pragmatics is pragmatic failure, a consequence of not doing something, or merely anomalous behaviour, not worthy of consideration (Culpeper 2011: 6).

Culpeper contributes significant theoretical insights concerning the examination of symbolic violence in language usage, as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, he addresses crucial aspects related to relational and interpersonal linguistics, including the stability of meaning, intentionality, the historical context of offensive linguistic forms, and elements of identity preservation and degradation through language (Silk 2013: 261). These dimensions shape my comprehension of impoliteness and offer valuable perspectives into how such linguistic behaviours impact individuals' social reputations and interpersonal relationships.

Despite several studies concentrating on relational work (Locher 2013; Locher & Graham 2010; Locher & Langlotz 2008), the field still lacks comprehensive research on relational work and interpersonal pragmatics within the context of online reputation management. By way of example, many studies are primarily theoretical (e.g., Locher 2013; Culpeper 2007; Donaghue 2018; Locher & Watts 2008) as they focus on defining terms while hardly focusing on empirical data. My research diverges from the theoretical approach by encompassing practical and empirical aspects.

Locher (2013: 145) underwent a similar shift as she reacts to several issues raised by other scholars in connection to the notion of relational work. Notably, Locher (2013: 146) contends that relational work underscores reputations as dynamic constructs that arise from interactions within specific contexts, relative to contextual norms. Consistent with previous literature, Locher (2013: 146) notes that reputation effects are aggravated, maintained, or enhanced by choosing different language options.

Apart from the above-mentioned, Locher (2013: 148) addresses numerous comments from other scholars about terminology applied to relational work. According to Locher (2013: 148), the terms "face", "impoliteness" and "relations" are interconnected but operate on different levels. As a result, the concept of relational work holds a central position in the field of interactional linguistic studies, given that language significantly influences the establishment of relationships and reputations among interactants. Currently, social media platforms worldwide, such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*, promote the use of language that fosters positive relationships and harmonious interactions

among online users (Pohjonen 2019: 3088). The relevance of my study becomes evident in light of these platforms recognizing the necessity for users to coexist harmoniously.

As highlighted by Pohjonen (2019), the issue of personal attacks and reputational smearing is posing a threat to the harmonious coexistence of individuals on digital platforms globally. Online negativity is jeopardizing interactional opportunities and coordinated engagements among significant stakeholders in societies. Thus, research that integrates relational work and interpersonal pragmatics is necessary. The current study seeks to offer recommendations on how political actors in digital spaces can linguistically manage their reputation in the face of adversity.

This research represents a significant contribution to the scholarship on relational work by examining it through an African lens, an area that has received scant attention to date. Given that the theoretical underpinnings of this study derive primarily from the Global North, it is crucial to explore how individuals in African political contexts engage in and navigate the various threats that can potentially damage their reputations. This research seeks to uncover whether there is a discernible and distinctive approach to communication in this context or whether there is a tendency towards homogenization with globalized behaviours. Therefore, this study contributes to testing the applicability of selected Global North theories outside the context of their origin.

3.2.2 Relational work in dispute: Negotiating norms, negotiating relationships

In pragmatics, studies focusing on the relational aspect of communication used to fall under the heading of politeness which entails behaviour that is respectful and considerate of other people (Hu 2021: 133). However, in recent times, research on politeness has expanded to encompass a broader framework of interpersonal relationships, including impoliteness as a phenomenon present in contentious interpersonal interactions (Culpeper 2011). According to Haugh, Kadar and Mills (2013: 1), several concepts such as, “relational work”, “rapport management”, or “face constituting” have been introduced in the reconceptualization of politeness to align with the aspect of interpersonal relations rather than a focus on the individual performing politeness.

For scholars investigating relational work, the focus of politeness research should be the discursive concept and the discursive dispute in which interactants engage (Kadar 2011: 251). In the past, for example, in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) seminal work on politeness, politeness mainly dealt with what was considered “good behaviours”. Contemporary politeness studies such as Haugh, Kadar & Mills (2013), however, cover both the polite and the impolite concepts. Thus, from a relational work perspective the concern is on the discursive negotiability of what is regarded as polite and impolite behaviour by the interactants themselves. In view of this position, the interactants’

evaluation of what is deemed polite or impolite takes centre stage in my study. As a field, the discursive is based on the theorization of politeness analysis as “first-order vs. second-order” (see detailed discussion of these concepts on Section 3.4) (Kadar 2011: 250).

The assessment of what qualifies as polite or impolite behaviour by the interactants themselves remains a topic of debate within the framework of relational work. As Mills (2011: 47) points out, the focus on judgement or evaluations of the polite or impolite by interactants creates some difficulties. Critics argue that the concept of relational work merely shifts the perspective from the speaker performing politeness to the addressee evaluating politeness. A potential solution to this issue, in my view, could involve incorporating both first-order and second-order (Kadar & Haugh 2013) approaches.

Kadar and Haugh (2013: 69) point out that evaluations of im-/politeness are subject to disagreement, “because members of different groups, or even members of the same group, do not always perceive the moral order in the same way.” This reveals that judgement of relational work vary because members of different groups adopt different norms. Even among members of the same group who are expected to share norms, whether they are localized, group-based, or societal norms, there might be variations. Therefore, the challenge is in knowing the norms of appropriate behaviour applicable to the given context.

Norms of behaviour are shaped by the specific expectations set by the social situation (Locher & Watts 2008: 78). As noted by Locher and Watts (2008: 78), “frames” refer to individuals’ cognitive conceptualizations of experiences, past situations, or notions of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour that have developed through their own history of individual or social practice. Variations in individual experiences can lead to differing norms, which in turn results in varying judgments of relational work or politeness (Hu 2021: 138). Any divergence between the expected shared norms and frames can potentially become a fertile ground for disputes to arise.

Culpeper (2008: 29) identifies three types of norms which are: experiential norms, situational norms, and co-textual norms. His research indicates that these norms may be pertinent to individuals engaged in an interaction, guided by the context. Nevertheless, there’s no assurance that they will utilize the same set of norms to interpret utterances, even if they share experiential norms.

Participants in communication account for each other to an established normative background. Notably, the claim to normative rightness can be upheld or challenged by the interactants (Hu 2021: 142). This implies that the assessment of politeness is regarded as politic/polite when it

upholds the claim of normative rightness. Conversely, when participants disagree with the speaker's claims of normative correctness or find them unjustified, they contest or dispute them (Hu 2021: 142). As a result, the speaker can face diverse evaluations of inappropriateness, a common focus in impoliteness studies. Often, when normative rightness is disputed, it indicates that the addressee negatively perceives the speaker's utterance.

Culpeper (2011: 14) suggests that the contention over politeness assessments is rooted in the norms that underpin these judgments. This demonstrates that the "speaker in saying what he/she says, raises a claim to normative rightness, which can be inferred from the hearer's act of evaluating the speaker's utterance against norms" (Hu 2021: 142). Therefore, discerning the acts of raising a normative rightness claim and responding to it (or judging it) helps in understanding the way in which participants in interaction negotiate relationships by negotiating norms (Hu 2021: 142). It can be argued that divergent frames of expectations serve as the foundation for disagreements that arise during interactions.

Thus, recent research on politeness has expanded its scope to encompass the broader context of relationships and interaction, treating politeness as an evaluative assessment guided by norms and expectations (Culpeper, O'Driscoll & Hardaker 2019: 175). Hu (2021) notably contributes to the realm of relational dynamics by investigating the normative foundation of relational work. His study explores the usefulness of norm variation by analysing different cases of norm variation which can be seen to underlie relational work dispute. Norms, norm variation, and relational work are relevant concepts in online interactions. Norms provide a framework for acceptable behaviour in a given context, while norm variation refers to differences in norms across contexts or cultures (Hu 2021: 1). Relational work is the effort individuals make to maintain or establish relationships with others (Haugh, Kadar and Mills 2013: 1) Grasping and navigating these factors holds importance for fostering positive online relationships. This entails understanding contextual norms, respecting variations in norms, and engaging in constructive relational efforts.

Hu's (2021) study takes a comprehensive view of relational dynamics that goes beyond the confines of politeness and impoliteness. Pertinent to this research is the exploration, wherein he suggests that the concept of contextual norms could be further developed to enrich the investigation of communication's relational dimension. This motivation drives me to employ a foundational theory, specifically Politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1987) from the Global North, to comprehend reputation management issues in the Global South. This allows me to identify potential limitations in the theory's universal applicability.

However, my focus in this study is directed towards the online realm, which is regarded as a new public sphere in the 21st century (Cela 2015: 195). The new space has been termed a “networked public sphere” whose norms may differ from the norms of the physical public spheres (Cela 2015: 196). I seek to understand how norm variations are negotiated by interactants in a contentious field of politics considering the online platform they engage. Additionally, I strive to unravel how these interactants can effectively manage their online reputations through linguistic strategies, even when they hold differing opinions on other subjects.

3.2.3 Political expression versus hate speech

In this section, I explore the boundaries and constraints of political expression and hate speech from a Zimbabwean viewpoint. I assert that the right to political expression holds significant importance within any democratic framework (Vosloo 2011: 9). Nevertheless, it is crucial to establish a well-defined scope for this freedom, allowing a distinct differentiation between political expression and hate speech, particularly in online environments.

The Zimbabwean Constitution (2013) Chapter 4-Part 2 considers fundamental human rights and freedoms and addresses the question of political expression and hate speech. The issue of political expression is touched under Chapter 4-Part 2 Section 60 Sub-section B which states that everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, which includes the freedom to practise and propagate and give expression to their thought, opinion, religion, or belief, whether in public or in private and whether alone or together with others. Chapter 4-Part 2 Section 61 Sub-section 1 then says every person has the right to freedom of expression. Chapter 4-Part 2 Section 61 Sub-section 5 furthermore states that freedom of expression excludes incitement to violence, advocacy of hatred or hate speech and malicious injury to a person’s reputation or dignity.

However, the same constitution now includes statutes like the Criminal Law Codification and Reform Amendment Bill, commonly referred to as the “Patriotic Bill” of 2023, which impose limitations on these fundamental freedoms. The Patriotic Bill of 2023 criminalizes and prohibits citizens from “wilfully damaging the sovereignty and national interest” of the country. This effectively means that individuals are prohibited from making statements that could be considered unpatriotic towards the country. According to Amnesty International (2023), this statute restricts the rights of Zimbabweans to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association, ironically, rights that are also protected by the same constitution.

Considering the aforementioned, it can be argued that the Zimbabwean constitution provides a unclear position of political expression and hate speech. While it upholds the essential right of

freedom of expression, it also explicitly excludes hate speech that could harm the reputation and dignity of others. This prompts the question of whose assessment determines whether an utterance falls under political expression or hate speech. It is evident that the criteria for assessing damage to reputation and dignity lack clarity in terms of measurement, raising uncertainty regarding the categorization of an utterance. The inquiry arises regarding whose perspective is employed in classifying an utterance – does it rely on localized norms, group-specific norms, societal norms, or even global norms?

Moreover, the issue of context comes to the forefront. When comparing online spaces to physical environments, the complexity of enforcing regulations akin to those outlined in the Zimbabwean constitution becomes evident in the digital realm. The tension between the cross-border nature of the internet and national jurisdictions creates challenges for their application (De La Chapelle & Fehlinger 2016: 4). Online platforms transcend physical boundaries, enabling interactions among individuals from various legal domains, thereby complicating the uniform application of laws. Nonetheless, it's worth highlighting that the legal regulations of each individual's country of residence still hold sway over them, irrespective of the online interaction's location.

According to Fombad (2022: 220), Zimbabwe has witnessed a decline in the rule of law alongside an increase in human rights abuses. Makgale and Mpani (2023) point out that hate speech has been employed by political entities to propagate their ideologies and criticize opponents, often masquerading as political expression. The authors also emphasize that the proliferation of online platforms has facilitated the dissemination of hate speech, making it difficult to effectively manage. Sande and Maforo's (2022) study explore how politicians employ hate speech as electioneering strategy and concludes that hate speech from politicians is socialising some Zimbabweans into violent, angry individuals, murderers, and vandals.

Sande and Maforo (2022) emphasize the societal impact of hate speech under the guise of political expression. Their research underscores that this issue of utilizing hate speech within political discussions is evident empirically within the Zimbabwean context. The findings shed light on the detrimental effects of this phenomenon on Zimbabwean society. Their study highlights that in contexts where the rule of law is disregarded, political expression can easily devolve into hate speech, causing harm to individuals' reputation and dignity.

From a linguistic standpoint, I aim to highlight the distinctions between political expression and hate speech. Political expression involves conveying thoughts and perspectives through diverse communication channels (Velasquez & Rojas 2017: 13). Of interest in the definition is that it does not specify how the thoughts and views should be expressed, a departure from hate speech.

According to the South African Human Rights Commission (2019: 3), hate speech is defined as an expression which goes beyond mere insults or offensive language, and which may infringe the dignity of certain persons or groups. Similarly, the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (2020: 9) characterises hate speech as public speech expressing hatred towards a group or an individual based on grounds such as ethnicity, political affiliation, gender, or religion. From the two definitions, we construe that hate speech covers many forms of linguistic expressions that spread, incite, promote, or justify hatred, violence and discrimination against a person or group of persons for a variety of reasons.

Regarding the distinction between political expression and hate speech, my focus lies on the intricate ways language is utilized to convey ideas, whether as straightforward political expression or as hate speech. I also emphasize the connection between linguistic expression and the management of reputation, both from the perspective of the speaker and the recipient. Moreover, I contend that the failure of individuals to differentiate between political expression and hate speech has contributed to an escalation of rudeness on social media platforms (Maity, Chakraborty, Goyal & Mukherjee 2018: 1). Valera (2012: 311) refers to this phenomenon as the “radicalization of public debate”.

Several studies have argued that political interactions seem to be characterised by the strengthening of hostile messages against ideological adversaries and a rise in polarised positions (Hernandez-Santaolalla & Sola-Morales 2019: 155). The consensus is that globally, political expression is shifting towards hate speech. Cabo-Isasi and Garcia-Juanatey (2016: 4) point out that there is a universal proliferation of extremist messages across various contexts.

Despite the various contexts in which the term ‘hate speech’ may arise, I interpret it as a linguistic form that fosters intolerance, violence, and bias against others (Gagliardone, Gal, Alves & Martinez 2015). Given the direction to which political expression is moving globally, it becomes crucial for this study to propose strategies to counteract hate speech in a manner that safeguards the reputations of those involved. It is evident that social capital is being threatened by the existence of hate speech. In the words of Naim (2019) hate speech in online environments can be considered a “global pandemic”. Thus, fostering harmonious coexistence among politically differing individuals is a primary objective I aim to achieve through this study.

The attention I give herein to the concepts of political expression and hate speech forefronts the discussion of how the concepts manifest in contemporary online spaces. I assert the importance of comprehending how political expression can align with the principles of freedom of expression and freedom of conscience as outlined in the Zimbabwean constitution (An area that may be

considered for future research). I further advance the argument that hate speech assumes various forms and shapes which should be made known to interactants if it is to be countered. From a linguistic politeness perspective, one can examine the concepts of political expression and hate speech through the lenses of relational work and facework theories. These viewpoints encompass both polite and impolite aspects of interactional dynamics. Therefore, these theoretical frameworks offer insights into how impoliteness stemming from political expression and hate speech can manifest, whether in online or offline domains.

In relation to online hate speech, several studies endeavour to find ways of mitigating the challenges it poses in various social contexts. For example, is Article 19 (2015: 3) offers a guide for identifying hate speech and how to counter it effectively, while safeguarding the rights to freedom of expression. However, despite its focus on hate speech, Article 19 does not directly link this issue to the crucial concept of reputation management that underlies all human interactions. This is a gap which my study seeks to address as it proposes linguistic face-saving solutions meant to redress online reputation attacks.

3.2.3.1 Violence in political discourses

In this section, my argument centres on the presence of inherent violence in various political discourses in Zimbabwe. To effectively manage their reputations, interactants must strive for a transformation of these discourses towards non-violence. To underpin this perspective, I adopt the definition of violence provided by the World Health Organization (WHO) (2002: 4), which characterizes violence as “the intentional use of force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, resulting in any form of harm.” This definition encompasses not only physical harm but also encompasses threats, intimidation, psychological distress, and deprivation, all of which can be perpetuated through various discourses that negatively impact societies.

Violent discourse in the Zimbabwean context takes various forms, including propaganda, indoctrination, patriotic history, biased reporting, vilification, demonization, and hate speech (Chari 2017: 72). Considering this, it is accurate to assert that language is being utilized to assert political positions, often leading to the propagation of hate speech that subsequently jeopardizes reputations. Saidi and Munemo (2012: 7) illustrate that the speech of violence is meticulously crafted using words and phrases whose meanings carry negative or derogatory connotations. These violent political discourses inflict harm on the dignity, emotions, and self-esteem of individuals holding different political views (Makagale & Mpani 2023). They further observe that it has become commonplace in Zimbabwe for individuals from opposing political factions to exchange

insults. The repercussions of such violence-laden discourse within a highly charged and polarized political environment like Zimbabwe can lead to uncontrolled acts of aggression.

The discourse of political violence is not confined to a single political faction in Zimbabwe. Both the ruling regime and pro-democracy movements are engaged in a struggle for political power, and both sides have actively contributed to the propagation of violent discourses (Sande & Maforo 2022: 349). I argue that when examining the language used to expose the vulnerabilities of political opponents through the lens of incitement and ethical principles, it becomes evident that it possesses violent undertones. Furthermore, I contend that the language employed to promote political ideologies is generating a distinct political discourse with the intention of influencing and reshaping attitudes, actions, and behaviour, particularly in contexts where differing political viewpoints exist (Chari 2017: 72). As an illustration, during interactions, people employ discourse markers to denigrate and criticize prominent political party leaders by using descriptive language that can be interpreted as aggressive speech. This type of language is referred to as violent discourse by Saidi and Munemo (2012: 8), and features terms such as “blood thirsty”, “octogenarian dictator”, “genocidal” and “tyrannical”. This discourse is considered violent as it endeavours to turn negative and unwelcome opinions against Mugabe. As a result, I assert that there is need to develop linguistic strategies that foster cooperation and contribute to a harmonious coexistence between political adversaries.

At the heart of the political discourse in Zimbabwe lies language, skilfully employed to craft a persuasive political message in the form of propaganda. Political rivals utilize propaganda, carefully chosen through language, to shape the perspectives of Zimbabweans (Jakaza 2019: 293). This manipulation occurs by presenting a narrative selectively, using deliberate wording and speech to evoke emotional responses rather than rational ones, all in service of advancing one’s own political objectives. Hence, it can be argued that propaganda functions as a tool of conflict, intensifying violence instead of mitigating it within Zimbabwe’s turbulent political landscape (Saidi & Munemo 2012: 7).

Numerous studies on political discourse violence predominantly centre on mainstream media, such as Cornell, Marlherbe, Seedat, and Suffla (2022), who analyse violence within political interviews, and Chari (2017), who investigates violence within press discourse. However, there is a scarcity of research exploring violent political discourse in alternative media, like social media. Mark Nartey comes somewhat closer, his work on political discourses on *Twitter* revealing how political actors narrativize their messages persuasively, capitalizing on local sentiment and language features unique to particular communities and audiences (Nartey 2022). Nonetheless, this study

specifically examines how violence manifests in political discourse on an alternative media platform like *Twitter*. By examining the ways in which violent rhetoric is being utilized in these online spaces, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the role that social media plays in shaping public discourse and political action.

A study that probes into political discourse violence is that of Saidi and Munemo (2012) who analyse discourses on Zimbabwe since the advent of its political crisis. Their findings reveal that language used in the discourses of political campaigning creates a violent discourse. Importantly, their research suggests that addressing violence in the Zimbabwean political crisis requires a fundamental overhaul and radical transformation of the discourses within its political sphere. This suggestion from Saidi and Munemo (2012) resonates with my study, underscoring the empirical necessity to develop politeness strategies that could foster harmony within the Zimbabwean political landscape, creating an environment conducive to the emergence of social capital. I seek to advocate for this by offering linguistic face-saving strategies that political actors could employ to manage their positive reputation effectively.

3.2.3.2 Incivility as political strategy: exploring the utility of impolite behaviour among political actors

The use of impoliteness as a political strategy is a contentious topic widely debated in academic literature. Some scholars, like Chirau and Chikwature (2020), contend that impolite behaviour is a sought-after element that political actors may intentionally employ to gain approval from those who share their political ideologies. At times, impoliteness is employed to achieve “dark attraction” where posts considered impolite draw a large number of reactions and engagement from those involved in the interactions (Rega & Marchetti 2021: 125). Conversely, scholars such as Fiske (2018) perceive impoliteness as behaviour that has negative consequences for both the individual and society at large, thus advocating for its avoidance by all participants in interactions.

While impoliteness is often viewed negatively and avoided by many, this section aims to highlight that impoliteness can, at times, be intentionally employed to gain approval from individuals sharing similar political ideologies. In contrast to some political actors who opt for polite behaviour to appear desirable, others utilize impolite behaviour to achieve the same sense of desirability. This might involve using derogatory language and insults to resonate with their followers. A study that supports this position is that of Rega and Marchetti (2021) who explored the use of incivility in contemporary politics focusing on the 2018 Italian general election on *Facebook*. Their findings reveal that political actors use of impolite messages strengthens political affiliation.

In Zimbabwe, this trend can be attributed to the heightened level of political tension and competition, as discussed in Section 2.2. This situation is further intensified by the country's economic challenges and political uncertainties (Sithole & Makumbe 1997: 133). Within this context, political actors face the pressure to differentiate themselves from their rivals while demonstrating their dedication to their supporters. Employing impolite language in aggressive and confrontational ways becomes a strategy for achieving this goal and resonating with their followers' emotions and biases.

However, the utilization of impoliteness as a political strategy to enhance desirability is not exclusive to Zimbabwean *Twitter* discourse; it is a global phenomenon, as evident in the cases of the 2016 US presidential election campaign and the 2018 Italian general election (Rega & Marchetti 2021: 108). For instance, Trump harnessed "algorithmic" power on social media through his impolite statements, leading to increased followers, reactions, comments, retweets, and likes, consequently amplifying his reputation (Faris et al. 2017). Instances of "impolite campaigns" in Zimbabwe, the US, and Italy highlight that political actors worldwide are increasingly resorting to impolite language to mobilize their supporters by fostering an "us-versus-them" polarization. From this perspective, impoliteness is seen as a strategic tool (Herbst 2010) wielded by political actors to achieve favourable outcomes.

3.3 Understanding face and face-threatening acts in the 21st century

In this section, I provide a contemporary interpretation of the terms "face" and "face-threatening acts," acknowledging their origin in the 20th century. Additionally, I question certain fundamental principles of these concepts with the overarching goal of assessing their relevance in the Global South.

Upon closer comparison between the 20th-century definitions of "face" as proposed by Goffman (1967) and Brown and Levinson (1987), and the 21st-century interpretations by Locher (2008) and Hammond (2016), it becomes evident that the essence of the concept remains consistent. The definitions from the 20th century place significant emphasis on the emotional aspects of face, encompassing notions of humiliation, embarrassment, and emotional involvement. On the other hand, the 21st-century definitions highlight the importance of self-presentation and its adaptability during interactions. Generally, I observed a subtle shift from a primary focus on emotional aspects to a greater emphasis on the malleability of self-presentation.

The notion of face is derived from Goffman (1967) who ties it up with the notion of being embarrassed, humiliated or losing face (Brown & Levinson 1987: 61). In this context, face is seen

as emotionally invested, subject to loss, maintenance, or enhancement, requiring continuous attention during interactions (Brown & Levinson 1987: 61). This reveals a shared vulnerability of interactants' faces in every interaction, underscoring the necessity for cooperative face maintenance. According to Goffman (1967), individuals are not only expected to safeguard their own face but also to protect others' faces. This dynamic implies a mutual dependence on each other's face preservation, as threats to one's own face could inadvertently expose the faces of others in the same interaction. Thus, I contend that face is a dyadic notion encompassing both speakers and addressees (Bull & Fetzer 2010: 159), and it is a construct achieved through interaction.

Face holds significant influence in communication, shaping how individuals engage in social interactions. Locher's (2008: 514) conceptualises face as a mask or an image a person gives themselves during a particular interaction, which is not fixed but rather negotiated in emergent networks. In different interactional encounters one may pursue different types of faces. Hammood (2016: 3) further defines face as an evolving self-image that individuals negotiate throughout interactions. This perspective portrays face as a dramatic metaphor (Goffman 1967: 31), consciously employed by participants to project positive self-images encompassing values like dignity, respect, honour, status, and more (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi 1998: 190). Consequently, face aligns closely with the idea of reputation, reflecting how individuals wish to be perceived and respected.

Nonetheless, this perspective largely focuses on the positive aspects of face, omitting instances where individuals deliberately adopt negative faces to threaten, abuse, insult, or embarrass others. In this study, I contend that the concept of face should encompass both positive and negative images that individuals may project during interactions. It should be open to various portrayals, whether favourable or unfavourable, that participants choose to adopt in any interaction.

The components of face, including dignity, respect, and honour, are often considered fundamental desires known to all participants, generally serving the interests of everyone to some extent (Brown & Levinson 1987: 62). However, I contend that in reality, the granting of face respect is not an automatic entitlement; interactants may choose to either fulfil or disregard another's face desires. This stance rationalizes instances where individuals intentionally provoke face-related tensions. Such actions might be prompted, if not premeditated and strategic. Moreover, I propose that while interactants might acknowledge the necessity of accommodating face-related considerations, the decision to honour these needs remains a personal choice.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 62), there are two components of face namely the negative face and the positive face. The negative face is defined as the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others (Brown & Levinson 1987: 62). This component speaks to all actions which might be deemed to infringe on this aspect during interaction. Negative face is very important in political contexts where interactants speak mainly from a position of authority and where the roles of superior and subordinate are very much common. The positive face, on the other hand, is the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others (Brown & Levinson 1987: 62). This includes among other things the desire to be ratified, understood, approved of, liked, or admired (Brown & Levinson 1987: 62). The interactant however does not expect to be desirable to anyone, but at least to some particular others. In contemporary settings of political nature this component of face appears to be more common as interactants normally expect to please mostly those whom they share political ideology with and raffle those who oppose them; hence the idea applies of being desirable to at least some others.

Brown and Levinson (1987) assert that face is a universal concept, implying that there exists shared awareness of individuals' public self-images or faces, along with a societal requirement to align with them during interactions. This assumption suggests that all participants are cognizant of how others wish to be perceived and engaged. However, this assertion has met opposition within the realm of politeness studies, where scholars challenge its applicability to diverse universal contexts.

Critics emphasize that Brown and Levinson (1987) presume that people from different cultures and linguistic backgrounds possess equivalent internal linguistic and social capacities (Alabdali 2019: 74). Their stance assumes that individuals from various cultures would respond similarly in identical situations (Antovic 2007). This viewpoint contrasts with that of Nwoye (1992: 310), who highlights disparities between Brown and Levinson's (1987) conceptualization of face and how the Igbo people of Nigeria perceive it. As a result, my study assumes significance as it strives to deepen comprehension of the debates surrounding the universality of face.

Another intriguing facet to consider is that Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of face was initially devised for face-to-face interactions. This originates from the fact that during their proposal of the face concept, face-to-face communication was the prevailing mode, influenced by prior ideas of Goffman (1967). Though the face concept has been applied in studies of online social interactions (Forums that have since been discontinued) by Park (2008), my study assesses the applicability of this concept within a contemporary online political platform. I contend that online platforms have evolved into the primary arenas for numerous interactions in the 21st

century. While Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept was designed for face-to-face interactions, it is pertinent to investigate its relevance in contemporary digital environments.

The notion of face in online contexts has been explored in prior research. For instance, Park (2008) examines how participants in online discussions express their interpersonal stances while presenting arguments in group forums. Additionally, Zhang (2022) explores the concept of face in computer-mediated communication, particularly focusing on online educational discourse. The findings underscore the management of face and the realization of politeness through both positive and negative relational strategies (Zhang 2022: 245). Through this study, I aim to contribute to the expanding body of literature that examines the notion of face within online contexts, particularly in the realm of online political discourse.

It is argued that whenever individuals interact, there is a potential for encountering discourse that challenges the positive image one aims to present (Goffman 1967). This brings us to the concept of Face-threatening Acts (FTAs). As per Brown and Levinson (1987: 65), FTAs encompass actions that contradict or are inappropriate in relation to the desired face of the recipient and/or the speaker. Hammood (2016: 6) suggests that FTAs refer to speech acts that do not align with the face desires of either the speaker or the recipient. Thus, FTAs inherently disrupt social norms or expectations against which relational dynamics are evaluated.

A distinction can be made between acts that threaten negative face and those that threaten positive face (Adistana, Chandra & Al-Arief 2021: 43). There are acts that threaten the addressee's negative face, by virtue of the speaker potentially indicating that he/she does not wish to avoid impeding the addressee's freedom of action. These acts include orders and requests, suggestions or advice, reminding's, threats, warnings, dares, offers, promises, compliments, expressions of envy or admiration and expressions of strong negative emotions towards addressee (Brown & Levinson 1987: 66). There are also those acts that threaten the positive face want, by indicating (potentially) that the speaker does not care about the addressee's feelings, wants etc. (Adistana, Chandra & Al-Arief 2021: 43). These include those that show that speaker has a negative evaluation of some aspect of addressee's positive face such as expressions of disapproval, criticism, accusations or insults and contradictions or challenges (Brown & Levinson 1987: 66). Expressions of violent out-of-control emotions, irreverence, mentioning of taboo topics, bringing of bad news, raising of emotional or divisive topics, blatant non-cooperation and misidentifying someone in an offensive way are some of the FTAs that threaten the positive face (Brown & Levinson 1987: 67).

It is, however, not only the addressee whose face is threatened as the speaker's face can equally be threatened through own actions. FTAs that are threatening to the speaker include those that offend

his/her negative face such as expressing thanks, acceptance of addressee's thanks or apology, excuses, acceptance of offers and giving unwilling promises and offers (Redmond 2015). For example, "I gladly accept the offer to now become an ordinary card-carrying member of our party despite having been a senior member acting as the Secretary General of the party". There are also FTAs that damage a speaker's positive face such as apologies, acceptance of a compliment, breakdown of physical control over body, self-humiliation, confessions, admissions of guilty and emotional leakage (Redmond 2015). For example, a speaker may say, "I humbly apologise to all affected and wish to retract the accusations I laid against the Minister of Finance, I was misinformed".

FTAs are employed through three possible strategies, according to Brown and Levinson (1987: 69). First, an interactant may go 'on record' which means he/she makes his/her communicative intention clear to participants. There is no ambiguity to the speaker's intention. Secondly, the speaker may go 'off-record' which means there is more than one unambiguously attributable intention so that the interactant cannot be held to have committed himself/herself to one particular intent (Brown & Levinson 1987: 69). Thirdly, going 'baldly without redress', which means doing the face-threatening act in the most direct, clear, unambiguous, and concise way possible (Brown and Levinson 1987: 69).

Face-Threatening acts (FTAs) and the associated strategies have long been recognised as crucial components of effective communication in face-to-face interactions (Brown & Levinson 1987). However, the relevance of FTAs and their implementation strategies in the context of the 21st century digital platforms remain a subject of debate. Nevertheless, research by Brummernherich and Jucks (2013) sheds light on this issue. Specifically, their study examines the management of FTAs in online tutoring and concluded that FTAs and the strategies for implementing them continue to be relevant in digital communication, despite the lack of face-to-face interaction (Brummernherich & Jucks 2013). Their findings have implications for online communication and suggest the need for continued research on this topic. Thus, through this study, I seek to provide further evidence to this by using the FTAs strategies as a barometer to look at how trolling manifests itself on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. I am also aware that the concepts of face and of FTAs are largely treated as Western Global North concepts lacking the inclusion of elements more related to non-Western speech communities (Alabdali 2019: 73). It is argued that Brown and Levinson (1987) did not adequately provide extensive evidence to postulate the universality of the face concept (Alabdali 2019: 74). Given this position, I argue that testing the concepts in a non-Western speech community like the Zimbabwean Twittersphere might contribute to the understanding of their universality concept.

A study which scrutinises the concepts of face and face-threatening acts in relation to political contexts is that of Bull and Fetzer (2010). In their study political discourse is examined through the concepts of face and facework in the context of three distinct genres of political communication: broadcast interviews, Prime Minister's questions, and monologues. The study interrogates how politicians must defend themselves against FTAs which may make them look bad. Even though they do not particularly focus on online discourses, Bull and Fetzer (2010) give prominence to facework which is a set of strategic behaviours by which people attempt to maintain both their reputation and that of the people with whom they are interacting. This study shares this endeavour as it sets out to find linguistic strategies which political actors can use to manage their reputation within the online space. Reputation management appears to be a primary constraint on the achievement of goals in social interaction. From this perspective, face can be conceptualised as the successful presentation of a preferred reputation. Hence, to fail to have one's preferred reputation ratified is to lose face in an encounter, while to have one's preferred reputation ratified is to have face, and to maintain a preferred reputation after it has been challenged, is to save face (Holtgraves 2002).

Regarding the various facets of face that concern political actors, Bull and Fetzer (2010: 160) identify three distinct aspects: the individual face of the political actor, the face of their significant associates, and the face of the political party they represent. In my study, I adopt a holistic approach to the concept of face, considering it as a unified entity. I contend that within political contexts, disentangling these different faces can be complex, as they collectively contribute to the desired reputation of the political figure in question. In democratic systems, maintaining this preferred reputation is vital, as the political survival of an individual hinges upon the endorsement of their desired reputation by the public (Bull & Fetzer 2010: 161).

Goffman (1967) underscores the significance of safeguarding face, noting that individuals must protect their face from any potential threat. In this context, my current research endeavours to formulate linguistic strategies that uphold face and prevent potential threats, even proactively.

3.3.1 Face as relational and interactional

Arundale (2006) highlights that face is not solely an individual phenomenon, but rather a relational and interactional concept, shaped through engagements with others. Approaching face from this standpoint necessitates situational consideration in political contexts. Consequently, the positive and negative aspects of face are reconceptualized in terms of the interplay between establishing connections with others and maintaining separation from them (Arundale 2006: 193). Framing

face as both relational and interactional offers a comprehensive framework that encompasses the entirety of facework and reputation management.

Goffman (1967) accounts for face as an individual want. However, there is an emerging interest within interactional linguistics to conceptualise face as relational as it transcends the characteristics of the individuals. The preferred face is therefore a conversational action achieved interactionally or is conjointly co-constituted (Arundale 2006: 196). Thus, conceptualisations of face as a relational phenomenon rest on an understanding of face as an interactional activity (Arundale 2006: 194).

For online reputation to develop, interactional engagement is essential. Within these interactions, the focus shifts to the concept of face. According to Brown (2001: 11623), face is undeniably shaped and managed through interactions, forming the foundation of a desired reputation. However, Goffman's (1967) portrayal of the ideal social actor is rooted in a Western construct, one centred on self-image and preservation (Bargiela-Chiappini 2003: 1463). Yet, this study proposes a shift towards conceptualizing a social actor as actively engaged in upholding the social order (Arundale 2006: 198). This suggests that Brown and Levinson's (1987) notions of face-wants should be viewed as inherently intertwined with interaction, shaping both our core personality and identity construction (Arundale 2006: 200).

A discussion of face as relational and interactional means that the social self is not understood as an individual, or as a singular biological entity, instead, the social self is seen as a person, or as an individual inseparably entwined with the other individuals with whom he or she interacts (cf. Radcliffe-Brown 1940: 194). I draw on this perspective as my base for the argument that reputations are an emergent phenomenon, interactionally achieved in situated communication; accordingly, reputations come into existence and are sustained in their communication by other interactants. Similarly, face is not an element of nature but is given meaning and existence by relaters, perceivers, and modes of action, including discourse (Ducks 1995: 539). Without other interactants coming into play there can be no face or even reputation to talk about. In short, the reputation or face is irreducibly relational. Thus, to frame face as relational rests directly on framing it as interactional (Arundale 2006: 201). Consequently, face meanings arise and are maintained and changed in relationships.

Without relations, face is not operative until it is interactionally achieved in a specific relationship, that relationship implying some basis of connectedness (Lannaman 1994: 40-44). In this context, Arundale (2010: 2081) uses the term 'interpretings'. Interpretings are dynamic cognitive processes unfolding in a conversational sequence providing continually shifting affordances and constraints for one's analysis of meanings- and of conversational actions. This entails that particular

interpretings of face that become operative for one participant's utterance are evident to both participants only after the other's uptake of that utterance (Arundale 2010: 2081).

Treating face as relational and interactional implies that no utterance inherently threatens face, as the extent of face threat depends on how each interactant interprets face meanings (Arundale 2006: 209). Similarly, face support is an interactant's evaluation of the emerging interpretation of face (Arundale 2006: 209). As a result, interactants' understanding of face meanings and their actions co-evolve during interactions. Thus, the evidence used to study facework should be shaped by interactants' interpretations, not solely the researcher's viewpoint (Wilson 1970).

However, this does not imply that my findings will solely rely on interactants' interpretations. I argue that a theoretical or scientific foundation is necessary to validate the findings. Arundale (2006: 209) suggests that adopting a relational and interactional understanding of face does not mean analysts should disregard theoretical concepts or general theories. Instead, the decision about what constitutes data, which analyses are applicable, and what conclusions are valid presupposes the presence of a conceptual framework or theory (Arundale 2006: 209).

To this end, face in the context of the relational and interactional frameworks should always be judged first along the lines of frames of expectations and secondly, along theoretical lines. This argument speaks directly to the concepts of first-order and second-order analytical approaches to politeness which I discuss in the next section. The first- versus second- order distinction was first made by Watts, Ide and Ehlich (1992: 3) who define first-order politeness (i.e., Politeness1) as "the various ways in which polite behaviour is perceived and talked about by members of sociocultural groups", and second-order politeness (i.e., Politeness2) as "a term within a theory of social behaviour and language usage".

3.4 The concept of politeness: first-order and second-order distinction, classical and modern conceptions

From an ethological perspective, Brown and Levinson (1987: 1) point out that the problem for any social group is to control its internal aggression while retaining the potential for aggression both in internal social control and, especially, in external competitive relations with other groups. In this perspective, politeness, like formal diplomatic protocol, presupposes the potential for aggression and seeks to disarm it, making it possible for communication to happen between potentially aggressive parties (Brown & Levinson 1987: 1). This denotes that politeness is regarded as constituting a potent form of social control.

3.4.1 The concept of politeness

Given the political context of the current study, where contestation has been identified as the order of the day, the concept of politeness becomes very significant in understanding issues of online reputation. In what follows, I provide a definition of politeness and offer insights into how politeness concerns can be examined through a combination of the first-order approach (Watts, Ide & Ehlich 1992) and the second-order approach (Watts, Ide & Ehlich 1992) to politeness.

The term “politeness” means to take the hearers’ feelings and desires into consideration when speaking or acting (Al-Duleimi, Rashid & Abdullah 2016: 263). This definition is based on the mental frameworks and cognitive processes of those involved in the situation. Yule (2010: 135) defines politeness as displaying awareness and consideration of another person’s face through minimising the possibility of conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange. In both definitions, politeness is viewed as speech, guided by the basic pragmatic rules of a specific language system, which determines the social appropriateness of an utterance. Thus, Yule (2010) treats politeness from a conflict avoidance paradigm where a speaker makes it clear through his/her utterance that he/she is aware of the addressee’s face. This position aligns with Gumperz (1982) understanding of politeness as necessary for social order and human cooperation. Thus, politeness is seen as playing an effective role in interaction through controlling the cooperative behaviour of interactants in a conversation (Thomas 1995: 158).

Watts (2003: 3) observes politeness as a subjective matter of evaluation, where perceptions of polite behaviour can differ between individuals and groups. Incorporating fundamental aspects of politeness recognized in all cultures, Watts (2003: 4) further defines the term ‘polite’ as using language that avoids excessive directness and instead demonstrates consideration for the other person. Yule’s (2010) definition aligns with that of Watts (2003), highlighting that politeness plays a crucial role in influencing language choice and negotiating relational meanings within specific interactional contexts. Thus, politeness serves as a communicative means, verbal or nonverbal, to demonstrate consideration for the image presentation, feelings, and desires of others during communication (Ononye 2020: 2).

Politeness is not limited to conventional acts of linguistic etiquette like formal apologies, so-called ‘polite’ language, and address terms, although it includes all these (Haugh & Kadar 2013: 1). Rather, it covers the entire spectrum of interpersonal behaviour ranging from the polite to the impolite. In this sense, the term politeness in the pragmatics field encompasses all kinds of behaviours from the good to the bad, the polite to the impolite.

In many sub-Saharan societies, like Zimbabwe, the concept of politeness, togetherness, and respect is shown through the notion of *Ubuntu*. The word “*Ubuntu*” is described as the capacity in an

African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring (Khoza 2006: 6). Like the politeness concept, the *Ubuntu* approach advocates for interactants to express care and consideration for the other, through the kind of language that they choose to use in an interaction.

From the definitions provided, politeness can be construed as a key by which humans work out and maintain interpersonal relationships (Kadar & Haugh 2013: 1). However, as said earlier, politeness is not limited to conventional acts of linguistic etiquette, like the so-called “polite” language and address terms, although it includes all these acts (Kadar & Haugh 2013: 1) Rather, it encompasses all types of good or bad interpersonal behaviour.

Notably, there has been a paucity of attention to the concept of politeness on digital platforms. This research addresses the gap by providing an understanding of how the concepts manifest on digital platforms when employed by interactants with an African background. While the importance of politeness has been pointed out, it becomes necessary to explain concepts which pertain to the levels at which politeness is understood and approached as a social practice.

3.4.2 First- and second-order approaches to politeness

This brings to the fore terms such as first-order (language user) analysis and second-order (language observer) analysis of politeness (Kadar & Haugh 2013: 2).

The first- versus second-order distinction can be likened to the emic-etic division made by Harris (1990: 48), who describes emic statements as “logico-empirical systems whose phenomenal distinctions or ‘things’ are built up out of contrasts and discriminations significant, meaningful, real, accurate or regarded as appropriate by the interactants themselves, while etic statements are classified as “phenomenal distinctions judged appropriate by the community of scientific observers”. Thus, the distinction of first- and second-order politeness is arguably related to the distinction of emic and etic approaches to politeness (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009: 16).

Generally, the first-order approach (post-modern) is considered recent (from the 21st century) and a shift from scientific approaches. This signifies that the first-order analysis of politeness is how an interactant conceptualises his or her own behaviour, as well as the interactants’ thought processes while performing the behaviour (Eelen 2001: 77). This is corroborated by Haugh (2007: 8) who regards first-order approach as an interactant’s conscious notion of politeness, and their spontaneous evaluation of both their own behaviour as well as the behaviours of others as either impolite or polite. This evaluation is made during an interaction. The idea pursued by this approach is of paying less attention to rule-finding but focusing on the norms of appropriateness

constraining the pragmatic strategies or linguistic choices employed by interactants in their social relations (Lakoff & Ide 2006). Seminal scholars of the post-modern era include Culpeper (2011), Watts (2003), Kadar & Haugh (2013) etc.

Second-order politeness (traditional) arises from seminal scholars such as Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983) and the prominent work of Brown and Levinson (1987) (from the 20th century). These scholars proposed specific rules and principles of politeness which they claim guide language usage. From a second-order analysis, politeness is defined by Eelen (2001: 43) as the scientific conceptualisation of the social phenomenon of politeness in the form of a theory of first-order politeness. By means of such a theory we should be able to understand how first-order politeness works, what its functionality is, and what it does for people and for society in general. In other words, second-order politeness is a scientific framework that should provide reasonable theoretical structure towards the understanding of first-order politeness. Haugh (2007) posits that first order politeness benefits second-order politeness by providing a pragmatic, local understanding of politeness in situ.

Most of the second-order approaches to politeness categorised as either traditional, theoretical, or scientific have been criticised over the aspect of rigidity (Ononye 2020: 5). Scholars such as Haugh (2009) and Watts (2003) argue that meanings attached to politeness behaviour change overtime; in this sense what constitutes impoliteness at one time may at other times be considered polite. The argument is that scientific theories prescribe a rigid approach to politeness which might not be congruent with language change and contextual situatedness. Furthermore, the theoretical or scientific have been criticised for focusing on a universal understanding of politeness concepts and rules that should guide language users to be polite, without considering the specificity of situational uses of language (Ononye 2020: 6).

The traditional approaches have also been criticised for over generalization. Specifically, the work of Brown and Levinson (1987) has been criticised for ranking indirect utterances as being more polite than direct utterances. This has been regarded as over-generalisation by post-modern scholars such as Culpeper (2011) who argue that no linguistic utterance is inherently polite or impolite, but it is the norm of engagement that determines its politeness or otherwise (Ononye 2020: 6). As a matter of logical association, most of the criticisms of second-order politeness approaches are invariably expected to be handled by the first-order approaches (Ononye 2020: 6).

The concepts of first- versus second-order approaches to politeness have extended to the analysis of face (Ononye 2020: 7). Scholars such as O'Driscoll (2011) and Sifianou (2011) equate first-order face (Face1) with folk notions and expressions, while second-order face (Face2) is considered as a

theoretical construct. This implies that from a first-order point of view what is deemed as face is arguably not a universal concept but a concept that can have localised meanings. At the same time, assigned meanings of face from a scientific standpoint are observed as second-order face.

The first- versus second-order approach has weaknesses. Much of the weakness emerges from using either the first-order approach or second-order approach in isolation. Hence, I argue that any productive understanding of politeness and face is rooted in both ways of approaching these concepts. A combined first-order and second-order approach is consistent with well-developed understandings of social practice in various contexts (Kadar & Haugh 2013: 3). This shows that the understanding of politeness should be based on insider perspectives as well as observer perspectives. The current research assumes that neither the first-order approach nor the second-order approach has an inherently greater value. Rather, the two approaches rely on each other to produce a holistic understanding of politeness (Kadar & Haugh 2013: 3).

Linguistic manifestations of politeness behaviour have largely been based on the second order approach, i.e., from the perspective of the observer/theorist/scientist. However, the current study posits that the investigation of politeness may include the linguistic evaluations of what can be deemed polite by the interactants involved in a communication event. Speech communities may have their own conventions and moral compasses as politeness is conditioned by sociocultural norms (Ononye 2020: 3). Hence, what is impolite in one speech community may not be deemed to be impolite in another. To this end, I argue that the first- and the second-order approach may be used together.

3.4.3 Politeness: classical literature versus post-modern literature

As mentioned earlier, linguistic politeness holds a central position in the study of language within various cultures and societies, serving to uphold relationships and preserve face (Al-Duleimi, Rashid & Abdullah 2016: 262). The examination of politeness as a linguistic phenomenon and pragmatic investigation reveals two main approaches: the traditional/classical approach and the post-modern/discursive approach (Hammood 2016: 1). The traditional/classical approach is grounded in second-order perspectives, utilizing scientific frameworks to comprehend politeness. In contrast, the post-modern/discursive approach focuses on how to conceptualize politeness by highlighting the addressee's role in evaluating utterances as either polite or impolite (Hammood 2016: 1). This post-modern/discursive approach centres around the principles of the first-order approach.

A significant portion of earlier literature on politeness, including works by Lakoff (1975), Leech (1983), Brown and Levinson (1987), Grice (1989), and Fraser (1990), falls under the category of traditional literature. This body of work primarily focuses on the polite aspects of interpersonal communication (Locher & Watts 2008: 78). It tends to centre on the speaker's perspective and often neglects the role of the addressee (Hammond 2016: 3). Traditional scholars typically view politeness as the speaker's effort to soften the impact of their speech acts to maintain harmony. These scholars commonly emphasize the speaker's desire to uphold their own positive self-image or "face" during interaction. However, their shared belief in the universality of politeness as a social phenomenon can lead to the oversight of cultural distinctions and an assumption of internal homogeneity within each culture, despite external differences (Al-Duleimi, Rashid & Abdullah 2016: 262). It is important to note that traditional scholars tend to assume that face and the principles of politeness are universally applicable (Terkourafi 2005: 99). In this study, the notion of universality is examined by analysing data from the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. The paragraphs that follow introduce selected seminal literature on politeness chronologically, aiming to highlight further distinctions between classical and post-modern interpretations of politeness.

Lakoff (1975) is among those who were first to conduct studies on politeness. She probes into different cultures focusing on how similar acts are similarly considered as either rude or polite. In conclusion, she suggests that there must be certain rules that determine whether we consider an utterance as either polite or rude, namely: formality, deference, and camaraderie. Lakoff (1975) states that in ordinary conversations speakers usually tend to stay within the limits of politeness in order to remain engaged in the conversation. Her theory is based on the cooperative principle (Grice 1975). However, Lakoff's approach received criticism for lacking characteristics that speakers could follow to produce polite utterances (Watts 2003).

To Leech (1983), the major purpose of politeness principles is to establish and maintain feelings of harmony within a social group. Leech (1983) probed into politeness through his theory of illocutionary functions which refers to speech acts like orders, promises or requests that predict a particular outcome. He classifies such speech acts according to their illocutionary functions into four categories based how they relate to the social goal of establishing and maintaining harmony (Leech 1983: 104): competitive, convivial, collaborative, and conflictive.

In competitive speech acts (like ordering, demanding, begging etc.) the illocutionary goal competes with the social goal; convivial speech acts (offering, thanking, congratulating etc.) have an illocutionary goal that coincides with the social goal; collaborative speech acts (asserting, reporting, announcing, instructing etc.) are speech acts where the illocutionary goal is indifferent to the social

goal; while conflictive speech acts (threatening, accusing, cursing, reprimanding) are characterised by an illocutionary goal that conflicts with the social goal (Leech 1983: 104). Thus, Leech's theory of politeness situates politeness within a framework of interpersonal rhetoric where the politeness principle regulates the social equilibrium and friendly relations, which enables us to assume that our utterances are being cooperative (Fauziati 2013: 96). However, Leech's principles of pragmatics were criticised as being based on Western cultures (Al-Duleimi, Rashid & Abdullah 2016: 267), as previously mentioned in this chapter.

By far the most prominent work in the context of politeness research in both classical and post-modern literature is that of Brown and Levinson (1987). Since every language has its own way of conveying messages, intentions, and expressing different speech acts that may threaten face, Brown and Levinson (1987) propose four politeness strategies to act as a guide that controls everyday threats of face with respect to social norms. They focus on how politeness is expressed to protect interactants face/image/reputation (Al-Duleimi, Rashid & Abdullah 2016: 264). These strategies are bald on record, redress on record, off-record, and do not act (Brown & Levinson 1987) (These strategies are to be explained in detail in the theoretical framework chapter). This reflects that for interactants to maintain their face, they cooperate with others as the need to maintain everyone's face relies on others (Wijayanto, Laila, Prasetyarini, & Susiati 2013). Brown and Levinson (1987) propose three social factors that speakers should consider when interacting with each other, they are: power which refers to the different relation between speaker and addressee, social distance which refers to type of relationship between the interactants, and the degree of imposition which refers to the illocutionary act itself. These factors are said to be possessing the power to control the preferred linguistic forms of any speaker.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory (PT) is not without criticism. Some researchers find it Western centric (Matsumoto 1989: 209). The argument being that the theory does not apply or is yet to be fully tested to both Eastern and African contexts to qualify it as universal (Mao 1994: 451). Mao (1994: 452) indicates that studies reveal that the universality argument in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory is yet to address discourse behaviours in other non-Western cultures where the underlying interactional focus is not centred upon individualism but upon group identity, or where politeness conveys different moral meanings or normative values, or where politeness departs considerably from Western social psychological assumptions about agonistic relationships between speakers and speech strategies (Held 1989: 198). Given this background, the current study contributes to an understanding of politeness/relational work from an African perspective. Hammond (2016: 6) highlights another weakness of the theory, namely its

concentration on the speaker's communicative intentions. Thus, it becomes imperative to analyse utterances within the broader linguistic context in which they take place (Hayashi 1996: 228).

Scholars such as Eelen (2001), Watts (2003), and Culpeper (2012) are advocating for novel approaches to politeness and their views fall under the post-modern interpretation of politeness. They suggest that social concepts, specifically the idea of habitus should be considered to better understand politeness. Habitus, as defined by Watts (2003: 274) relates to the behavioural patterns and tendencies of people which are shaped by their past social experiences. Much emphasis is placed on the power of contexts to direct politeness. The post-modern approach challenges the traditional approach which universalises the politeness behaviours. Thus, within this theory, politeness is regarded as a social practice determined by the speaker's intentions and the addressee's recognition of these intentions successfully or to a certain degree of success (Hammond 2016: 9). In what follows, I discuss some of the key arguments by selected, seminal scholars of the post-modern approach, who are important to my thesis.

Eelen's (2001) study, "*A Critique of Politeness*," marked the emergence of a new school of politeness, namely the post-modern or discursive approach. This fresh approach involves considering the addressee's position and their evaluative perspective, which can determine both politeness and impoliteness (Eelen 2001). It diverges from traditional approaches that primarily focus on the speaker's standpoint and their evaluative stance. Eelen's main goal in his account of politeness is to illuminate the nature of politeness from both the speaker and the addressee's perspectives (Hammond 2016: 9). He challenges the omission of the addressee's perspective in traditional approaches that treat the addressee as external to the interaction.

While a flawless technique for explaining or analysing impoliteness may not exist, Eelen (2001) critiques traditional politeness approaches as insufficient. He contends that these approaches often assign the same strategies to both impoliteness and politeness, thus treating impoliteness as a mere opposite of politeness. Consequently, traditional approaches lack a scientific framework suitable for studying impoliteness. According to Eelen (2001: 224), "notions of politeness are not the result of a passive learning process in which each individual internalizes 'the' societal/cultural politeness system but are rather an active expression of that person's social positioning in relation to others and the social world in general." This argument aligns with the stance taken in this study, where the frames of expectation against which both the speaker and the addressee assess relational work are considered.

Eelen (2001) introduces a distinct model, the relational framework, which encompasses both politeness and impoliteness concepts in interactions. He challenges the prevalent notion that

politeness and impoliteness are closely interconnected and can be comprehended within a conventional politeness framework (Hammond 2016: 9). Instead, Eelen (2001) proposes an alternative perspective on politeness, highlighting new aspects of evaluativeness, variability, and discursiveness.

Firstly, evaluativeness entails that politeness involves making assessments about social relationships and the social status of individuals involved (Eelen 2001). Secondly, variability indicates that politeness is not a fixed or universal concept; rather, it varies depending on cultural and social factors (Eelen 2001). This underscores that politeness is an adaptable social practice shaped by diverse cultural and social influences. Lastly, discursiveness emphasizes that politeness is not solely related to language use; it also encompasses non-verbal cues and social interactions (Eelen 2001).

Approaching from a post-modern stance, Watts (2003: 162) defines politeness as a “linguistic behaviour that carries a value in an emergent network in excess of what is required by the politic behaviour of the overall interaction”, or “linguistic behaviour that is perceived to be salient to marked behaviour” (Locher & Watts 2005: 16). Unlike Brown and Levinson’s (1987) notion of politeness, Watts (2003) suggests that politeness is a matter of individual evaluation, which can differ from person to person or group to group (Hammond 2016: 11). The central idea in Watts’s argument is that politeness should be defined by how participants themselves understand politeness (Hammond 2016: 12). Locher and Watts (2005: 16) emphasize the significance of taking native speakers’ assessments of politeness seriously and using them as the foundation for a discursive, data-driven, bottom-up approach to politeness. They argue, “The discursive debates over such terms in instances of social practice should be the focal point of attention in politeness research.”

Watts (2003) defends the distinction between first-order and second-order notions of politeness, highlighting the contrast between the everyday understanding of politeness and the theoretical concept of politeness. Watts (2003: 42) explains, “We take first-order politeness to correspond to the various ways in which polite behaviour is perceived and discussed by members of socio-cultural groups,” encompassing common-sense perceptions of politeness. Conversely, second-order politeness is a theoretical term linked to social behaviour and language use (Watts 2003). This leads to a debatable stance where Watts (2003) asserts that the evaluation of impolite behaviour is carried out by individual “interactants” rather than following parameters established by social scientists. Such a position grants analysts the privilege of interpretation and assessment. However, Hammond (2016: 12) contends that this approach to accounting for politeness is problematic since researchers

may struggle to precisely define politeness, relying solely on participants' understanding. I suggest adopting a comprehensive model of politeness that combines elements from both traditional and post-modern approaches.

For a long time, conflict in interaction and language use has been treated as a phenomenon that occupies the margins of linguistic theories. However, Culpeper can be considered one of the prominent scholars in the post-modern era to mark a transition from harmonious and cooperative interactions to violent and offensive ones (Silva 2013: 257). In his 2011 study, Culpeper focuses on fundamental issues on offensive linguistic behaviour. According to Silva (2013: 257), Culpeper attempts to answer several questions:

“Is offensive language some casual and unsystematic phenomenon, or its regular and pervasive? Does impolite language draw its illocutionary force from conventional patterns and norms of social behaviour or from irregularities and idiosyncrasies in language usage? How is reputation constructed, sustained, debased, and threatened in (im-)polite interactions? What role does language about offensive language, or impoliteness meta-discourse, play in the offense itself?”

Through answering these questions, Culpeper is eloquent at both analysing non-ideal speech and denouncing the biased view that assumes harmony to be the default of interactions (Silva 2013: 257).

Culpeper (2011: 246) asserts that certain impoliteness incidents can damage individuals' sense of dignity, harm them emotionally, or even infringe upon their social rights. He frames impoliteness as a type of symbolic or verbal violence (Culpeper 2011: 234). This perspective forms the foundation of my study. I contend that the exploration of language use in conflict situations has received limited attention (Silva 2013: 260), as the focus has predominantly been on orderly, cooperative, and harmonious linguistic exchanges, neglecting the conflict-driven and aggressive interactions that characterize many political contexts. As previously mentioned, the traditional approaches to politeness are mainly rooted in the cooperative principle (Grice 1975), thereby leaving scant consideration for non-cooperative linguistic interactions (Watts 2003).

According to Culpeper (2011), impoliteness arises when there is a clash between an individual's expectations, desires, or beliefs, shaped by a specific context, and the negative way in which those expectations are met. Such linguistic behaviour has the potential to impact individuals' social perceptions and provoke emotional responses in the participants (Culpeper 2011). Consequently, impoliteness is seen as a disruptive phenomenon. In line with this viewpoint, Culpeper (2011: 98)

regards impoliteness as a manifestation of symbolic violence. In contrast to conventional literature, Culpeper (2011: 31) contends that “face is not at the core of everything that can be considered (im-)polite. Often, the key concern appears to be breaches of social norms and conventions.”

Culpeper (2011) also departs from the conventional belief that intentionality is central to communication. Instead, he sees intentions as constructs formed after the fact, collaboratively developed in interaction. Consequently, Culpeper (2011) suggests that linguists should now focus on addressing the societal issue of language-related violence.

3.4.4 Politic and non-politic linguistic strategies

The terms “politic” and “non-politic” are linguistic expressions that have emerged in the post-modern era (Post year 2000). These terms are predominantly employed by discursive scholars like Locher (2006) and Watts (2003). They stem from the relational status of interactants towards a message, based on norms of appropriateness within a specific social context (Locher & Watts 2008: 77). These terms revolve around the concept of frames of expectations, against which both the speaker and the addressee assess their utterances for politeness or impoliteness (Locher & Watts 2008: 77).

These terms are most utilized in the context of the spectrum of relational work introduced by Locher and Watts (2008: 79). Within their relational work spectrum, the term “politic” pertains to a first-order assessment of an utterance’s politeness or lack thereof. It signifies whether the utterance is deemed appropriate, unmarked, or positively marked within the specific social context it is used (Locher & Watts 2008: 79). In Watts’ (2003: 276) definition, “politic” refers to behaviours, both linguistic and non-linguistic, that participants jointly construct as fitting the ongoing social interaction. While “politic” behaviour encompasses politeness, it should not be equated with it on a one-to-one basis (Locher 2006: 256).

On the other hand, the term “non-politic” refers to a first-order judgement of an utterance as impolite or over-polite, inappropriate, and negatively marked within the social domain it is used (Locher & Watts 2008: 79). According to Locher (2006: 257), rude/impolite and overpolite behaviour appears as non-politic and inappropriate linguistic behaviour that is negatively marked. It is important that I breakdown the terms “unmarked/positively marked” and “negatively marked” behaviours. The term “unmarked/positively marked” behaviour refers to socially appropriate behaviour which is not likely to evoke an evaluative comment (Locher & Watts 2008: 79). Negatively marked behaviour, i.e., behaviour that has breached a social norm, evokes negative evaluations such as impolite or over-polite, depending upon the degree of the violation and the

type of conceptualisation the inappropriate behaviour is profiled against (Locher and Watts 2008: 79).

The cognitive framework against which an utterance is evaluated as either a politic or non-politic linguistic strategy is not fixed. Whether an utterance is considered politic or non-politic relies on linguistic norms, which are in constant flux within social contexts, undergoing continuous renegotiation (Locher & Watts 2008: 78). Therefore, the terms “politic” and “non-politic” serve as conceptual representations of the notion that no linguistic behaviour is inherently polite or impolite. These terms capture the adaptable and discursive nature of impoliteness, which hinges on the judgments that participants make to categorize an utterance as polite or impolite (Locher & Watts 2008: 78).

The terms “politic” and “non-politic” hold significance as they depart from traditional second-order notions of politeness to embrace the first-order perspective of impoliteness in post-modern thought. Their use signifies a prioritization of first-order comprehension of politeness, where the evaluation and judgment of an utterance by participants are paramount. Through their inclusion in my study, I emphasize the importance of considering both the speaker’s and the addressee’s assessments of an utterance.

The terms “politic” and “non-politic” were formulated to cover the entire spectrum of social linguistic behaviour. This point of view is in stark contrast to much of the traditional literature on politeness that implicitly or explicitly speaks only of polite or impolite behaviour but does not leave open the option for a type of utterance that is neither polite nor impolite (Locher 2006: 255). The post-modern scholars who employ these terms argue that relational work cannot be reduced to a dichotomy of polite and impolite behaviour (Locher 2006: 255). Their argument is that there are utterances that are neither polite nor impolite (Locher 2006: 255).

I contend that incorporating these terms into this study underscores the necessity of addressing the full spectrum of human interactions and relational dynamics. This study is thus obligated to craft linguistic strategies for online reputation management. Given the limited usage of the terms “politic” and “non-politic” in im-/politeness literature, this research significantly contributes to their broader recognition and adoption.

3.5 Understanding *Twitter* as a site for political contact

The utilization of social networks is on a continuous rise. As Larsson and Moe (2013: 319) point out, *Twitter*, alongside platforms like *YouTube* and *Facebook*, has become an integral part of political communication worldwide. Individuals such as campaigners, lobbyists, lawyers, journalists, and

activists frequently employ this platform to disseminate their messages and engage with potential voters, clients, or followers (Larsson & Moe 2013: 320). Thus, *Twitter* has gained significant prominence in global political communication, enabling political figures to enhance their visibility.

According to Reveilhac & Morselli (2021: 98), political parties and politicians heavily rely on social media, including platforms like *Twitter*, to promote their views, engage with citizens and other political stakeholders, and attract attention from traditional media. *Twitter* serves as a means of political accountability, where political actors use it to update their constituents about matters affecting their well-being. By maintaining a visible presence on the platform and responding positively to public concerns, certain political figures position themselves as credible and trustworthy. Ordinary citizens also use the platform to communicate with elected officials and other influential political figures, expressing their views on policies, service delivery, and participating in constructive political discussions. This highlights that some individuals are utilizing *Twitter* for productive political interactions.

The subsequent sections of this study concentrate on hate postings and hate speech prevalent on *Twitter*. Examining these aspects can illuminate the potential repercussions of negative online content on the reputation of political actors. This discussion can provide valuable insights into effective strategies for managing their online image. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of timely responses to and condemnation of hateful content as a measure to mitigate damage to their reputation.

3.5.1 *Twitter* policy on hate postings

Twitter's purpose is to serve the public conversation through ensuring that all people can participate in public conversations freely and safely (Twitter 2023)¹. According to *Twitter*, violence, harassment, and other similar types of behaviour discourage people from expressing themselves, and ultimately diminish the value of global public conversation (Twitter 2023). This kind of speech falls within the rubric of hate speech, a broad and emotive concept which lies in a complex nexus with freedom of expression and the concept of dignity/reputation (Gagliardone 2019: 3070). This assessment is in line with the motivation for the current research, namely that the prevalence of online hate postings is threatening the social capital which can emerge from the cross-pollination of ideas between political interactants (see Section 1.3).

¹ Find the Twitter policy on hate postings at: <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/hateful-conduct-policy>

Twitter states that it is committed to combating abuse motivated by hatred, prejudice, or intolerance through prohibiting prejudicial behaviour (Twitter 2023). The prejudicial behaviours they cite as hate include the following: “violent threats, wishing, hoping or calling for serious harm on a person or group of people, references to mass murder, violent events, or specific means of violence where protected groups have been the primary targets or victims, incitement of fear, harassment or discrimination, repeated and/or non-consensual slurs, epithets, racist and sexist tropes, or other content that degrades someone, as well as hurtful imagery” (Twitter 2022). While *Twitter* offers an open space for interactants to discuss, share thoughts and opinions, its nature and the huge number of posts, comments and messages exchanged makes it difficult to control hate speech and filter the content of users (Watanabe, Bouazizi & Ohtsuki 2018: 1).

Under *Twitter* policy, *Twitter* states that it acts against behaviour that violates its policy, as described above. Among a plethora of actions, they take against behaviours that violate their policy are the following: requiring tweet removal by asking the perpetrator to retract the violating content and making him/her serve a period of time in a “read-only mode” before they can tweet again (Twitter 2023)². The read only mode is a level of permission that permits read access to *Twitter* resources, including a user’s tweets, home timeline, and profile information (Twitter 2023). However, it does not allow access to read a user’s Direct Messages, and it does not allow to update any element or object (Twitter 2023). In cases where there are continued violations, *Twitter* extends the read-only periods and may eventually suspend the user permanently (Twitter 2023). This happened to Donald Trump, the former President of the United States of America, whose account @realDonaldTrump was suspended permanently for violating *Twitter* rules (Holmberg 2021: 310). *Twitter* also hides tweets that are violating *Twitter* rules while awaiting their removal by the users. This demonstrates that violating tweets can be blocked from public view and *Twitter* replaces the original content with a notice stating that the tweet is no longer available because it violated the rules (Twitter 2023).

Interesting to note is that even though *Twitter* has a very clear stance against hate postings, it remains a very rough platform with no respected ethics or code of conduct. See Figure 3.1 below.

² <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/hateful-conduct-policy>

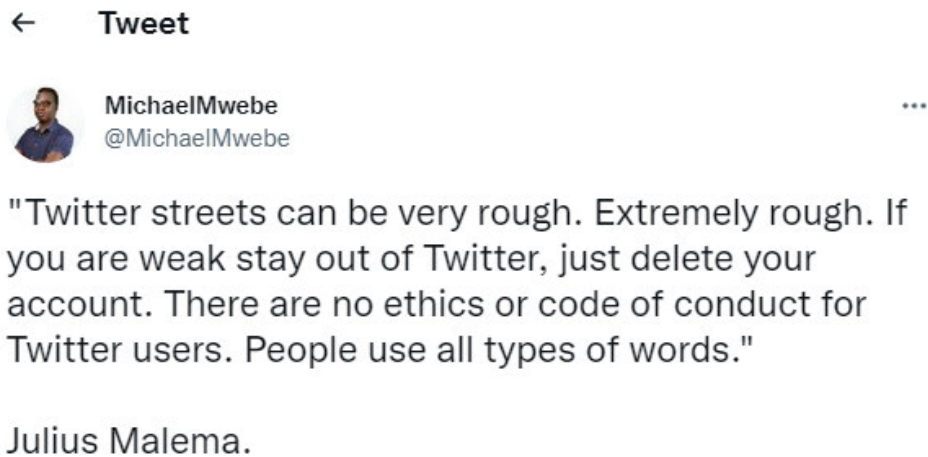


Figure 3.1 A social perception of *Twitter* by its user: Source: @MichaelMwebe

Considering *Twitter's* policy on hate postings, which is often not being adhered to, the substantial user base of the platform, and the negative sentiments some users hold toward it, there is a notable gap in achieving *Twitter's* goal of fostering a public conversation where everyone can engage freely and safely (Twitter 2022). The vast number of users on *Twitter* presents a considerable moderation challenge, and the prevalence of hate speech could potentially hinder constructive deliberation and even pose a threat to democratic processes (Sevasti 2014: 6). From a linguistic perspective, this study proposes methods to facilitate harmonious coexistence among users on the platform.

Linguistic studies encounter substantial challenges in identifying hate speech, despite efforts from both the *Twitter* platform and researchers. Distinguishing between hateful and non-hateful utterances remains problematic, particularly when hate speech is masked by sarcasm or lacks explicit indicators of hate, racism, or stereotyping (Watanabe, Bouazizi & Ohtsuki 2018: 2). Similar to hate speech political discourse also finds itself malleable and flexible as it evinces the same. Furthermore, content that may sound offensive and hateful can be challenging to accurately interpret, especially when it is presented in an ironic or joking manner (Watanabe, Bouazizi & Ohtsuki 2018: 2). These challenges highlight the intricate nature of linguistically analysing and detecting hate speech.

The linguistic strategies proposed in this study for managing online reputation are not intended to completely eliminate the existing challenges on the platform. However, they can add to the current body of literature that aims to address or mitigate these challenges. This literature includes works such as Ferracane (2019), which discusses legal and voluntary measures to control hate speech on social media platforms. The author concludes that a combination of legal and voluntary measures is necessary for effective hate speech control. Another study by West and Sapiezynski (2019) examines the characteristics and prevalence of hate speech, proposing strategies for combating it.

These scholars suggest that a combination of automated and human moderation, education, and counter-speech can be effective in mitigating the harms of online trolling.

In the context of this study, the presented data analysis can potentially enhance the detection of political trolling by utilizing the proposed combination of the first-order (Watts, Ide & Ehlich 1992) and second-order approaches (Watts, Ide & Ehlich 1992).

3.5.2 Hate speech on *Twitter*

According to Watanabe, Bouazizi and Ohtsuki (2018: 2), hate speech is speech that is intended to insult, offend, or intimidate a person because of some trait such as race, religion, political affiliation, tribe, sexual orientation, or nationality. Simpson (2013: 1) aptly puts hate speech as:

“A term of art in legal and political theory that is used to refer to verbal conduct- and other symbolic, communicative action- which wilfully expresses intense antipathy towards some group or towards an individual based on membership in some group [...]. Hate speech thus includes things like identity-prejudicial abuse and harassment, certain uses of slurs and epithets, some extremist political and religious speech and certain display of hate symbols”.

The above definition captures the behaviours that are transpiring in the Zimbabwean political space (online and physical) as discussed earlier (see section 3.2.3.1). Notably, the definition reveals how broad and encompassing the concept of hate speech is and how it includes concepts such as “identity-prejudicial abuse” that are very much connected to the reputation aspect that is central to the current research. The negative implications for hate speech in society are multifaceted (Sevasti 2014: 27). As highlighted by Leets (2002), hate speech violates the individual’s dignity, resulting in humiliation, distress and psychological or emotional pain. It can also lead to violence between groups or individuals, marginalisation, stereotyping, xenophobia, queer-phobia, civil unrest etc.

Hate speech in political discourses on *Twitter* is becoming a growing concern with significant effects for both individuals and society. Several studies explored hate speech in political discourse on *Twitter*, with the intention of understanding the linguistic features and patterns of such language use. For example, Hardaker and McGlashan (2016) analysed tweets containing misogynistic slurs directed towards female politicians during the 2015 UK general election campaign. They established that such language is employed to delegitimise female politicians and undermine their political authority. Additionally, they found the misogynistic slurs being more prevalent among male *Twitter* users. Similarly, Udupa and Pohjonen (2019) examined the use of hate speech in the

context of the Indian general elections of 2019. They established that hate speech on *Twitter* is used to mobilize support for particular politicians and to smear the reputation of the opponents.

Several studies have explored the effectiveness of different strategies for addressing hate speech in political discourse on *Twitter*. For instance, Haseeb et al. (2021) investigated the application of machine learning algorithms to identify and eliminate hate speech from political tweets. They discovered that the algorithms were successful in detecting hate speech; however, they encountered challenges in differentiating between hate speech and legitimate political discourse.

It is clear that hate speech in the form of political trolling is a significant issue on *Twitter*. In the context of reputation management, hate speech can be employed to harm the reputation of individuals, resulting in adverse effects on their societal standing, career, and personal life. A pertinent study shedding light on this phenomenon is that of Fernandes, Guntuku, McKeown, and Ungar (2018). Their research investigates the impact of hate speech on the reputation management of public figures on *Twitter*. Their findings reveal that hate speech is a prevalent strategy used in political trolling to undermine the reputation of targeted individuals. Often, this hate speech is accompanied by threats of violence and sexual harassment.

3.6 Politics of reputation smearing

In this section, I look into the reasons behind the choice of political actors to tarnish the desired reputation of their competitors instead of focusing on their own policies or positive attributes. In the modern political landscape, it is observable that political actors often resort to adopting a 'negative' approach and show less inclination towards fair campaigning (Haselmayer 2019: 356). Consequently, the phenomenon of tarnishing reputations through smear campaigns is prevalent globally, taking on various forms including substantive critiques, the use of derogatory language, or the spread of rumours concerning a political figure's personal life (Haselmayer 2019: 356). Such reputation-smearing tactics can escalate to the level of character assassination, which involves a deliberate and prolonged effort to harm an individual's reputation or credibility (Samoilenko 2016: 115).

The mechanics of reputation smearing become clearer when we analyse the application of abusive ad hominem techniques, a concept derived from the field of logic and argumentation studies (Samoilenko 2016: 115). In this approach, the speaker intentionally shifts the focus away from the debated issue and instead directs attention towards the opponent's personal attributes and reputation. This alteration in the discourse transforms the nature of the interaction from

addressing an argument to launching an attack on the individual's character (Samoilenko 2016: 115).

In the realm of politics, reputation smearing often involves various tactics, including doublespeak, manipulation, the propagation of false accusations, the circulation of rumours, insinuations, or deliberate dissemination of misinformation regarding an individual's morality, integrity, and public standing (Samoilenko 2016: 115). In the political arena, reputation smearing might be a component of a more extensive "smear campaign," characterized by calculated and premeditated efforts to erode the reputation and credibility of an individual or a group (Samoilenko 2016: 117).

Scholars such as Haselmayer (2019) as well as Izougu and Imoren (2017) probed into the reasons why reputation smearing is employed from the speaker's point of view. They established that the speaker's motivation is often based on the intent to destroy the victim psychologically or reduce his or her public support (Samoilenko 2016: 115). Within the scope of the current study, reputation smearing is regarded mainly from the speaker's intentional behaviour paradigm.

The politics of reputation smearing stems back to ancient times. Some of the studies that have looked at reputation smearing include but not limited to: Arif and Bunker's (2018) study which highlights the negative impact of smear campaigns on individuals and organisations with regards to online reputation management. The scholars established that there is use of unethical tactics to create and spread negative content about the targets to make vulnerable the target's credibility. Wu, Li, Li and Li (2020) study analysed the impact of reputation smearing on social media. The scholars established that negative news on social media about political actors significantly damages their reputation, and that the context can influence the severity of the damage. Their study demonstrates that social media is a powerful tool for damaging political reputations, and as such political actors should be aware of the potential risk associated with their online presence. The two studies cited here highlight the need for political actors to carefully manage their online reputation as reputation smearing continue to pose a threat to their preferred online reputation.

As stated in previous sections, more scholars explored the area of harmonious engagement rather than impolite or confrontational linguistic behaviours. Icks, Keohane, Samoilenko and Shiraev (2017: 3) in their conclusions on the *Conference on Character Assassination and Reputation Politics* (2017) point out that a multidisciplinary scholarly approach to a better understanding of the complexity of reputation smearing is required and that more studies addressing the issue of incivility in public discourse are needed. The current study advances an understanding of reputation politics in that it seeks to mitigate issues of incivility pervading the Zimbabwean Twittersphere.

3.7 Defining the roles of speaker, addressee and audience in online interactions

Throughout this study, the terms “speaker,” “addressee,” and “audience” are frequently employed. These terms stem from the fundamental concept of communication, which involves the exchange of information and meaning between two or more participants in an interaction (Steinberg & Angelopuolo 2015: 32). In this context, a “speaker” refers to any individual participating in the interaction who is transmitting a message, while the recipient of the message is the “addressee.” It is important to note that the roles of speaker and addressee within interactions are not fixed; they interchange as communication progresses in a cyclical manner (Steinberg & Angelopuolo 2015: 29).

Understanding who is speaking in a *Twitter* interaction requires careful consideration of the source of each tweet. While the addressee of the tweet is always the intended recipient, the person sending the tweet may not necessarily be the one who initiated the conversation. The term “speaker” on *Twitter* refers to the person who is currently making the statement in question. It is essential to recognise the fluidity of the roles of speaker and addressee in online interactions. These roles can shift rapidly. Therefore, it is crucial for readers to follow the conversation’s flow to identify the “speaker” and “addressee” for each tweet.

I argue that on social media platforms such as *Twitter*, there is a distinction between the terms “audience” and “addressee.” While speakers and addressee may be part of the same online community, the speaker’s words are typically directed towards a specific individual or group, and not necessarily towards everyone who may be witnessing the interaction. However, anyone who is present and observing the conversation can be considered part of the audience. It is important to note that the audience is not a passive entity, as their presence can have a significant impact on the meaning and interpretation of the conversation. The tone and atmosphere created by the audience can heavily influence the meaning of the message being communicated.

The audience on social media have it at their disposition to either involve themselves in the conversation or to just be passive observers of the interaction. Whenever an interactant previously part of the audience joins an ongoing interaction by saying something, they immediately fall into the category of speaker. This, however, depends on the flow of the interaction and whose utterance is under review. These terms are very important in the understanding of the data analysis of this thesis as they are going to feature prominently in it.

3.8 Understanding language choices of Zimbabweans online

In this section, I discuss the online use of Zimbabwean languages. Zimbabwe is an ethnically diverse country with 16 official languages (Constitution of Zimbabwe Amended (No. 20) Act, 2013) and a large variety of further languages spoken by the population. In such a diverse and multilingual country, it is commonplace to have either monolingual discourses in indigenous or one of the colonial languages or to find code-switching and code-mixing between languages.

The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amended (No. 20) Act (2013) recognises the importance of languages. Among the languages recognised are Chewa, Chibarwe, English, Kalanga, Koisan, Nambya, Ndau, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, Sign Language, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda, and Xhosa (Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013). The government compels all institutions and individuals to ensure that all officially recognised languages are treated fairly (Hikwa 2015: 93). This position comes against the background that there is no fair treatment of a language without the right to freely express one's ideas in the language of one's choice (Maseko & Ndlovu 2013: 150). Language is an important means of expression, source of power and a right which must be exercised (Hikwa 2015: 99). Accommodating indigenous languages in my study captures the full range of experiences in the studied society as most of African people's experiences are mediated through their native languages (Dahlberg 2007: 47). To elaborate the importance of considering African languages former South African President Nelson Mandela once famously said, "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head, but if you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart" (Dahlberg 2007: 46). This quotation emphasizes the importance of considering indigenous languages in the understanding of emotions expressed.

The situation in Zimbabwean online spaces stands in stark contrast to the ideal scenario advocated by the constitution. According to Maseko and Ndlovu (2013: 151), African indigenous languages are often overshadowed by various colonial languages. I am aware of the disparities among the languages spoken by the Zimbabwean people. Generally, English is criticized as a colonial language (Mpofu & Salawu 2018: 46) yet retains a higher status compared to many other indigenous languages. These imbalances have their origins in various spheres of influence, such as colonial legacy, international appeal, or economic positioning. Online spaces, being global in nature, have led many post-colonial African countries to embrace English as the primary language of communication, often to the detriment of local languages and communities (Maseko & Ndlovu 2013: 151). In Zimbabwe, English is favoured by Zimbabwean youths due to its perceived sophistication and global relevance (Maseko & Ndlovu 2013: 152). It is against this backdrop that this study adopts an inclusive approach, encompassing all languages used by interactants in the corpus (refer to Chapter four for more detailed information).

3.9 Summary

This chapter captures an account of relevant existing research. It engages in politeness and impoliteness literature at the centre of linguistic reputation management. It explains how various issues of politeness and impoliteness have been treated by traditional scholars as juxtaposed to post-modern approaches. Various concepts closely related to the politeness and impoliteness concept such as violence in political discourses are elaborated. *Twitter* as a site for political discourse as well as its policy on hate speech are introduced, followed by politics of reputation smearing. The chapter further unpacks the roles of speaker, audience, and addressee within the context of online interactions and ends with a discussion on language choices in Zimbabweans online spaces. The aim of the chapter is to situate the study within the body of existing literature and to outline gaps in the available knowledge base that the current research seeks to address.

Chapter four

Theoretical framework

4.1 Introduction

The theoretical framework employed in this study draws upon three main theories: the Face Constituting Theory (FCT) by Arundale (2010), the Politeness Theory (PT) by Brown and Levinson (1987), and the Public Sphere Theory (PST) by Habermas (1964). While new theories continuously emerge in the field of impoliteness and social media research, the long-established theories I reference in this study continue to provide a solid foundation for understanding human behaviour in social contexts. They also offer a versatile framework that can be applied across different contexts, including social media. These theories provide a comprehensive understanding of different concepts related to political interactions, face/reputation management and public discourse. Through engaging them, I seek to uncover new insights into how political trolling is shaping our world.

Arundale's (2010) FCT emphasises the significance of face/reputation management in social interactions, underscoring how participants establish and sustain face in everyday communication. In contrast, Brown and Levinson's (1987) PT emphasizes the importance of face-saving and the strategies individuals employ to mitigate face-threatening acts. Lastly, Habermas' (1964) PST defines the public sphere as an ideal space where rational discourse can occur and potentially lead to socially and politically harmonious societies.

To reconcile traditional (20th century) and post-modern (21st century) approaches to the study of impoliteness, this study adopts a combination of "first- and second-order" approaches as discussed in Section 3.4.2. This integrated perspective, referred to as the "first-second-order approach", helps in overcoming critiques of both traditional and post-modern approaches. By integrating these theories and approaches, a comprehensive understanding of the different concepts in this study is achieved. The table below illustrates the relevant connection between theories and research questions.

Research Questions	Theoretical Framing
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<p>1. Which non-politic linguistic strategies are utilised in political trolling within the Zimbabwean <i>Twitter</i> sphere.</p> <p>1.1. How does political trolling on <i>Twitter</i> employ non-politic linguistic strategies in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors?</p> <p>1.2. Why may political trolling be used in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors on <i>Twitter</i>?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First-second order Approach: The FCT, PT, Culpeper’s four key aspects of impoliteness and Culpeper’s super-strategies of impoliteness. • PST
<p>2. Which component of face is predominantly targeted in personal attacks on <i>Twitter</i> by Zimbabwean political actors engaged in trolling behaviour?</p> <p>2.1. How is the identified component of face being attacked?</p> <p>2.2. Why might these aspects of face be the ones that are targeted?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First-second order approach: FCT and PT
<p>3. Which linguistic face-saving strategies can political actors utilise to redress face threatening acts on digital platforms such as <i>Twitter</i>?</p> <p>3.1. How can the face-saving strategies be utilised to redress face threatening acts on digital platforms such as <i>Twitter</i>?</p> <p>3.2. Why are these face-saving strategies important?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First-second order Framework: FCT and PT • PST

Table 4.1 Relevance connection table of research questions and theoretical framing

In the upcoming sections of this chapter, the examination of each theory focuses on how its tenets advance the study’s research questions. The discussion addresses various aspects pertaining to the formulation of the theories, their advocated concepts, the intended contexts in which the theories are meant to operate, their relevance to this study, their utility in analysing data, and the implications of their application in this study.

4.2 First-order approach — The Face Constituting Theory (FCT)

While the first-order approach proposed by Kadar and Haugh (2013: 2) may not require scientific methods, I contend that a conceptual framework is necessary for determining the actual evaluation of politeness by interactants. Arundale's Face Constituting Theory (FCT) qualifies as a post-modern theory, as it conceptualizes face as a relational phenomenon on both general and culture-specific levels (Arundale 2010: 2078). This theory defines face as the interpretations of relational connectedness and separateness, conjointly co-constituted in talk/conduct during interaction. FCT brings in a new perspective by examining how face interpretations are perceived as either stabilizing relationships or posing threats and support in interactions (Arundale 2010: 2078). This theory aligns well with studies of reputation management, where face occupies a central role in all interactive engagements. I contend that incorporating a face theory into my study enhances understanding of how reputations (and consequently face) are threatened, maintained, or supported.

The FCT as a post-modern theory, emerges as a reaction to classical theories. Its conceptualization of face draws a lot from contemporary studies (Arundale 2010) that adopt a discursive approach to interpersonal communication. This approach conceptualises face as a relational and interactional phenomenon as opposed to a person-centred attribute understood as determining the form of the individual's utterance (Arundale 2010: 2079). The argument pursued here is that reputation (like face) is a co-constructed phenomenon moulded by all interactants and not by just one individual. In the context of the current research, this conceptualization of face is very important as it mirrors the contributions made by the speaker, addressee, and audience in shaping an interactant's projected reputation.

By employing the FCT in this study, I contribute to the ongoing trend of applying contemporary theories to the examination of face and facework, a field historically dominated by classical theories (Arundale 2010: 2078). Much of the research on face and facework has heavily relied on classical foundational theories that often lack consideration for interactants' context-specific evaluations of face. The FCT, in contrast, is framed from the perspective of those engaged in the interaction. It respects the assessments made by participants in determining the impoliteness of an utterance (Arundale 2010: 2078)

The FCT is employed to attain a first-order/emic perspective through its three fundamental principles. These principles are as follows: the adjacency in talk principle, the sequential interpreting principle, and the recipient design principle. Notably, these principles are formulated from the standpoint of participants rather than that of the analyst. The subsequent section will

provide a comprehensive explanation of how the core principles of the FCT contribute to achieving this first-order perspective.

4.2.1 The Conjoint Co-Constituting Model of Communication

To understand the FCT, one needs to engage with the Conjoint Co-constituting Model of Communication (CCMC) (Arundale 2010: 2079), an integral component of the FCT. According to Arundale (2010: 2079), the CCMC “conceptualizes ‘interaction’ or ‘communication’ in the ‘strong’ or technical sense of a non-summative process arising in single system of two or more interdependent persons, as opposed to the common ‘weak’ or ordinary sense of a summative process involving two separate systems, for example an independent encoder whose output becomes the input of an independent decoder.” Accordingly, the CCMC regards all interactants engaged in interaction as being responsible for the faces or reputations that emerge from their contact.

The CCMC distinguishes the FCT from existing theories, Within the model face is not a psychological construct that is external to language use, but a dyadic accomplishment that is endogenous to using language because it is achieved as an integral part of the interaction among interactants (Arundale 2010:2079). Using the CCMC provides the FCT with a basis to explain face threat, maintenance, and support within a single, integrative framework (Arundale 2010: 2079).

The CCMC addresses the question of how interactants achieve meanings and actions in everyday talk. This model focuses on how people engage in shared activities, viewing reputation (and face) through the lens of those involved in joint actions (Kidwell & Zimmerman 2006: 22). This approach considers the dyad, not the individual, as the fundamental unit of analysis (Arundale 2010: 2079).

The model centres on communication in a robust sense, portraying it as the ongoing, reciprocal co-creation of meanings and actions between two people in continual address and response (Krippendorff 2009: 37-47). In the digital realm, a dyad communication model remains pertinent, as individuals continue to collaboratively shape meanings and actions through online interactions. The term “interpreting” is used here as a gerund to underscore that the transient outcomes of interpreting talk/conduct-in-interaction are not fixed but constantly evolving (Arundale 2010: 2079).

The CCMC encompasses three core principles: the adjacency in talk principle, the sequential interpreting principle, and the recipient design principle. These principles are framed from the participants’ viewpoint rather than the analyst’s perspective (Arundale 2010: 2081). Essentially, the

Face Constituting Theory (FCT) integrated within the CCMC can be characterized as a first-order approach to linguistic impoliteness. All three principles are built upon the fundamental assumption that a sequence of utterances in talk-in-interaction emerges as co-participants engage in a sequence of conversational turns and actions (Heritage 1984: 262-264).

In the subsequent discussion, I provide a brief overview of each principle to demonstrate its applicability.

The adjacency in talk principle asserts that, by default, addressees interpret the ongoing utterance in light of the preceding utterances (including those preceding it), which in turn shapes the formulation of subsequent utterances (and those that ensue) (Arundale 2010: 2081). Reciprocally, from the speaker's standpoint, unless indicated otherwise, the current utterance is crafted with the expectation that it will be interpreted within the context of its position within the sequence of utterances (Arundale 2010: 2081). The adjacency in talk principle underscores how interactions influence the comprehension of face, and I posit that issues related to linguistic reputation management can be analogously understood in a similar manner.

According to Arundale (2010: 2082) the sequential interpreting principle states that

“recipients/addressees interpret the utterance currently being produced using both knowledge and expectations arising in designing and interpreting prior utterances; they ascribe their current interpreting to the producer of the utterance as the producer's meaning or action, holding him/her accountable for it; they assess consistency between their current provisional interpreting and evolving prior interpreting, forming operative interpretations; and they evoke expectations for designing and interpreting subsequent utterances”.

This principle makes apparent the importance of being equipped in interaction with face-saving strategies because it emphasises the importance of designing and interpreting prior utterances.

The recipients design principle describes the planning and production of utterances in talk, speakers being “specifically accountable for designing their utterances for the particular recipients they target” (Raymond 2003: 950). Speakers hence make a conscious effort to frame an utterance based on expectations arising from prior interpretations, attributing the addressee with certain resources and practices for interpreting and anticipating the addressee's interpreting, ascribing, assessing, and invoking in formulating meanings and actions for the utterance being designed (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974: 727).

Observable from the explanations of the principles is that they are all framed from the participant's perspective. Thus, the three principles enable a careful examination of each interactants'

assumptions and operations as they alternate in designing and interpreting each new utterance in sequence (Arundale 2010: 2083). Contrary to most traditional models based on encoding and decoding commitments, the CCMC neither expects nor assumes overlap in a participant's operative interpretations of any given utterance: misunderstanding emerges out of the very same processes of interactionally achieving and conjointly co-constituting operative interpretations as does understanding (Arundale 2008). The CCMC represents a radical shift in framing from other models because meaning and action are explained as social, and specifically as interactional, rather than as cognitive in nature (Arundale 2010: 2085).

4.2.2 The tenets of Face Constituting Theory

In this section, I outline the fundamental concepts and foundational structure of the Face Constituting Theory (FCT), which represents a post-modern approach to understanding communication dynamics.

4.2.2.1 Face as a relational phenomenon

The Face Constituting Theory is built upon the foundation of the social dialectic. It introduces a fresh conceptualization of face within the context of the smallest social unit, involving two individuals engaged in interaction (Arundale 2010: 2086). As a result, face is perceived as a collective creation shaped by the participating individuals in the communication process. Therefore, the theory emphasizes that face is established through the interplay within this smallest social unit of interacting individuals (Arundale 2010: 2086). It can be understood that face is inherently shaped through every instance of interpersonal contact and communication between individuals.

The interactional nature of the theory aligns well with my investigation of platforms like *Twitter*. On such a platform, the presence of other users in every tweet provides an intriguing opportunity to establish the relational aspect of face as perceived by those involved. The interactions themselves form the foundation for understanding how face is maintained, compromised, and remedied. In the context of the *Twitter* platform, I view face as a social characteristic that emerges within a specific social system, accompanied by its socially constructed norms that are upheld, transformed, and influenced (a similar viewpoint is presented by Heritage 1984: 179).

4.2.2.2 Face as a relational connectedness and separateness

As described by Baxter and Montgomery (1996: 9), terms like “connectedness” and “separateness” create a “functional opposition,” where complete autonomy of individuals prevents relational connection, just as connection between individuals limits their individual autonomy. This implies

that separateness within a relationship is understood in relation to connectedness, and the two concepts influence each other (Arundale 2010: 2086). In any interpersonal interaction, the interplay between connection and separation is constantly present, causing the participants to exist in a state of balance “between unity and differentiation,” essentially existing as both components of a social system and as individual entities (Baxter & Montgomery 1996: 79).

Face as relational connectedness and separateness is integral to the FCT as the tenet specifies face as the achieving of both connection with and separation from other persons (Arundale 2010: 2087). Thus, reputation and face as social constructs, must be investigated in terms of the connectedness or separateness of the interactants. Establishing the linguistic strategies of managing online reputation should emerge from the knowledge of connectedness or separateness of interactants that basically characterize several political interactions.

4.2.2.3 Face as interactionally achieved

Arundale (2010: 2087) explains that the conceptualization of face as relational connectedness and separateness at the level of the minimum social system highlights how interaction integrates individuals into a social system through connection, while simultaneously differentiating among individuals within that social system through separation. Since human interaction occurs through utterances and behaviours, the practices used to achieve connection and separation in interaction are intertwined with the practices used to convey meanings and actions (Arundale 2010: 2087). Thus, interpretations of face emerge within the context of interactional encounters.

In a social media space like *Twitter* where one presents themselves to others on a public platform, one’s face can only be viewed from an interactional paradigm. The essence of being on the platform is to engage with others and the projected image one wants everyone to see and appreciate is built on interactions. One can argue that face or preferred reputation is omni-relevant in talk-in-interaction (Schegloff 1995: 187). The FCT states that the omni-relevance of face lies in the fact that all human interaction takes place between interactants who, in and through interactions create and recreate their reputations. Arundale (2010: 2090) states that, “face/reputation is continually being formed and reformed as interactants achieve a sequence of utterances. In doing conversational work interactants are engaged in ‘facework’”.

By conceiving face as a relational phenomenon and aligning communication with an interactional achievement model (Arundale 2008), one can understand face as an outcome of talk-in-interaction—a result of individuals mutually shaping each other’s interpretations of a given utterance (Arundale 2010: 2087). Therefore, I assert that interpretations of face emerge from

interpretations of social human interaction. From a micro-sociology perspective, this aspect of the FCT addresses how the practices within natural interactions influence an individual's self-presentation (Robinson 2006: 154). Reputation seems inseparable from the immediate context of interaction. Face, as an interactional concept, isn't confined to an individual's body, but rather diffusely resides in the unfolding events of an encounter (Goffman 1955: 214).

4.2.3 The significance of the FCT in this study

The FCT offers a conceptualization of relationships in general, and of face in particular, that clarifies how reputation is formed through everyday talk-in-interaction (Arundale 2010: 2088). Unlike many traditional approaches that focus on individualistic interpretations of face, the FCT allows for research on linguistic reputation management that aligns with current 'constitutive' (Robinson 2006) and social constructionist theories. These perspectives view face as a locally organized, interactional achievement involving two or more participants (Arundale 2010: 2088).

The FCT offers a conceptualization of relating, and especially of face as relational connection and separation, more endogenous to talk-in-interaction than exogenous as in existing theories (Arundale 2010: 2088). FCT is framed within the confines of interactional achievement models of communication, and within the framework of the ethnomethodological understanding of the social order (Garfinkel 1967), enabling an empirical understanding of reputation management issues at localized levels.

Arundale (2010: 2089) suggests that the FCT is particularly effective when the researcher is ethnographically grounded and possesses an understanding of how interactants perceive the dialectic of connectedness and separateness. This knowledge allows the researcher to grasp both aspects of connection face and separation face. The FCT views culture in terms of a 'community of practice' (Wenger 1998), and its application allows the researcher to assess local, internally coherent systems of interactional practices. These practices shape interactants' interpretations of connection and separation, as well as their perceptions of politeness and impoliteness (Arundale 2010: 2089).

4.3 Second-order approach — the Politeness Theory (PT)

The reason for selecting this theory stems in its enduring influence on politeness studies and its adaptability to virtual public spheres. It is a theory grounded on the principles that lie behind the construction of social behaviour. In the PT, Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) make the following assumptions that all competent adult members of a society have (and know each other to have):

“face, the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, consisting in two related aspects: negative face which is the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction and positive face which is the positive consistent self-image or ‘personality’ (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants” and “certain rational capacities, in particular consistent modes of reasoning from ends to the means that will achieve those ends”.

4.3.1 The notion of face

Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) associate face to the notions of being embarrassed or humiliated or losing face. Their interpretation of face closely aligns with the understanding of face presented in my problem statement and corresponds with the aspect of online reputation management that I investigate in this study. To me face is a linguistic term used in different cultures in a metaphorical sense to mean the reputation or the standing in the society. Thus, to Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) face is emotionally invested. Furthermore, face can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction. This understanding of face presents it as something that is mutually vulnerable between interactants.

Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) propose that each interactant’s goal should be to uphold one another’s face by behaving in ways that reassure the others that they are mindful of face-related expectations. They also argue that while the specifics of face may vary across cultures, the shared awareness of members’ public self-image, or face, and the societal need to acknowledge it during interactions are universally applicable (Brown & Levinson 1987: 62). This theoretical standpoint highlights a gap that this study aims to address by examining the validity of the universality principle in the context of a digital space predominantly used by Africans.

The theory highlights that interactants aim for their goals, possessions, and accomplishments to be seen as desirable, especially by specific individuals who are relevant to those goals (Brown & Levinson 1987: 63). This concept of face can be applicable to a politically divided context like the one in my corpus, where interactants may seek validation from individuals who share their political beliefs, thus enhancing their positive face. In the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, the notion of face provides a framework to comprehend how language is employed to safeguard or contest reputations, especially within a context of contested political power.

4.3.2 The notion of rationality

Brown and Levinson (1987: 64) define rationality as the application of a specific mode of reasoning which guarantees inferences from ends or goals to means that will satisfy those ends. By this they

claim that a face-bearing rational agent will tend to utilize the minimizing strategies of acts that cause a threat to the individual's expectations regarding self-image according to a rational assessment of the face risk to an addressee (Brown & Levinson 1987: 91). The assumption they make is that everyone can apply their minds reasonably (practical reasoning) on anything they engage on to arrive at any results that they might desire. In their own words, Brown and Levinson (1987: 65) say that rationality is "the ability to weigh up different means to an end and choose the one that most satisfies the desired goals". The importance of this aspect in this study is that it universalises the ability of every interactant to apply their mind within reasonable parameters in order to achieve certain communicative goals. Thus, any utterance issued within the context of the study is said to have been said by a rational being for the purposes of achieving certain impoliteness ends.

4.3.3 Face Threatening Acts (FTAs)

Yule (1996: 61) defines Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) as communication actions that pose a risk to an individual's desired self-image. For Brown and Levinson (1987), FTAs are central to their politeness theory. They characterize FTAs as "acts that inherently challenge the face-related desires of the speaker and/or the addressee" (Brown & Levinson 1987: 65). They use the term "act" to refer to the intended action conveyed by the utterance (Brown & Levinson 1987: 65). Importantly, the concept of FTAs, according to Brown and Levinson (1987: 65), applies to both the speaker and the addressee. However, from the speaker's perspective, FTAs occur when the speaker engages in actions that contradict their own wants and preferences (Nasution & Lisetyo 2013: 3).

In the context of politeness theory, Brown and Levinson (1987: 65) delineate Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) based on two key aspects: "Whose face is being threatened (the speaker or the addressee's), and which type of face is being threatened (positive or negative face)." They introduce positive and negative faces as the specific facets of face that can be jeopardized through an utterance. Brown and Levinson (1987: 65) distinguish FTAs along two lines: firstly, by recognizing the type of face that is endangered, and secondly, by distinguishing between threats to the addressee's face and threats to the speaker's face.

4.3.3.1 Kinds of face threatened

The negative face is presented as threatened in cases where the speaker indicates potentially that he/she does not intend to avoid impeding the addressee's freedom of action (Brown & Levinson 1987: 65). Several acts that impede on the negative face were listed as follows:

“acts that predicate some future acts on addressee and in so doing put some pressure on addressee to do or refrain from doing the act such as threats, warnings, dares, reminders, suggestions or orders and requests. Acts that predicate some positive future act of speaker towards the addressee, and in so doing put some pressure on addressee to accept or reject them, and possibly incur a debt. These acts may be in the form of offers or promises. And those acts that predicate some desire of speaker toward the addressee or addressee’s goods, giving the addressee reason to think that he may have to take action to protect the object of speaker’s desire, or give it to speaker. These acts include compliments, expressions of envy or admiration or expressions of strong (negative) emotions toward the addressee.”

From this explanation, it becomes evident that these acts encompass actions that have the potential to impact someone’s inclination to avoid imposition. On *Twitter*, political interactions often involve endeavours to persuade, influence, or express opinions, which could potentially encroach upon the negative face of other users. By comprehending how the various actions listed above can influence individuals’ negative face, one can interpret the dynamics of political interactions on *Twitter* in the context of linguistic reputation management. This suggests that the way linguistic tactics are employed to persuade, manipulate, or engage participants, as well as how individuals respond based on their perception of face-threatening actions, can be comprehended through the lens of negative face.

The positive face is presented as being threatened in cases where the speaker indicates or potentially indicates that he/she does not care about the addressee’s feelings, wants and in some important respect he/she does not want addressee’s wants (Brown & Levinson 1987: 66). According to them, violation of the positive face manifests through the following: “acts that show that speaker has a negative evaluation of some aspect of the addressee’s positive face. This can manifest through speaker indicating that he/she does not like/want one or more of the addressee’s wants, acts, personal characteristics, beliefs, or values. Or the speaker might indicate that he/she thinks the addressee is wrong or misguided or unreasonable about some issue, such wrongness being associated with disapproval. And finally acts that show the speaker does not care about or is indifferent to hearer’s positive face. These acts manifest when, the speaker gives the addressee possible reason to fear him/her or be embarrassed by him/her, the speaker indicates that he/she is willing to cause distress to addressee, and does not care about addressee’s feelings, the speaker creates a dangerous-to-face atmosphere, the speaker indicates that he/she does not care about addressee’s negative or positive face wants and lastly when speaker misidentifies addressee in an offensive or embarrassing way, intentionally or accidentally” (Brown and Levinson 1987: 67).

Comprehending the concepts of positive face and its potential violations, as outlined by Brown and Levinson (1987), is essential for grasping the dynamics of political interactions on *Twitter*. These violations shed light on the tactics that various actors might employ. Such understanding can then serve as a guide for developing linguistic strategies that promote more respectful and effective political communication on social media platforms.

4.3.3.2 Threats to addressee's face versus threats to speaker's face

When it comes to FTAs, Brown and Levinson (1987: 67) state that a distinction can be made between acts that primarily threaten the addressee's face and those that threaten primarily the speaker's face. They present FTAs threatening to speaker as including: "acts that offend speaker's negative face such as expressing thanks, acceptance of apology and offers as well as excuses. And acts that directly damage the speaker's positive face such as apologies, acceptance of a compliment, breakdown of physical control over body, self-humiliation, confessions, and admissions of guilty and emotional leakage" (Brown & Levinson 1987: 68).

The distinction made by Brown and Levinson between face-threatening acts (FTAs) targeting the addressee's face and those affecting the speaker's face provides crucial insights into comprehending political interactions on *Twitter*. Acts that challenge the speaker's face are often strategically employed in politics to manage image, create emotional connections, and wield power. These actions allow politicians to humanize themselves or control narratives, while also highlighting power dynamics and public perception management. Understanding these strategic moves aids in deciphering authenticity, navigating power structures, and recognizing the delicate balance between calculated tactics and genuine emotions in the realm of political communication on social media.

4.3.3.3 Strategies for doing FTAs

Brown and Levinson (1987: 85) do not mean to imply that what they dub 'strategies' are necessarily conscious. However, they state that when interactional mistakes occur, or interactants try to manipulate others, strategies may very well emerge into an awareness (Brown & Levinson 1987: 85). The following Figure 4.2 represents circumstances determining choice of strategy.

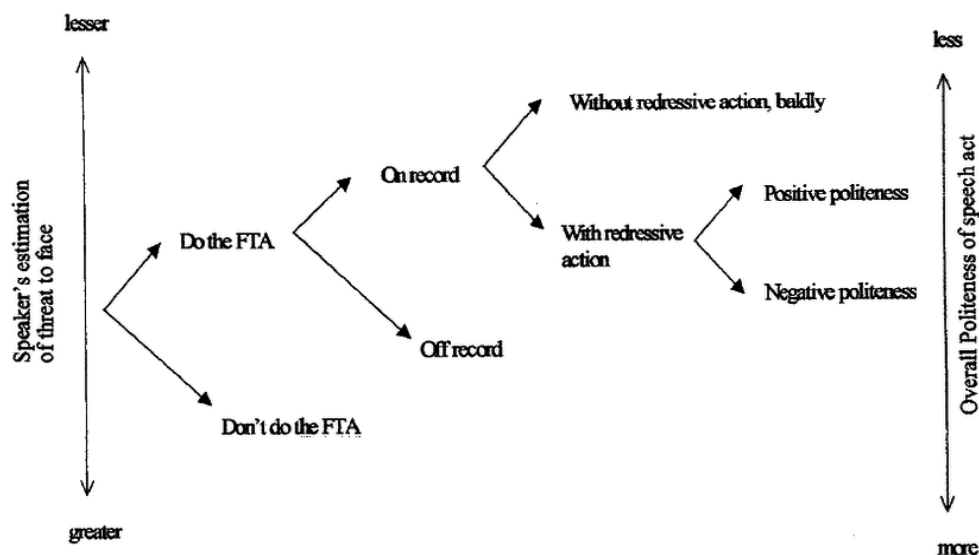


Figure 4.2 Circumstances determining the choice of strategy

In the context of the mutual vulnerability of face, Brown and Levinson (1987: 68) state that any rational agent will seek to avoid FTAs or will employ certain strategies to minimize the threat. As Figure 4.2 reveals, the estimation of risk of face loss determines the performance of the FTA. Brown and Levinson (1987: 68) state that the speaker must take into consideration the relative weightings of at least three wants: (a) the want to communicate the content of the FTA, (b) the want to be efficient or urgent, and (c) the want to maintain addressee's face to any degree. Brown and Levinson (1987: 68) give us strategies for doing the FTAs. An interactant is considered to have gone 'on record' in doing an act only when he/she makes it clear what intention made him/her to do so (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 68). However, the intention should have witnesses who concur with it. When an interactant is considered to have gone 'off record' in doing an act, it means he/she made more than one unambiguously attributable intention such that he/she cannot be held to have committed himself to one particular intent (Brown & Levinson 1987: 69).

An interactant can also perform the FTA 'baldly, without redress' by doing it in the most direct, clear, unambiguous, and concise way possible (Brown & Levinson 1987: 69). This act is performed in cases where the speaker does not fear retribution from the addressee. An interactant can also do the FTA through redressive action which implies action that 'gives face' to the addressee, that is, that attempt to counteract the potential face damage of the FTA by doing it with modifications or additions, that indicate clearly that no such face threat is intended or desired, and that speaker in general recognizes addressee's face wants and himself/herself wants them to be achieved (Brown & Levinson 1987: 69). The redressive actions according to Brown and Levinson (1987:

70) assume two forms namely positive politeness and negative politeness depending on the aspect of face being stressed.

Positive politeness is oriented towards the positive face of the addressee, which is the preferred self-image or reputation that he/she claims for himself (Brown & Levinson 1987: 70). It is adjudicated based on approach as the speaker must demonstrate that he/she wants what the addressee wants either by treating him/her as a member of an ingroup or a friend (Brown & Levinson 1987: 70). Thus, the potential FTA is minimized through an assurance by the speaker that he/she does not mean a negative evaluation of addressee's face.

On the other hand, the negative politeness is oriented mainly towards partially redressing the addressee's negative face, his/her basic want to maintain claims of territory and self-determination (Brown & Levinson 1987: 70). This strategy is avoidance based and the speaker makes clear that he/she recognizes the addressee's freedom of action and thus will not interfere with it. FTAs that threaten the negative face are said to be mainly redressed with apologies for interfering or transgressing (Brown & Levinson 1987: 70).

The theory also states that there are particular benefits or payoffs for using any of the five possible strategies of doing FTAs. Brown and Levinson (1987: 72) summarize the payoffs as follows:

“On record payoffs can yield clarity and demonstrate non-manipulativeness, bald-on-record payoffs can yield efficiency as speaker can demonstrate that other things are more important than face, or that the act is not an FTA at all, redress payoffs such as positive politeness provides speaker with a chance to satisfy hearer's self-image in some respect while the negative politeness satisfies addressee's negative face, and lastly, off-record payoffs allows speaker to avoid the inescapable accountability for his actions” (Brown & Levinson 1987: 72).

4.3.3.4 Assessment of the seriousness of an FTA

Brown and Levison's (1987: 74) politeness theory claims that interactants make calculations to determine the seriousness of an FTA through involving the following factors that they claim to apply in all cultures: (1) the 'social distance' (D) of speaker and addressee, (2) the relative 'power' (P) of speaker and addressee and (3) the absolute ranking (R) of impositions in the particular culture. These social variables shape the linguistic strategies that interactants choose to employ and influence the interaction differently. According to Garcia (2018: 10) the social factors build on context and are all involved in various cultural interactions, however, they are measured and valued in different degrees across cultures. The social variables are context-dependent and can be

perceived or modified differently depending on the context (Brown & Levinson 1987: 78). The P, D and R variables are considered to be all relevant and independent in their assessment of danger of FTAs (Brown & Levinson 1987: 80). Thus, the weightiness of an FTA is a motive for the choice of one of the strategies 1-5 I discuss in what follows.

4.3.4 Face-saving strategies

In what follows I explain the four super-strategies for saving face.

4.3.4.1 Bald on-record

Brown and Levinson (1987: 94) treat this strategy as speaking in conformity with Grice's Maxims (Grice 1975) which are an intuitive characterization of conversational principles that would constitute guidelines for achieving efficient communication. They are as follows: (1) Maxim of quality: speak the truth, be sincere, (2) maxim of quantity: do not say less/more than what is required, (3) maxim of relevance: be relevant, and (4) maxim of manner: be perspicuous; avoid ambiguity and obscurity (Grice 1975: 47). The main reason for employing the bald-on-record usage is to perform the FTA with maximum efficiency more than how the speaker wants to satisfy addressee's face (Brown & Levinson 1987: 95). The bold-on-record strategy falls into two different classes: (1) those where the face threat is not minimized, where face is ignored, and (2) those where in doing the FTA boldly on record the speaker minimizes face threats by implication (Brown & Levinson 1987: 95). This strategy can be employed in circumstances such as those that follow: "where maximum efficiency is very important, and both speaker and addressee are aware of this, no face redress is necessary, and where the focus of interaction is task-oriented, face redress may be felt to be irrelevant." The selected bold-on-record class is influenced by the circumstances under which the speaker finds themselves. In the context of this study the bold-on-record strategy provides an indication of what the speaker considers as important between achieving maximum efficiency and indicating a task. From the knowledge of this indication arises an idea of what is polite and face-saving in the given context.

4.3.4.2 Positive politeness

The term "positive politeness" refers to the face-saving strategy directed to the addressee's positive face- the desire that their wants, actions, acquisitions, values resulting from them should be thought as desirable (Brown & Levinson 1987: 101). Thus, the redress entails demonstrating that one's own wants are in some fashion the same as the addressee's wants. It makes the addressee feel good about themselves (Njuki & Ileri 2021: 1). The redress embraces the appreciation of the

addressee's wants or the expression of similarity between the speaker and addressee's wants (Brown & Levinson 1987: 101).

The linguistic realizations of positive politeness are representative of intimates' linguistic behaviour characterized by a frequent exchange of interest and approval of each other's personality, wants and knowledge (Brown & Levinson 1987: 101). Positive politeness has an element of exaggeration which serves as its marker of face-redress. Positive politeness utterances are used as a kind of metaphorical extension of intimacy, to imply common ground or sharing of wants to a limited extent even between strangers (Brown & Levinson 1987: 103). This strategy can be used in three possible ways: (1) claiming common ground, (2) conveying that speaker and addressee are co-operators and (3) fulfilling the addressee's wants (Brown & Levinson 1987: 102).

Positive politeness is important to this study as it reveals interactants' desire for appreciation of each other's wants in general or to the expression of similarity between ego's (Brown & Levinson 1987: 101). It shows how interactants respect the aspect of desirability of the other which is central in most political environments. Apparent in all the techniques for performing positive politeness is the use of intimate language to express appreciation of the alter's wants.

4.3.4.3 Negative politeness

Negative politeness is a form of redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face which is his/her want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded (Brown & Levinson 1987: 129). Negative politeness is considered the epitome of respectful behaviour by Brown and Levinson (1987: 129) as it performs the function of minimizing the particular imposition that the FTA unavoidably effects. Its linguistic outputs are of a "social distancing" nature (Brown & Levinson 1987: 130). This corroborates O'Barr and Atkins' (1980) position who state that negative politeness features are characteristic of powerless speech. According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 131), negative politeness can be employed in five different ways namely: (1) by on record through being direct, (2) through redress to addressee's want to be unimpinged upon, (3) through not presuming/assuming, not coercing addressee, (4) communicating speaker's want to not impinge on addressee and (5) redressing other wants of addressee's derivative from negative face.

Politics is a field dominated by power struggles. Olafsson (2008: 1) refers to politics as a game of pursuing power over people. In politics interactants seek to have unhindered freedom of their actions and their unimpeded attention. It is at the juncture of pursuing such freedoms that the aspect of negative politeness becomes pertinent to this study. This corroborates what I earlier

stated that impolite behaviour in politics is viewed differently as a desirable aspect which political actors intentionally employ in order to be approved of by at least the people whom they share with their political ideologies.

4.3.4.4 Off-record

With this strategy, the speaker creates a ‘way out’ by providing by phrasing an utterance in a manner that allows several defensible interpretations, e.g., by indirect uses of language. The off-record strategy can be employed either through inviting various conversational implicatures or being vague or ambiguous. Accordingly, the speaker can hardly be held accountable if the addressee picks one particular interpretation of an utterance (Brown & Levinson 1987: 211). This strategy is mostly used when a speaker wants to commit an FTA, but at the same time is trying to avoid the responsibility for doing so by leaving it up to the addressee to decide how to interpret the utterance (Brown & Levinson 1987: 211).

4.3.5 The significance of PT in this study

The Politeness Theory (PT) is widely recognized and extensively employed in the field of pragmatic politeness, finding applicability across various cultures (Alabdali 2019: 73). For instance, Li et al. (2016) utilise the PT to examine politeness in different cultures through English *Twitter* and Mandarin Weibo. Lindqvist (2022), on the other hand, utilizes the PT to explore how social distance influences English users’ perceptions of politeness and appropriateness in contemporary English usage. This theory offers a structured, theoretical, and somewhat objective insight into face-related matters from an external perspective. It presents a higher-order viewpoint on politeness, shedding light on human behaviour (Eshreteh & Yasir 2018: 27). These characteristics contribute to the theory’s enduring relevance, making it suitable for analysing modern discourses despite its origination in the 1980s. In this study, the PT is integrated into the chosen theoretical framework that combines both first- and second-order analyses to address the limitations of the PT, including its lack of contextual comprehension.

As discussed earlier in Chapter three, Section 3.4, the PT offers a valuable framework for comprehending both impoliteness and reputation management concerns. It is important to emphasize this aspect, as the PT not only shapes my research design but also aids in situating the findings within the existing scholarly discourse. By revisiting this theory, I can underscore its continued significance to this study.

The PT hinges on the universal concepts of face and rationality, which Brown and Levinson (1987) assert are inherent in how individuals communicate (Alabdali 2019: 73). These two concepts hold

significant importance in my study for the following reasons: Face represents one's public self-image (Brown & Levinson 1987: 61), akin to reputation, and losing face corresponds to losing reputation. Rationality, on the other hand, suggests that individuals strategically select their linguistic behaviour to uphold or enhance their reputation or face, guided by rational assessments of potential gains and costs associated with various communicative acts. Therefore, I contend that the PT can be effectively applied to comprehend reputation management, even in scenarios where the desired face/reputation is greatly threatened.

By employing the concepts of negative and positive face, it becomes possible to identify the specific type of face that political trolling predominantly aims to affect. Given the recognition of the contentious environment in Zimbabwean political spheres, I required a theory capable of capturing the fragile nature of face preservation among interactants. Hence, my choice to adopt Brown and Levinson's PT.

Within the framework of the PT, rationality holds a significant position, acknowledged by Brown and Levinson (1987) as pivotal for discourse analysis. Discourse establishes the 'boundaries' and defines the significance of speech, consequently shaping the capacity to justify one's actions (Kukartseva & Surma 2020: 8). As previously mentioned in Section 4.3.1, rationality remains a pivotal consideration when scrutinizing the linguistic behaviours of individuals in any interactional context. This significance extends to the realm of politics, where negative language targeting opponents' reputations is often employed by political actors to gain an upper hand. Therefore, the inclusion of the rationality concept in my analysis aims to uncover the underlying rationale behind such behaviours.

In this thesis, I apply the PT to the written interactions on *Twitter*. The PT consists of two equally significant parts: the first part describes the fundamental theory that explains the nature of politeness and how it operates in various interactions, while the second part presents a comprehensive list of strategies that can be employed to maintain an individual's face in social interactions (Eshreth & Yasir 2018: 28). By utilizing the PT, I seek to explore how political actors employ politeness strategies in their written interactions to save face, particularly in situations where disagreements or conflicts are present. This study intends to contribute to the body of knowledge on politeness theory by providing a better understanding of how this theory can be applied to written interactions in social media, and the implications of using politeness strategies in managing impoliteness and maintaining positive social relationships in these contexts.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) work has been criticized for ranking strategies, which tend to see indirect utterances as being more polite than others (Ononye 2020: 6). Scholars such Alabdali

(2019: 75) consider that as an over-generalization as the discursive/post-modern approaches agree that no linguistic utterance is inherently polite or impolite, but it is the norm of engagement that determines its politeness or otherwise (Ononye 2020: 6). This criticism within this study is addressed by the use of the first-and second-order approach as earlier discussed.

4.4 Second-order approach — Analytical approaches of impoliteness

In this section, I explore the data analytical methods employed in this study to enhance the understanding of impoliteness. While these methods are not the central theories of the study, they play a crucial role in dissecting the corpus. The two focal approaches are Culpeper's (2011) four key facets of impoliteness and Culpeper's (2005) super-strategies for eliciting impoliteness. These approaches are prominently featured in the data analysis, and I will delineate how they reinforce the study's theoretical framework.

4.4.1 Culpeper's four key aspects of impoliteness

Culpeper (2011), through his framework of four impoliteness aspects, offers a method for assessing impoliteness. These aspects encompass face, intentionality, social norms, and emotion. Concerning face, Culpeper (2005: 36) posits, "impoliteness occurs when (1) the speaker intentionally communicates face-attack, or (2) the addressee perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)." Thus, face is viewed as an assessment made by the addressee regarding whether the message aims to shame or damage their desired image. Intentionality pertains to the deliberate introduction of a threat by the speaker, signifying a purposeful engagement in aggressive communication (Bousfield 2008: 72).

The aspect of social norms states that an impolite utterance should show evidence of violating the social norms of a given context. According to Culpeper (2011), impolite utterances consistently diverge from the prevailing social conventions, and in assessing impoliteness, one should be capable of identifying the specific social norms that have been transgressed.

The last aspect of emotion speaks to the creation of a negative atmosphere. This is evident through expressions that show a negative attitude towards what has been uttered prior in the conversation.

The four key aspects of impoliteness (Culpeper 2011) were utilized to confirm findings of the first-order approach, which aimed to determine whether an utterance could be considered "impolite" based on the metapragmatic evaluations of the interactants.

4.4.2 Culpeper's five super-strategies of performing impoliteness

In this section, I outline the various methods through which non-politic linguistic strategies can be enacted. These super-strategies address the way impolite strategies become evident in discourse. The super-strategies encompass the following: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, off-record impoliteness, and withholding impoliteness (Culpeper 2005). The terminology used for these strategies might resemble those discussed within the context of the PT, but they are distinct. Although Culpeper's framework of impoliteness is built upon the foundation of Brown and Levinson's theory (1987), his five super-strategies for enacting impoliteness stand in contrast to the politeness strategies of Brown and Levinson (Kuntsi 2012: 48). Instead of bolstering or bolstering face, impoliteness super-strategies serve as methods for challenging face (Culpeper 1996: 8).

With the (1) Bald on-record impoliteness, Culpeper (2011: 292) states that the Face Threatening Act (FTA) is performed "in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way." (2) Positive impoliteness implies that the speaker performs the FTA in a manner that "damages the addressee's positive face wants that is through showing that speaker is disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic or utterly disrespectful" (Culpeper 2011: 293). (3) Negative impoliteness is the use of "strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants, e.g., frighten, condescend, scorn, ridicule, be contemptuous, or belittling the other" (Culpeper 2011: 293). (4) Off-record impoliteness means that the FTA is performed by means of implicature and lastly (5) withholding politeness is a super-strategy where the FTA manifests due to the absence of politeness work where it would have been expected (Culpeper 2011).

Employing Culpeper's super-strategies of impoliteness, distinct from the traditional framework of the PT, is essential as it offers a comprehensive lens to understand the nuances of communicative acts beyond politeness. While the PT primarily revolves around enhancing or safeguarding face, Culpeper's framework delves into how speakers intentionally attack face, providing a holistic perspective on discourse dynamics. These super-strategies act as vital tools to dissect the multifaceted ways in which impolite strategies manifest themselves in communication. Bald on-record impoliteness involves direct and concise performance of a FTAs, while positive impoliteness strategically damages the addressee's positive face wants by conveying disinterest or disrespect. Negative impoliteness targets the addressee's negative face wants, utilizing strategies like scorn or condescension. Off-record impoliteness relies on implicature to perform the FTA subtly. Moreover, withholding impoliteness underscores the significance of unspoken expectations, where the absence of anticipated politeness work leads to FTA manifestation. Culpeper's model enriches our understanding of discourse dynamics by shedding light on the

deliberate strategies that challenge face, enabling a more nuanced analysis of communication that extends beyond traditional politeness considerations.

4.4.2.1 Culpeper's 9 impoliteness strategies

The impoliteness strategies are part of a model that encompasses all potential ways in which impoliteness can manifest across various discourses. As per Culpeper (2016: 437), these impoliteness strategies encompass insults, pointed criticisms/complaints, unpalatable questions/presuppositions, condescensions, message enforcers, dismissals, silencers, threats, and negative expressives. The model outlines the linguistic structural characteristics of these triggers, facilitating the identification of instances where each impoliteness trigger is employed within discourses. These triggers play a very prominent role within the data analysis section.

4.4.3 Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

To analyse real and extended samples of written discourse from *Twitter* interactions, I engage Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as an approach for data analysis (see section 4.4.1). CDA adopts a macro-analytical view of the world in that it takes the notion of discourse in its widest sense as social and ideological practice (Baxter 2010: 126). CDA as an analytical approach considers how language works within political discourses to reveal inequalities in social relations (Baxter 2010: 126). CDA is not listed as a main theory in this study but is rather included as an overarching framework which adds a critical perspective. The current thesis adopts Baxter's (2010: 126) position that, "CDA does not regard itself as a coherent theory. Rather it views itself as a 'critical perspective', or programme of scholarship which can be combined with other approaches and commissioned by scholars working in a range of disciplines."

The CDA has the following key features important to the analysis in this thesis. It sees language as a social practice; it considers thus discourse to be socially constitutive as well as socially shaped (Baxter 2010: 127). It states that there is a relationship between language and power because discourses are influential: They can help to produce and reproduce unequal power relations (Baxter 2010: 127). The CDA is committed to an emancipatory agenda. It starts from 'prevailing social problems, and chooses the perspective of those who suffer most, and critically analyses the discourses those in power, those who are responsible, and those who have the means and the opportunity to solve such problems (van Dijk 1991: 4).

CDA further allows the examination of textual features such as sentence structure, verb tense, syntax, lexical choice, the internal coherence, and cohesion of discourse (Baxter 2010: 128). These features are important to the analysis of interactional discourse.

4.5 The Public Sphere Theory (PST)

The concept of the public sphere was introduced by Jürgen Habermas in 1964. Presently, Habermas' theory of the public sphere remains popular for the evaluations of the democratic quality of everyday communicative practice (Dahlberg 2004: 3). By 'the public sphere' he means an area of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed (Habermas, Lennox & Lennox 1974: 49). His theory helps to explain what a public sphere is, how accessible it should be, and the kind of discourse expected on a platform deemed to be of a public nature. In fact, Bruns and Highfield (2016) have found it to be applicable to social media platforms. Thus, this theory is used here to understand the Zimbabwean Twittersphere as a virtual public sphere, even though the theory is originally meant for physical public spheres.

According to Habermas, Lennox and Lennox (1974: 49), a public sphere guarantees access to all citizens. In a public sphere, every member of society has a right to assemble, i.e., to form a public body. Hence the public sphere is treated as a space which mediates between society and the state, in which the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion (Habermas, Lennox & Lennox 1974: 50). The PST states that citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion — that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions — about matters of general interest. This aspect of the theory helps assess the Zimbabwean Twittersphere to determine whether it can be deemed a public sphere.

The theory states that the state derives its task of caring for the well-being of all citizens primarily from the aspect of the PST which recognizes freedom of speech, association, and expression as pinnacles of the public sphere (Habermas, Lennox & Lennox 1974: 49). Thus, according to the argument, the public can influence decisions by the state in cases where it is allowed to express its criticism in the form of public opinions.

The PST treats the public sphere as the realm of private individuals assembled into a public body who as citizens transmit the needs of the citizens to the state, in order, ideally, to transform political into "rational" authority within the medium of this public sphere (Habermas, Lennox & Lennox 1974: 53). Accordingly, the canonical relation between state and the public is perceived as co-operative. An application of the theory to the data yields clear indications of whether the relations exhibited on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere can be considered as co-operative.

The PST is known as a theory of communicative rationality which details a set of normative conditions of public sphere discourse (Dahlberg 2004: 2). These conditions include the reasoned

exchange of problematic validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role taking, sincerity, formal inclusion, and discursive equality (Dahlberg 2004: 2). The conditions provide a set of critical standards of the public sphere used to evaluate and improve the democratic nature of communicative acts (Dahlberg 2004: 7).

The set of the normative conditions of the public sphere discourse are as follows:

(i) Thematization and reasoned critique of validity claims

The PST claims that arguments must be addressed to all potentially affected by the claims under consideration and not just to those who are present. This conveys that in public discussions or debates, it is important to consider not only the views and interests of those who are physically present, but also the views and interest of all those who may be affected by the claims being discussed.

(ii) Reflexivity

This is the critical examination of one's values, assumptions, and interests in the light of all other relevant claims and reasons. This requires that participants are willing to question and modify their own positions (including claims and reasons) in the light of all other relevant claims and reasons, which in turn demands taking the position of the other (Dahlberg 2004: 7).

(iii) Ideal role taking

According to the PST, interactants must put themselves in the position of all those potentially affected by the claims under consideration and consider the situation from their perspective (Habermas 1996: 228-230). This requires that interactants be open and sensitive to how others understand themselves and the world (Habermas 2001: 34). This is an attitude that demands a commitment to overcome instead of aggravating differences.

(iv) Sincerity

From the PST it follows that any argumentation must be premised upon honesty or discursive openness instead of deception (Habermas 2001: 34)

(v) Formal and discursive equality

The PST states that argumentation should be open to all interactants affected by the claims under consideration (Habermas 2001: 34). Hence all interactants should equally be able to participate in the ongoing interactions. Each participant being given an opportunity to voice their attitudes,

desires and needs (Habermas 2001: 34). According to this condition there is autonomy from any coercive and instrumental control such as threats, manipulation, intimidation, bribery, insults, etc.).

(vi) Autonomy from state and corporate power

The PST states that the public sphere should be free from the influence of the state and corporate interests (Dahlberg 2004: 10). What this suggests is that the direction of force and influence should be from the public sphere to these systems, and not the other way around (Dahlberg 2004: 10).

However, the theory has faced its share of criticism. Scholars such as Landes (1988), Ryan (1987), and Eley (1987) argue that despite the proclaimed ideals of publicity and accessibility in the official public sphere, it remains characterized by significant exclusions. They highlight gender as a primary axis of exclusion, emphasizing that women still encounter considerable difficulties in accessing the public sphere. This perspective sheds light on the enduring challenges that women continue to confront as they strive to engage in public discourse.

4.5.1 The significance of PST in this study

To Habermas (1996: 3) using the lenses of the PST, reaching understanding is the telos of communicative rationality, presupposed in all argumentations. According to Habermas (1996: 3), understanding occurs when two individuals agree that an utterance is appropriate based on a set of shared norms and values. In other words, understanding requires a mutual recognition and acceptance of a normative framework. Hence the theory can be used in my study that probes into linguistic reputation management, in a context where such preferred images or understanding are threatened by the discourses pervading the platforms. As previously stated, it appears achieving mutual understanding among users of the Zimbabwean Twittersphere is a challenging task. Therefore, in this study the PST is utilised as a tool to analyse how the conditions of the theory which facilitate effective communication are being disregarded.

The other theories mentioned earlier on (FCT and PT) have a focus on the language. However, the PST brings in a focus on the platform on which these interactions are taking place — *Twitter*. Thus, the PST is working towards informing the study on what to expect on the platform in terms of linguistic behaviours and goals of interactions.

4.6 The connection of the theories

The theories and their data analytical approaches mentioned in this chapter all contribute to the understanding of the phenomena under study. In this section, I provide a detailed explanation of how the connection between the main theories FCT, PT and PST is realized.

The FCT is designed to provide insights into the notions of impoliteness from a contextual and situational standpoint. It serves as a guiding conceptual framework for a first-order approach. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the FCT delineates face as the interpretations made by interactants regarding relational connectedness and separateness, co-created within the realm of talk and conduct during interactions (Arundale 2010: 2078). Through the FCT, we can recognize the impolite as perceived and practiced by the very individuals engaged in the communication. This theory embodies the post-modern perspective I adopted to comprehend linguistic reputation management in the 21st century. Consequently, using this theory, I assert that the understanding of politeness or impoliteness within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, as conceived by its participants, is elucidated. Hence, the theory addresses the shortcomings of a second-order approach that may impose a scientific interpretation of politeness or impoliteness, potentially conflicting with societal perceptions.

While the FCT serves to enhance participants' grasp of politeness and impoliteness concepts, the PT assumes the role of enabling a scientific and observer-oriented comprehension of the same phenomena. As a prominent framework in pragmatics, the PT offers an insightful avenue for delving into the intricate nuances of impoliteness within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, surpassing surface-level insights. This indicates the supplementary nature of the PT, which complements the first-order understanding of impoliteness.

Furthermore, the PT comprises of several concepts which illuminate an understanding of face issues. Concepts such as face, rationality, face-threatening acts, and face-saving strategies are important to a study such as the current one which focuses on reputation management. Through its framework various literatures that help develop an understanding of this study were consulted. While the FCT is important for determining what is polite and impolite according to the interactants, the PT provides a scientific evaluation of the first-order data. It even goes further to point out the kinds of faces threatened, how they are threatened and the face-saving strategies that can be used to redress faces. Thus, the PT comes into this study as a valuable resource that offers a way of understanding face issues.

The PST intersects with the FCT and PT by offering insights into the dynamics of the platform where face-related matters come into play. The behaviours observed on these platforms can be evaluated against the norms characteristic of any public sphere, as highlighted by the PST. Absent the PST, comprehending *Twitter* as a platform in the context of reputation management issues would have proven challenging. Consequently, the PST furnishes concepts that outline what one can anticipate within a rational public sphere.

4.7 The significance of the theoretical framework

To the best of my knowledge based on the consulted literature, there exists no study that has employed a synergistic amalgamation of the three aforementioned theories. Historically, the first-order and second-order methodologies were employed distinctly, operating independently from one another. However, in contrast to this trend, the present study uniquely intertwines these two approaches to analyse the same dataset.

4.8 Summary

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework I adopt in this study. In doing so I stated and defined theories for what they stand for. I discussed the theoretical perspective of each and explained how I employ it in this study. Relevant connections between the main concepts of the study and the theories are highlighted. I then concluded by providing the implications of using the cited theories in the context of the study.

Chapter five

Research methodology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter offers an outline of the current study, elucidating the procedures undertaken to yield dependable and valid outcomes. Firstly, I expound upon the study's type and nature. Subsequently, I delineate the data collection methods employed and elaborate on the analytical tools harnessed for data analysis. I then conclude by explaining the rationale behind the chosen methodologies. Notably, the research methodology obtained approval from an independent Research and Higher Degrees Panel on July 5, 2021. The research has been granted Ethical Clearance with the identifier number 00014080.

5.2 Research methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach, with its primary focus directed towards comprehending the intricate social realities of Zimbabwean political actors. As articulated by Jackson, Drummond, and Camara (2007: 22), qualitative research centres on understanding the intricate tapestry of human experiences and their contemplations on those experiences. This is achieved by eliciting in-depth responses from participants concerning how they have crafted or comprehended their encounters.

I chose to utilize a qualitative research approach due to my central focus on participants' interactions as the primary source of data. This method allows me to gather detailed responses that shed light on how these interactants have shaped their virtual interactive experiences. Thus, the study enables the capture and interpretation of unquantifiable social realities intrinsic to the interactive process, as well as the relational facets unveiled within the analysed discourses.

5.2.1 Population

The data underpinning this study is drawn from the realm of *Twitter*, focusing on a specific subgroup of *Twitter* users characterized as those "participating in discussions on current Zimbabwean politics." The study's target population encompasses a diverse array of political figures, including politicians, supporters, journalists, human rights advocates, independent members of parliament, political activists, leaders of social movements, and prominent government officials. These political actors engage in virtual and public conversations on

Zimbabwean political matters, either personally or through their designated *Twitter* accounts. The study concentrates on the segment of the *Twitter* sphere where these interactions occur.

5.2.2 Sampling method

In this study, the selection of the platform (*Twitter* now *X*) and that of the population is based on purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is defined as the deliberate choice of a sample owing to its qualities (Ilker, Sulaiman & Rukayya 2016: 2). Palys (2008: 697) defines it as an act of searching for cases or individuals who cover the spectrum of positions and perspectives in relation to the phenomenon one is studying. In other words, it is a deliberate method of selecting a population based on the qualities they possess that help to answer the case at hand.

The main reasons for employing a purposive sampling method, include among many others, the nature of the research problem—based on people’s perceptions, the type of data to be analysed—which is interactional; and the type of population targeted in this research—who are political actors (Tongco 2007: 151). Based on the variables mentioned, it is evident that the purposive sampling assumes a systematic approach in its determination of who the population is, as it pursues a clearly defined path in determining the study sample. In what follows, I proceed to explain how I utilised purposive sampling.

The *Twitter* platform was selected based on the following reasons: As of July 2022, *Twitter* had an estimated 486 million users placing it 14th in the world’s most active social media platforms (Datareportal 2022). A figure that indicates roughly that 6.1% of people on Earth use *Twitter* today (Datareportal 2022). With such prominence, *Twitter* is being adopted as a new avenue to diffuse political information to an ever-growing audience (Conway, Kenski & Wang 2015). Dang-Xuan, Stieglitz, Waldarsch and Neuberger (2013: 796) claim that in terms of retweets politicians and political parties are labelled as “influentials” on *Twitter*.

Unlike social networking sites that emphasize privacy controls, *Twitter* users mainly have public profiles that do not require bidirectional confirmation of connections (Boyd & Ellison 2007). Scholars such as Maclean et al. (2013: 295) regard *Twitter* as a platform that allows for free exchange and expression of ideas nationally and globally between interactants interested in similar areas of concern. In other words, *Twitter* is observed as an open social networking platform that allows for the unregulated and open expression of different voices and opinions (Sevasti 2014: 6). Judging from all this, I concluded that *Twitter* is an ideal context for discursive relational linguistics (discussed earlier in Chapter 3), due to the heavy presence of interactants’ corpus data (AbuSa’aleek

2015). It is against this background that I selected the *Twitter* platform among many other social media platforms.

Due to the nature of this study which looks at influential figures such as political actors, I employ a systematic and purposeful identification of a population whose data I work with based on how they related to the study's interest. The method led to the selection of *Twitter* handles and Tweets.

5.2.3 Nature of the population sample

In terms of discursive relationships, few may be more pronounced and heated than those between political actors and their opponents. Wolfsfeld (2015: 1) states that political actors who engage in such confrontational engagements derive from different socio-economic and politically significant categories. The sample population of this study, therefore, is marked by various kinds of Zimbabwean political actors on *Twitter* who, to mention but a few, range from politicians and their supporters, journalists, human rights activists, independent members of parliament, political activists, leaders of social movements, and prominent government office bearers. These political actors engage virtually on *Twitter* on Zimbabwean political issues. A few political actors were selected based on having special specific characteristics within the political field. These characteristics are mentioned under Section 5.3.5.2.

5.2.4 Data gathering site

In gathering data, I employed an online desk research method through which all the required data was harvested via online means. As the research is discursive in nature the linguistic material relevant to it lies in the interactions themselves. This coheres with a desk research approach which involves the collation and synthesis of existing textual material obtained online (Goundar 2012: 40).

5.2.5 Research instrument

In discursive studies, as Gale (2010: 12) highlights, a reliable vantage point beyond talk-in-interaction to scrutinize discourse does not exist. Therefore, research endeavours looking into social interactions should centre on observing how the self is constructed and how responsiveness emerges—namely, the shared, moment-to-moment construction—in response to the communication of others. According to Marshall and Rossman (1989: 79), observation entails systematically describing events, behaviours, and artifacts within the chosen social context of the study, without direct manipulation. Given the discursive nature of this study, the emphasis was placed on examining conversational and textual materials within political interactions, as they manifest on *Twitter* (Lester, O'Reilly, Kiyimba & Wong 2018: 2).

Having said that, the reason for the selection of observation lies in its affordances, such as helping the researcher to ‘get a feel’ of how people interrelate, as well as its ability to highlight what the participants deem as important during political interactions (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte 1999). Observation further created a “front stage culture”, defined by Goffman (1993: 34) as the expressive linguistic equipment of a standardized type, used intentionally or unconsciously by the individual during their social performance.

5.2.5.1 Data collection

The linguistic material observed in this study was captured from *Twitter* handles. A total of eight *Twitter* handles were selected and from each *Twitter* handle, two tweets were selected making a total of 16 tweets. The interactions in those tweets were subsequently captured via screenshots. Cramer, Sang and Park (2019: 1) define a screenshot as a digital image of content appearing on a device screen that can be cropped, filtered, retouched, edited, posted, and/or printed. The reasons behind the selection of the *Twitter* handles and the number of tweets will be discussed in sections to follow within this chapter. For the purposes of this study, all screenshots were printed and analysed as hard copies. The reason for this is that *Twitter* allows its users to either delete or mute conversations. Below is an example of a data set captured through a screenshot.

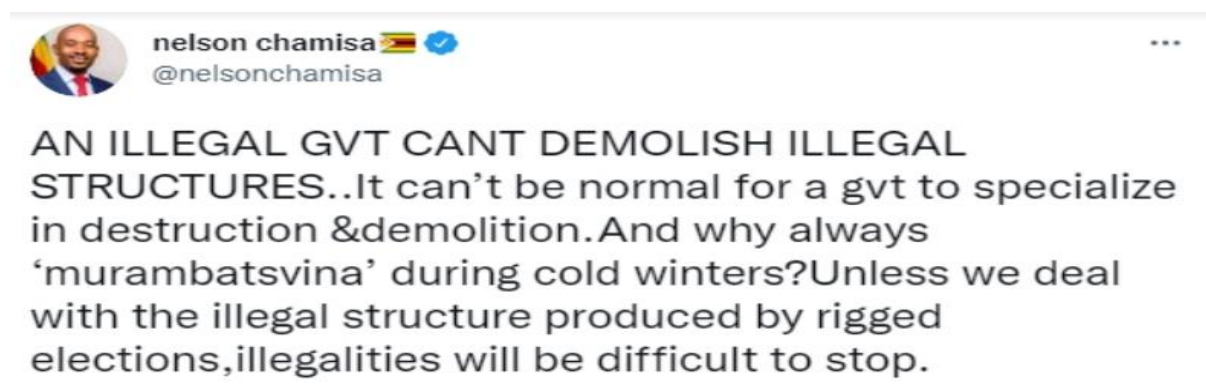


Figure 5.1 Example tweet from a political actor

Subsequent interactions that ensued from such tweets were also captured via screenshots. See example in Figure 5.2 below.



Figure 5.2 Responses to tweets from other interactants

5.2.5.2 Criteria for choosing *Twitter* handles

In pursuit to achieve results which speak to existing discursive relational work on Zimbabwean online political platforms, I chose the qualitative research method earlier mentioned. Accordingly, a sample of the *Twitter* handles of eight prominent Zimbabwean political actors was compiled.

The following criteria helped to identify the *Twitter* handles and tweets studied in this research:

a. Prominence of political actor

The selected participants are of ‘significant’ importance within the Zimbabwean political landscape and are easily noticeable (vocal) within the realm of *Twitter’s* political discourse. These individuals are recognized as influential opinion leaders. Notable examples of such prominent figures include Nelson Chamisa, who leads the opposition party and has 941,100 followers, and Emmerson Mnangagwa, the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, with 851,800 followers. These two individuals wield considerable influence in politics and their discourse significantly impacts the political narrative.

b. Trending tweets

All tweets were selected based on their relevance to Zimbabwean political matters during the specified period. It is important to note that not all tweets shared by the political actors pertain to politics. Thus, the focus was solely on posts that were politically significant. The reputations in question are of a political nature, thus requiring attention to political subjects. Within this study’s context, a political tweet either directly addresses political issues in Zimbabwe or indirectly alludes

to them. These tweets often serve as a form of political marketing, involving actions such as discrediting other political figures or their affiliated parties, as well as promoting oneself to gain political advantage.

c. Affiliation

To achieve representativeness, each *Twitter* handle represents one of the diverse politically concerned entities of the Zimbabwean political fray.

d. Time tweeted

Tweets had to fall within a specified time frame, which is from 1 November 2018 to 3 March 2021, a period marked by serious political contestations which range from President Robert Mugabe’s removal to the persisting legitimacy disputes between the current President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa and his major political opponent Advocate Nelson Chamisa.

e. Number of replies

The study investigates political tweets with at least 15 responses. This minimum number is deemed by the researcher to be the baseline number of interactions which provide a reasonable amount of linguistic data. There is, however, no upper limit of the maximum number of such replies. Some of the selected tweets elicited up to 500 responses; in total 2490 responses are considered.

f. Based on written textual meaning

While *Twitter* allows for various ways of communicating which include voice, video, images and emoticons, selected tweets must be understood based on the written text because the focus of the study is on trolling behaviour and linguistic face-saving strategies.

5.2.5.3 Profiles of selected political actors

Based on the above-mentioned criteria, tweets of the below mentioned eight political actors were selected. The number is a fair representation of each area dominated by prominent political actors in Zimbabwe.

<i>Twitter</i> name	<i>Twitter</i> handle	Number of Followers	Political Affiliation	Prominence of <i>Twitter</i> Handles based on two selected tweets

Hopewell Chin'ono	@daddyhope	334 600	Investigative Journalist and government critic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 345 comments • 17 Quote tweets • 405 Retweets • 3105 Likes
Nelson Chamisa	@nelsonchamisa	941100	President and Leader of the biggest opposition party Citizen Coalition for Change) (formerly known as Movement for Democratic Change)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 272 comments • 35 Quote tweets • 448 Retweets • 2558 Likes
Doug Coltart	@DougColtart	227200	Constitutional and Human Rights Lawyer. A known critic of the government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 204 comments • 50 Quote tweets • 582 Retweets • 1143 Likes
President of Zimbabwe	@edmnangagwa	851800	President of Zimbabwe and Leader of the ruling party, ZANU-PF.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 483 comments • 82 Quote tweets • 437 Retweets • 3231 Likes
Jamwanda	@Jamwanda2	70200	Is the Deputy Chief Secretary – Presidential Communications in the Office of the President of Zimbabwe. The official spokesperson for President Emmerson Mnangagwa.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 264 comments • 13 Quote tweets • 21 Retweets • 145 Likes

Prof Jonathan Moyo	@ProfJNMoyo	808 400	Expelled and exiled former ZANU-PF member who served in the government of Zimbabwe as Minister of Higher Education and Minister of Information and publicity. Now a known government critic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 363 comments • 75 Quote tweets • 783 Retweets • 3934 Likes
Makomborero Haruzivishe	@Makomborero H	81500	Political activist, human rights defender, pro-democracy campaigner and a Citizen Coalition for Change member.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 137 comments • 21 Quote tweets • 370 Retweets • 1255 Likes
Hon. Temba P. Mliswa	@TambaMliswa	396 800	Expelled former ZANU-PF provincial chairman now a Member of Parliament on an Independent ticket.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 422 comments • 24 Quote tweets • 84 Retweets • 529 Likes

Table 5.1 Profiles of selected political actors

The Zimbabwean Twittersphere is a large pool of political actors. However, I had to select carefully and purposefully the ones to include in this study. The number of followers, the political actors' political affiliation and the prominence of their *Twitter* handles is based on a random selected time within the studied time frame. In this section, I provide detailed descriptions of the criteria for their selection.

a. Nelson Chamisa @nelsonchamisa

Currently Nelson Chamisa is arguably the most prominent opposition politician in Zimbabwe. He holds the position of the President of the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) formerly known

as MDC in all its various splinter groups. This is the second biggest party after ZANU-PF in terms of electoral seats in Zimbabwe. In 2018 general elections, he contested for president and narrowly lost to President Emmerson Mnangagwa. The election results remain disputed up to date; hence Chamisa and his supporters continue challenging the legitimacy of President Emmerson Mnangagwa. On *Twitter*, Chamisa is known as a firm critic of the ZANU-PF government. The presence of Chamisa on *Twitter* is arguably beneficial to the public and to him. The platform represents a space where he can articulate his policies, criticisms, campaigns and engage with his supporters and other stakeholders. Yet, it is on the same platform that those who oppose him attack and vilify him.

b. Doug Coltart @DougColtart

Doug Coltart is a prominent Zimbabwean human rights lawyer. He happens to be the son of David Coltart, a founding member of the MDC, a MP, a former Minister on an MDC ticket and presently a senior member of the CCC formed in 2022. Doug Coltart is a registered legal practitioner with the High Court of Zimbabwe. His practice focuses on constitutional and human rights law. In Zimbabwean political circles, Doug is popular for being the legal representative of many oppositional political figures who have been issued with several legal charges. On social media, *Twitter* included, he is known for being a firm critic of constitutional and human rights violations done by the ruling ZANU-PF party. His *Twitter* handle is known for publishing abduction, arrests, and missing person alerts. To many within the opposition circles, Doug is a favourite but those who oppose his views and position make him a victim of racial slurs, threats, smear campaigns and many other profanities.

c. President of Zimbabwe @edmnangagwa

His name is Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, a Zimbabwean revolutionary and politician who has served as President of Zimbabwe since 24 November 2017, coming to power through a military assisted coup (Helliker & Mazarire (2021: 172). He is a long-time ally of former President Robert Gabriel Mugabe and has been in the corridors of power since Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. He held several influential positions and was President Robert Mugabe's Vice President, until President Robert Mugabe's dismissal in November 2017.

Throughout his tenure as a senior government official, he was the first Minister of State Security in an independent Zimbabwe and oversaw the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO). He also once served as Minister of Justice, Speaker of Parliament, Minister of Rural Housing, Minister of Defence and lastly as Vice President of Zimbabwe. However, in recent years he has been blamed

for the Gukurahundi massacres, in which thousands of Ndebele civilians were killed during his tenure (Manjengenga 2022: 33).

As the leader of ZANU-PF, he is considered the face of the party. With such a position he happens to be on the receiving end of anything positive or negative that represents the party. On social media platforms, *Twitter* included, the President of Zimbabwe maintains a visible position. He regularly posts on various social media platforms where he updates people on issues of national interest.

d. Jamwanda @Jamwanda2

Zimeye News (2021) reveals that it is the Deputy Chief Secretary in the office of the President and Cabinet George Charamba who uses the moniker name @Jamwanda2 on *Twitter*. George Charamba is also known as the presidential spokesperson, a position he has remained in since President Mugabe's era. He is among several individuals not allowed to travel to the United States because the US department of treasury perceives him as undermining democratic processes in Zimbabwe. He is witnessed regularly in the mainstream media denouncing the opposition and dismissing them as Western sponsored and puppets of "the Whites".

Zimeye News (2021) reports that Charamba through the moniker 'Jamwanda' developed a niche of commenting on any attacks targeted at the ruling ZANU-PF and government while mocking and demeaning those he opposes. He is also known for commenting on stories published on private media spaces or social media and in some cases issuing threats against reporters whose by-lines appear on the reports (Zimeye 2021). For this reason, Charamba is seen as a force to reckon with in the Zimbabwean political sphere. To those who align with his views, Charamba is a celebrated figure whose stewardship in defending the party and the government is unquestioned. However, to those who oppose his views Charamba is an enabler of the prevailing system. His outspokenness continues to elicit a vitriol of comments on his Tweets.

e. Prof. Jonathan Moyo @ProfJNMoyo

Prof. Jonathan Moyo is a Zimbabwean politician who served in various positions in President Robert Gabriel Mugabe's government. On 19 November 2017, he was expelled from ZANU-PF together with many other prominent politicians for being one of the "criminals surrounding President Robert Gabriel Mugabe". He is currently living in exile after surviving death and arrests during the coup that ousted President Robert Mugabe.

He is credited and criticized for being the architect of several draconian laws that limit people's freedoms (Moyo 2004: 27). Such laws include the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) (2001), the

Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (Commercialisation) Act (2003), the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) (2002), the Public Order and Security Act (2002) (The Financial Gazette 2005). As Minister of Information, Moyo fought battles with the private media, until the time he was expelled from ZANU-PF.

Before his ultimate second expulsion from ZANU-PF in 2017, Moyo had initially been expelled by the party in 2005 and went on to contest as an independent candidate for the parliamentary seat in Tsholotsho which he won. He is one of the only three politicians to date who have won as independents in all elections Zimbabwe has conducted since independence.

Since his expulsion in 2017 Prof. Jonathan Moyo has taken to *Twitter* to critic Zimbabwean politics. He is quite vocal on all political issues and because of his status as a professor he is seen as a credible voice and authority in Zimbabwean politics. The fact that he is now outside the corridors of governmental power makes people believe that he is the rightful person to give insider and outsider perspectives about the ruling party government. Due to his critical stance on Zimbabwean politics, Prof. Jonathan Moyo has enemies and friends on both divides — the ruling party and the opposition.

f. Makomborero Haruzivishe @MakomboreroH

Makomborero Haruzivishe is a former student leader and secretary general of the Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU). He is known for playing an active role in advocating for students' and citizens' rights. Many times, he has campaigned for these rights challenging the government resulting in him being arrested, beaten up and detained in some of the country's notorious prisons. In one of his criticisms of the government, Makomborero Haruzivishe was quoted in an article in the newspaper, *The Zimbabwean* as having said, "The disappearance of 15 billion dollars diamonds money is just but one of the major tendencies of Zimbabwe's pathetic and failed state presided over by thieves and robbers who masquerading as a president and cabinet...How on earth can a whole government fail to explain or account for money that is four times bigger than the national budget...?" (Global Heroes Project 2021). His public statements critical of the government have not made him a friend to those in government and those who support the ruling party. His views have been largely aligned with opposition sentiments. He is one of the prominent political activists who have taken to *Twitter* to amplify their voices.

g. Hon. Temba P. Mliswa @TambaMliswa

Honourable Temba P. Mliswa is an independent member of parliament for Norton Constituency. He is one of the only three people to date in the history of Zimbabwean politics to have won an

election standing as an independent candidate. He is a former ZANU-PF provincial chairman for Mashonaland West Province before his ouster in December 2014 and subsequent expulsion. He is known for being outspoken in Zimbabwean political circles calling out on those involved in corrupt activities and human rights violation. On many occasions Mliswa criticized a variety of powerful people both from the ruling party and the opposition.

As an independent candidate, Mliswa is seen as a neutral voice in a political context that is polarized along party lines. However, his history with ZANU-PF, corruption charges labelled against him, relationship issues, arrests and business dealings continue to haunt him and to threaten his reputation even online.

5.2.5.4 Address to the identity question of selected political actors

Focusing on *Twitter* handles raises the query whether the individuals behind the *Twitter* handles are the actual people listed in Table 5.1. Many influential people in the world have employees who run their social media platforms; this could also be the case here. However, this study does not seek to establish the real identity of the person behind a *Twitter* handle; this question is not of relevance in the context of this study. What matters are issues related to linguistic trolling behaviour and the management of online reputation.

5.2.5.5 Relations between interactants

In the context of my study, a person I consider an interactant manages to engage with others on *Twitter*. Thus, in the context of the current research study, an interactant is anyone from a political actor to a follower of a political actor who dialogues publicly on any political issue. There may not be any direct connection between interactants apart from the fact that they are individuals who have been brought into a common space because of similar interests — Zimbabwean politics. Obviously, there might be actual relationships between some interactants that exist outside the virtual space.

5.2.5.6 Character of the discourse

This study looks at tweets on various political issues by selected political actors. The tweets do not directly relate to one another, except for being about Zimbabwean political experiences. Each tweet is presented as an isolated event in which the political actor engages with the public on political issues that may be of interest to a wider public. All interactions ensue as a result of a tweet from a political actor and in drawing upon issues of face I probed into the main tweet by the political actor and the subsequent responses that emerged.

5.2.5.7 Language of the discourse

The language employed in this study is English. It is the language used in interactions by most of the participants in my data and they hardly ever code switch. This can be seen as a reflex of the fact that they are using *Twitter* as a multilingual platform that uses English as one dominant *Lingua Franca*. Such use of the language is rooted in the legacy of colonialism and the idea that English is a global language needed to interact on a global stage such as *Twitter*. In rare cases interactants use an indigenous language so that either code-switching or code-mixing occurs. In such instances, the indigenous language is translated into English to make the data analysis accessible to a wider audience.

5.2.5.8 Gender of the participants

The political actors whose tweets were selected for this study are all males. The reason for this is informed by Coates' (2014: 91) difference approach related to the use of discourse by different genders. The difference approach sees the differences between women's linguistic usage and men's linguistic usage as arising from the different subcultures in which women and men are socialized (Coates 2014: 91). Using Ncube and Yemurai (ibid)'s perception of trolling and Coates's (2014) understanding of language use by different genders, I chose to probe into an all-male sample. I acknowledge that by so doing I am leaving a gap for other researchers to look at women's use of language in political interactions. While I chose to select tweets from all-male political actors, there are some females among the respondents to those tweets.

5.2.5.9 Quantifying occurrence frequency of the non-politic strategies

While the primary focus of this study is qualitative. I include quantitative data in the form of frequencies to add perspective. The counted strategies were drawn from Culpeper's (2016) nine impoliteness linguistic strategies. I perceive these figures as helping the reader understand the prevalence of a case under discussion. The use of figures should never be taken to mean that mixed methods were employed. Where figures were included, calculations that derived them were done manually and with the aim of clarifying and supplementing the primary qualitative analysis.

5.3 Data analysis procedure

In this section, I present various methods and approaches I employed in the analysis of my data. The aim of this section is to provide a guideline of how the findings were established.

First, the data, being textual material in written form which has an impact on the perceived social status of participants, required a technique that would embrace these qualities. For this reason, the content analysis technique was employed. Parveen and Snowkat (2017: 1) observe content analysis as the study of recorded human communications such as diary entries, books, text messages,

tweets, and Facebook updates, to name but a few. On one end, the focus of content analysis is on *what* was said, and at the other end, the focus is on *how* something was said, while in the middle is the concern for both form and content (Jackson, Drummond & Camara 2007: 24).

As a study that sought to understand broader social aspects within language use, by implementing content analysis, the study further utilized Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which considers how broader social processes work through language (Heller 2001). CDA is defined by Elsharkawy (2017: 17) as a branch of discourse analysis concerned with analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language. Thus, CDA not only focuses on language and language use, but also on the linguistic characteristics of social and cultural processes (Elsharkawy 2017: 19).

In CDA, the critical scholarship desires to expose existing wrongs in society to shape a better world (Elsharkawy 2017: 19). CDA reveals correlations and causes that are hidden. CDA hence decodes and uncovers the operations of discursive patterns of ideology, that otherwise conceal features of the social world (Elsharkawy 2017: 19). CDA, beyond the text presented in interaction, considers the socio-political-historical context of the interactants' talk and how this context is involved in the negotiation of meaning and the consequences of interactions (Gale 2010: 8). It is for this reason that I use CDA to investigate critical reputational issues as they are expressed, signalled, constituted, and legitimized by language use (Elsharkawy 2017: 17).

5.3.1 Methods of analysis that answer research question

This subsection outlines the methods used to address the research questions. The analysis focuses on a total of 16 tweets, with two selected from each of the eight political actors. Throughout the data analysis process, each of the 16 tweets is revisited multiple times. This is because each tweet can illuminate different concepts and contribute to addressing the research questions from various angles. Therefore, when the analysis returns to a specific tweet, I encourage the reader to consider the examples provided and take note of the particular concept being discussed. This approach ensures that the data analysis remains dynamic and not repetitive. Instead, it highlights differences between distinct analytical steps. In this way, the reader can discern the current discussion's focus and compare it with concepts explored in previous analysis steps.

It is important to note that the research questions and their corresponding answers are interconnected. The outcomes of the initial research question serve as a foundation for comprehending the subsequent research question.

5.3.1.1 Determining non-politic linguistic strategies utilized in political trolling within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere

To detect the non-politic linguistic strategies, theoretical insights are combined with the analysis of naturalistic data. In addition, I use my knowledge of shared linguistic and socio-cultural expectations with respect to appropriate behaviour within the Zimbabwean context.

The data analysis employs the first- and second-order approach (Watts, Ide & Ehlich: 1992). This signifies that the data is first analysed from a first-order perspective, followed by a second round of data analysis from a second order perspective. The first-order analysis is guided by the Face Constituting Theory (FCT) (Arundale: 2010) while the second order analysis is guided by Culpeper's (2011) four key aspects of impoliteness as well as Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory (PT).

Determining an utterance as non-politic from a first-order approach, i.e., by conducting a metapragmatic analysis. The term "metapragmatic" pertains to the way utterance meanings are constructed during interaction using linguistic cues (Chernyavskaya 2020: 136). In this phase of analysis, I examine metapragmatic comments where participants assess ongoing communicative behaviour. These metapragmatic comments manifest as evaluative words and phrases, providing valuable insights into the values and social norms shaping the interaction.

As mentioned earlier, the second-order metapragmatic analysis was informed by Culpeper's (2011: 42) four key aspects of impoliteness, namely face, intentionality, social norms, and emotion. These four aspects collectively serve as a framework to categorize an utterance as impolite or non-politic. The aspect of face becomes apparent as Culpeper (2011: 42) highlights that any impolite utterance leads to face loss. Intentionality refers to a deliberate aim to cause face loss (Culpeper 2011: 42). Social norms, the third aspect, involve the identification of evidence that an interactant is contravening established social norms. While this may not be evident in the speaker's initial utterance, it can emerge through the response of the addressee. The fourth aspect, emotion, signifies that an utterance should evoke a negative emotional impact to be classified as non-political. This emotional effect is typically discernible from the evaluative reactions of the addressee or other participants to a preceding utterance.

5.3.1.1.1 Determining how political trolling employ non-politic linguistic strategies

Culpeper (2011: 28) argues that in as much as there are ways of performing politeness there are equal ways of performing impoliteness. To arrive at the 'how', I employed Culpeper's (2005) super-strategies by which impoliteness can be obtained. The super-strategies include bold-on-record

impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, affective impoliteness, and coercive impoliteness. These super-strategies provide a rubric upon which non-politic linguistic strategies can be classified. Based on the findings of the research question in the previous section, the how part was deemed recognizable by virtue of having existing categories of how certain non-politic linguistic strategies are employed as provided for in Culpeper's (2005) super-strategies.

5.3.1.1.2 Determining reasons why political trolling is used in personal attacks

In addressing this matter, my primary analytical approach revolved around the utilization of the first-order perspective. To elaborate, I extensively looked into metapragmatic evaluations – the assessments individuals make about the ways language is used and the social implications it carries. My focus was to discern instances where participants within interactions provided insights, explicitly or implicitly, into the rationale behind engaging in trolling behaviours.

These metapragmatic evaluations were derived from careful scrutiny of the utterances made by individuals during their various engagements. By closely examining the language and discourse utilized by these interactants, I sought to uncover the underlying motivations and justifications that they presented regarding the act of trolling.

Through this methodological approach, I aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon by tapping into the participants' perspectives on trolling. This involved not only analysing the surface-level content of their conversations but also deciphering the implicit cues, intentions, and reasoning they conveyed when discussing trolling behaviours.

In essence, my investigative process involved navigating the terrain of metapragmatic evaluations within the discourse of the interactants. This allowed me to illuminate the intricate web of motivations and explanations that individuals put forth when discussing the act of trolling, shedding light on the underlying dynamics that might drive such behaviours in online interactions.

5.3.1.2 Determining the component of face predominantly targeted in personal attacks on *Twitter*

To arrive at the component of face predominantly targeted in personal attacks on *Twitter*, I engaged a second-order approach in the form of the PT by Brown and Levinson (1987). The PT offers us two kinds of face and a rubric of behavioural characteristics that can be classified under each type of face. Using findings of the first research question which looks at the non-politic linguistic strategies utilized in political trolling within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, I juxtaposed the findings with the behavioural characteristics that can be classified under each type of face. According to the PT, the positive face is mainly realised through linguistic strategies of claiming

common ground, showing cooperation, and fulfilling addressee's wants. The negative face is satisfied by being direct, not assuming, not coercing, and not impinging the addressee. Using this classification, I was able to establish the kind of face mainly violated by the identified non-politic linguistic strategies.

5.3.1.2.1 Determining how the identified component of face is being attacked

The first- and second-order approach is used. The approach is used in a parallel form with the first-order approach pointing out the non-politic linguistic strategies employed and the second-order approach providing a theoretical framework that determines the kind of face being attacked and how such face is attacked. Determining how the identified component of face is being attacked entails taking a retrospective approach and utilising the findings of research question 1 together with the PT. The PT provides the lenses to determine the various strategies that are used to damage either the positive or negative face from a scientific observer perspective. These strategies are quite a number according to the PT. However, they were not taken blindly but were checked from a first-order perspective to determine their applicability in the given context.

5.3.1.3 Determining the linguistic face-saving strategies that political actors can utilise to redress FTAs

I employed a combination of the first- and second-order approaches in my study. Initially, I analysed the outcomes of research question 1, which focused on non-politic strategies used in political trolling within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. Additionally, I examined the findings of research question 2, which explored the specific facet of face that is frequently targeted in personal attacks on *Twitter* by Zimbabwean political actors engaged in trolling behaviour.

Subsequently, I used the insights gained from research question 2 as a basis to assess the applicability of the Politeness Theory (PT). The PT outlines strategies for preserving various components of face that may come under attack. To ensure that the linguistic face-saving strategies I propose align with the context of my study, I relied on the results obtained from research question 1 to guide this process.

Even though the second-order approach plays a prominent role in informing the linguistic face-saving strategies, I also engaged the first-order approach to recommend context specific strategies. These emerge from my realisations of face-saving strategies that proved to work effectively within the interactions.

5.3.2 Quality considerations for the study

Considering aspects of quality in qualitative research is important to ensure the credibility of the study findings. In this section, I detail the procedures I took to maintain quality of my study.

The initial step involved gathering data through screenshots. As mentioned earlier in Section 5.3.4.1, a screenshot is a digital image that captures the content displayed on a device screen, allowing for the exact replication of what is being observed to be shared with others or referred to later (Cramer, Sang, and Park 2019: 1). Given *Twitter's* dynamic nature, where tweets can be continuously edited, it was imperative to capture a screenshot of the interactions at a seemingly 'random' point in time. This approach was necessary to ensure the stability of the dataset. Considering that *Twitter* enables users to delete, edit, mute, and embed tweets, employing screenshots emerged as the sole viable method to guarantee the integrity of the collected corpus.

The second step was to engage in a two-tier parallel method of engaging and analysing the data in form of the first- and second order approach. Considering that when used in isolation, the first-order and second-order approaches have weaknesses of their own which they inversely cover for each other, engaging them both is more than satisfying each of them. Thus, the validity of this research lies in it not entirely basing on a theoretical framework but also relying on the interactants' linguistic evaluations of what can be deemed polite and impolite in their given contexts. The strength of the study lies in observing behaviours of the online interactants and allowing their utterances to provide answers to the study. This ensured that I obtain trustworthy data that is not misleading as I would have gotten if I had interviewed interactants.

Thus, the findings of this study are a product of data analysed from the first- and second-order approaches. The advantage of using two approaches/methods/perspectives is recommended by Webb et al. (1966: 3) who state that, "Once a proposition has been confirmed by two or more independent measurement processes, the uncertainty of its interpretation is greatly reduced".

Bradley (1993: 436) defines credibility as "adequate representation of the constructions of the social world". This suggests that whatever the study presents as its findings should mirror the social order in the empirical context. Bryman (2004) states a study is credible once there is a match between the presentation of findings, conclusions and the empirical data collected. In the current study, the findings are matched with the conclusions and empirical data by using the tested and well-established PT (Brown & Levinson 1987). Transferability is defined as an analytical generalisation which "involves a reasoned judgement about the extent to which the findings from one study can be used as a guide to what might occur in another situation" (Kvale 1996: 233). The study area of the current research is *Twitter*. I claim that my findings will be applicable to some other social media platforms or *Twitter* platforms. However, I stated that in cases where the

methods or the findings of this study might need to be transferred there should be strong respect and consideration for the given context. I honoured the transferability aspect through detailing the study site- the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, the study sample- the political actors, the selection criteria, the data collection methods and analysis and the theoretical frameworks. Specification of such intricate details of the study was meant to make it possible for any transferability to occur.

The quality of the study is also achieved through dependability. Bradley (1993: 437) defines dependability as “the coherence of an internal process and the way the researcher accounts for changing conditions in the phenomena”. This demonstrates that dependability involves the separation of research activities from the beginning to the end. In this study, all steps were clearly articulated, that is, from research proposal to data collection and interpretation. The dependability of this study’s methods, and theoretical frameworks emerge from a successful review at the proposal stage by the higher degrees committee comprising of specialists in the linguistics field.

5.3.3 Ethical considerations

The primary data for this study is available on the *Twitter* public domain in the form of tweets, which I captured through screenshots. Thus, the captured information used in this study, is deemed by the *Twitter* Privacy Policy as consented to for public use by virtue of the participants choosing the public options out of a plethora of other covert options available to communicate on the platform. It means, according to the *Twitter* Privacy Policy (2020), that by publicly posting content when one tweets, every *Twitter* user is directing *Twitter* to disclose that information as broadly as possible and directing those accessing the information to do the same.

I also obtained ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu Natal’s Ethics Committee. The ethical clearance protocol reference number is 00014080. See Appendix 1.

On submission of the thesis all data used as is the case with the printed screenshots of conversation transcripts will be handed over to the University of KwaZulu-Natal and will be kept at the College of Humanities, Department of Linguistics University of KwaZulu Natal. After five years, the gathered data will be disposed of.

5.4 Summary

This chapter discusses the research design and describes the following in relation to this study: population, sampling method, nature of the population sample, data gathering site, and research instrument. It further presents the data collection method and provides a justification for the selected *Twitter* handles. The following aspects are highlighted: the nature of relations between interactants, the character of the discourse, the language of discourse, the gender of the

participants, the quantification of occurrence frequency of the non-politic linguistic strategies. The data analysis procedure is outlined. The chapter ends by discussing quality aspects and ethical considerations of this study.

Chapter six

Data analysis

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focuses on the research methodology. This chapter presents a description and an analysis of the data that answers the study's research questions. The study aims at establishing pragmatic linguistic face-saving strategies which political actors can employ considering the threat posed by political trolling to their self-image and self-preservation during virtual political discussions. The structure of this chapter follows the order of the research questions, and the questions are presented as themes to provide a logical layout.

6.2 Research questions

As presented in Table 6.1, this research seeks to, firstly, identify the non-politic or inappropriate linguistic strategies utilised by Zimbabwean political trolls in personal attacks on *Twitter*, secondly, to establish the component of “face” (Brown & Levinson 1987), targeted in personal attacks against Zimbabwean political actors on *Twitter*, and, thirdly, to establish face-saving strategies (Brown & Levinson 1987) which can be utilised to redress non-politic or inappropriate linguistic strategies on *Twitter*, by Zimbabwean political actors.

In order to address these issues, this study adopts the theoretical lenses of the first-second order approach (see Section 3.3) which manifests in the study as a parallel use of the FCT and the PT theories. Conceptual frameworks by Culpeper (2005; 2011), in the form of four key aspects of impoliteness and super-strategies of impoliteness, support the second-order approaches. The two theories under the first-second order approach are then supported by the public sphere theory (PST) (see Section 4.5) to identify linguistic pragmatic strategies that can be used by political actors to redress face threats posed by political trolling. The research questions of the current study are shown below in Table 6.1 paired with the theoretical framing that is employed to address them.

Research Questions	Theoretical Framing
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Which non-politic linguistic strategies are utilised in political trolling within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere.<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.1. How does political trolling on <i>Twitter</i> utilize non-politic linguistic strategies in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors?1.2. Why may political trolling be used in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors on <i>Twitter</i>?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First-second order approach: The FCT, PT, Culpeper's four key aspects of impoliteness and Culpeper's super-

	<p>strategies of impoliteness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PST • Critical Discourse Analysis
<p>2. Which component of face is predominantly targeted in personal attacks on <i>Twitter</i> by Zimbabwean political actors engaged in trolling behaviour?</p> <p>2.1. How is the identified component(s) of face being attacked?</p> <p>2.2. Why might these aspects of face be the ones that are targeted?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First-second order approach: FCT and PT • Critical Discourse Analysis
<p>3. Which linguistic face-saving strategies can political actors utilise to redress face threatening acts on digital platforms such as <i>Twitter</i>?</p> <p>3.1. How can the face-saving strategies be utilised to redress Face threatening acts on digital platforms such as <i>Twitter</i>?</p> <p>3.2. Why are these face-saving strategies important?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First-second order approach: FCT and PT • Critical Discourse Analysis • PST

Table 6.1: The link between the research questions and the theoretical framing

As reflected above, the research questions are accompanied by sub-questions which, therefore, have subchapters dedicated to the analysis of the following:

- Establishing how political trolling on *Twitter* utilizes non-politic linguistic strategies in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors.
- Establishing why political trolling is used in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors on *Twitter*; finding out how the identified component of face is being attacked.
- Establishing why these aspects of face are the ones that are being targeted.
- Suggesting how the face-saving strategy can be utilised to redress face threatening acts on *Twitter*.
- Pointing out why the face-saving strategy identified are important.

In answering the first research question I employ the first and second-order approaches. However, from a second-order perspective there was an overreliance on Culpeper's (2005: 2011) conceptual framework to compliment the FCT. This was done purposefully to project the concept under study using the lenses of a seminal writer in the field of impoliteness studies.

6.3 Non-politic linguistic strategies utilised in political trolling within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere

In this section, I address research question 1: Which non-politic linguistic strategies are utilised in political trolling within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere? As mentioned in the literature review (see Section 3.3.2) non-politic linguistic strategies constitute a breach of social interaction norms (Locher 2006: 255). To understand and detect the non-politic linguistic strategies utilised by Zimbabwean political trolls in personal attacks on *Twitter*, I supplemented my insight into the theoretical literature and linguistic features of the selected data with my knowledge of shared linguistic and socio-cultural expectations of appropriate behaviour within the Zimbabwean context.

The analysis predominantly took a parallel approach, in the form of first- and second-order approaches. The first-order analysis was supported by my knowledge of expectations of appropriate behaviour as provided for under the FCT. While, the second-order analysis brought a scientific evaluation of the same data, resulting in the increased validity of findings as informed by the PT.

6.3.1 Non-politic linguistic strategies utilised by Zimbabwean political actors in personal attacks on *Twitter*

The data analysed for these strategies were captured from the eight *Twitter* handles mentioned in Table 5.1, presented for convenience below as Table 6.2. The data derives from sixteen tweets, that is, two tweets per *Twitter* handle. These tweets are repeated several times to illustrate different concepts at different stages. However, at all times, while the conversations remain the same, new comments are incorporated which speak to the concept under discussion.

<i>Twitter</i> name	<i>Twitter</i> handle	Number of Followers	Political Affiliation	Prominence of <i>Twitter</i> Handles
Hopewell Chin'ono	@daddyhope	334 600	Investigative Journalist and government critic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 345 comments • 17 Quote tweets

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 405 Retweets • 3105 Likes
Nelson Chamisa	@nelsonchamisa	941100	President and Leader of the biggest opposition party, Citizen Coalition for Change) (formerly known as Movement for Democratic Change)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 272 comments • 35 Quote tweets • 448 Retweets • 2558 Likes
Doug Coltart	@DougColtart	227200	Constitutional and Human Rights Lawyer. A known critic of the government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 204 comments • 50 Quote tweets • 582 Retweets • 1143 Likes
President of Zimbabwe	@edmnangagwa	851800	President of Zimbabwe and Leader of the ruling party ZANU-PF.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 483 comments • 82 Quote tweets • 437 Retweets • 3231 Likes
Jamwanda	@Jamwanda2	70200	Deputy Chief Secretary - Presidential Communications in the Office of the President of Zimbabwe. The official spokesperson for President Emmerson Mnangagwa.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 264 comments • 13 Quote tweets • 21 Retweets • 145 Likes
Prof Jonathan Moyo	@ProfJNMoyo	808 400	Expelled and exiled ZANU-PF member who served in the government of Zimbabwe as Minister of Higher Education and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 363 comments • 75 Quote tweets • 783 Retweets • 3934 Likes

			Minister of Information and Publicity. Now a known government critic.	
Makomborero Haruzivishe	@Makomborero H	81500	Political activist, human rights defender, pro-democracy campaigner and a Citizen Coalition for Change member.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 137 comments ● 21 Quote tweets ● 370 Retweets ● 1255 Likes
Hon. Temba P. Mliswa	@TembaMliswa	396 800	Expelled ZANU-PF provincial chairperson now a member of Parliament on an Independent ticket.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 422 comments ● 24 Quote tweets ● 84 Retweets ● 529 Likes

Table 6.2 *Twitter* names and handles of political actors (repeated)

6.3.1.1 First-order and second-order analysis of data

The non-politic linguistic strategies discussed hereunder depend on context to be impolite (Culpeper 1996: 357). As mentioned in section 5.2.5.9, the counted non-politic strategies were drawn from Culpeper's (2016) nine impoliteness linguistic strategies.

6.3.1.1.1 Insults

Of the non-politic linguistic strategies identified in the data, 26.3% are insults. This strategy is by far the most frequent of the non-politic linguistic strategies. Culpeper (2010: 3241) defines insults as derogatory statements that produce a display of low values aimed at a target. The frequency at which insults are employed averages 26.3% per tweet. This is the highest rated non-politic linguistic strategy appearing in the interactions. Judging by this, insults can be regarded as a prominent political trolling strategy commonly utilised within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere.

In many cases, insults are cast in various forms, such as personalised negative vocatives, personalised negative assertions, and personalised negative references.

Firstly, the presence of personalised negative vocatives is revealed. Lambrecht (1996: 267) defines vocatives as a means for calling the attention of an addressee to establish or maintain a relationship between this addressee and a proposition. Thus, a vocative can be a word or phrase employed to refer to a listener directly. When personalised and negative, vocatives directly portray the target in an undesirable manner. Dunkling (1990) asserts that, in English, personalised negative vocatives often start with “you” as part of a vocative phrase in the structure of “you” + adjective + noun and on some occasions the adjective is omitted. The following conversations (6.1 and 6.2) constitute examples of where personalised negative vocatives are employed in response to a tweet and how they are evaluated metapragmatically as insults by other interactants:

6.1 President of Zimbabwe tweet 2— Insults

President of Zimbabwe @edmnangagwa

22 years ago today, Zimbabwe lost a great man. Dr Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo is a hero of the liberation struggle, a man of the people, and visionary who built a better Zimbabwe. Every day we strive to continue your legacy of unity, love, and peace.
#RememberingFatherZimbabwe

Admire Bere @admirebere

Replying to @edmnangagwa

Iwe Beche [*You vagina*]

Ford @ford

Replying to @admirebere

Why use such foul language in this public space?

Tinashe Phibeon @TPhibeon

Replying to @admirebere

This is inappropriate and uncalled for! Where have you left you cultural values?

In conversation 6.1 the response by Admire Bere to a tweet by ED Mnangagwa is, from a metapragmatic perspective, considered a non-politic linguistic strategy in the form of personalised negative vocatives. Referring to an incumbent president with an expletive term such as “vagina” seems universally inappropriate and more especially in the Zimbabwean cultural context, which places great weight on respecting elders and those of higher status (Booty 2017). Statements made

in response to his utterance are evidence of the inappropriateness of the utterance in the given socio-cultural context.

The first-order position of the utterance is made recognizable through evaluative words and phrases employed by other interactants such as, “Why use such foul language in this public space?”, “This is inappropriate and uncalled for” and “Where have you left your cultural values?” The evaluative remarks make apparent how interactants consider Admire’s utterance as a face-damaging insult unsuitable in the given context. The use of the word “why” is evidence of a challenging position being assumed with respect to prior utterances or actions. In the above cited case, the word “why” exposes the inappropriateness of the preceding utterance.

6.2 President of Zimbabwe tweet 2— Insults

K Laz@klaz325

Replying to @edmnangagwa

You idiot!

Dogefather @Dogefat52563906

Replying to @klaz325

You idiot to a whole 79-Year-old Zimbabwean President? This is not acceptable at all!

Kennedy Stresskilla @KStresskilla

Replying to @klaz325

Would you say that to your father? You are out of order on that one.

Kalungi Fahad @ Kalungi Fahad7

Replying to @klaz325

Why insult the old man? Can you not make your position clear with respectfully presented facts than insults.

LynneM @LynneStactia

Replying to @klaz325

This is so wrong!

K Laz@klaz325

Replying to @LynneStacia

Stop telling me what is wrong you bitch! Who invited you to this male discussion? Go breastfeed your fatherless child.

In conversation 6.2, the statement by K Laz is challenged through evaluative remarks in a meta-pragmatic form such as “This is not acceptable at all,” “You are out of order” and “Why insult an old man?” These utterances are indicators that K Laz, through his statement, has violated the expected social norms and made an offence. The offence, as with any other insults, in turn, gives rise to evaluative remarks that carry emotions such as humiliation, hurt or anger on the part of the addressee and those who support him.

In both conversations and from a second-order perspective, the use of linguistic terms such as “you” in conjunction with a noun term that is negative, such as “you dog,” gives an insult direct address to the intended addressee. Culpeper (2011) produced a rubric that specifies terms which should be considered negative vocatives. On his list, the nouns “vagina and idiot” are included, and when used together with the pronoun “you” become personalised negative vocatives. Many of the personalised negative vocatives established, reflect the four key aspects of impoliteness which deem them insults, as provided for by Culpeper (2011: 42). These aspects include face, intentionality, social norms, and emotion.

In conversation 6.1, the statement “you vagina” reveals the aspect of face highlighted by Culpeper (2011). Such a targeted address through name calling can be said to carry intentions of causing face loss. Intentionality, in the same utterance, manifests through the use of the pronoun “you.” Through the pronoun, the target of an address is made clear. However, it is the juxtaposing of the pronoun with the negative noun which makes it clear that the syntactical structure carries the intention to cause confrontation. The third aspect of violation of social norms is not apparent in the utterance itself but in the responses to it. In conversation 6.2 by President of Zimbabwe tweet 2, the response “You idiot to a whole Zimbabwean President? This is not acceptable at all!” is a striking example of how interactants evaluate the utterance as violating social expectations. The response shows evidence of emotion, which is the fourth key aspect determining an insult, as cited by Culpeper (2011). The phrase “This is not acceptable at all!” shows that the utterance by K Laz had a negative emotional effect on the audience. Establishing these key aspects of impoliteness in the utterances qualifies the personalised negative vocatives as insults.

Insults of a personalised negative vocative nature are used recurrently by the different *Twitter* handles studied and are equally challenged by evaluative remarks and realised through Culpeper’s

(2011) four key aspects of impoliteness. The following constitute typical realizations of other personalised negative vocatives which are employed:

-[you] - [puppet, fool, liar, little moron, loser, pig, coward]

Other insults are made in form of personalised negative assertions where a pronoun accompanies a verb in a singular presentation to give negative weighting to an adjective. According to Frege (1918: 22), an assertion is an outward sign of a judgment or expression of belief. When personalised and negative, the assertion assumes a direct ill-suited characterisation. Such utterances qualify as non-politic linguistic strategies, from both the first-order and second-order perspectives, as they carry impoliteness overtones. In what follows, examples are provided of instances where personalised negative assertions are used and how they are deemed as insults:

6.3 Prof Jonathan Moyo tweet 1— Personalised negative assertions

Prof Jonathan Moyo @ProfJNMoyo

Replying to @thee_bfm

You are one stupid who thinks or wish that my family and I were at our home when Mnangagwa's murderous Special Forces got there. What a dunderhead!

Ollen @thee_bfm

Replying to @ProfJNMoyo

Why are you swearing? A whole minister losing rationality and insulting me in public.

N@SH_T @Miss_nashtee

Replying to @thee_bfm

Tell him.

Cde John Chikerema @CdeChikerema

Replying to @ProfJNMoyo

Your response shows that you are a foolish professor.

In conversation 6.3 above, through the statement “You are stupid...” Prof. Jonathan Moyo makes a statement that qualifies as an insult when viewed from a second-order perspective. The statement has a pronoun you + verb + negative adjective features, which Culpeper (2011) identifies as a personalised negative assertion. In the cited statement Prof. Jonathan Moyo makes a confident

and forceful statement about the intelligence of his addressee. The use of the pronoun “you” singles out the target of the utterance. The negative adjective then connotes a negative feeling about the addressee.

When viewed through Culpeper’s (2011) four key aspects of impoliteness, one observes that Prof. Jonathan Moyo’s statement has the intention to cause loss of face, violates social norms (judging from the reactions) and causes an emotional effect. However, further to his statement qualifying as an insult of a personalised negative assertion nature, according to Culpeper’s rubric the responses from the other interactants are evidence of the statement being evaluated as an insult in the given context. Responses such as “Why are you swearing?”, “A whole minister losing rationality and insulting me in public,” and “Your responses show that you are a foolish Professor” are evidence that Professor Jonathan Moyo had offended people through a violation of expected social norms. Judging from the given analysis it is evident that personalised negative assertions qualify as insults. Using the same analytical approach presented above, the following personalised negative assertions were recognised in the study:

-[you] [are] [so/such a] [bitch/shit/disappointment/hopeless/terrible/etc.]

-[you] [disgust me]/ [make me] [made/etc.]

Although personalised negative vocatives and personalised negative assertions are prominent, other insults are issued in the form of personalised negative references. Such insults are characterised by having a [determiner + negative adjective + noun] resulting in utterances such as those included in the following conversation:

6.4 Prof Jonathan Moyo tweet 2— Insults

Larry Charamba LLM @Counsel74

Replying to @ProfJNMoyo and @I-am-Bucie

Your big head should have noted that a convicted felon is not a political prisoner. The constitution is clear on qualified rights and their restrictions. No one is above the law whether they are a politician or not. That is rule of law.

Ndini Harare @HarareNdini

Replying to @Counsel74

Your response made more sense had it stood on its own. You spoiled a good thought by throwing an insult. Why talk about his head?

Phoenix @PhoenixRise03

Replying @Counsel74

Totally against our cultural values to insult others based on physical appearance!

Larry Charamba LLM @Counsel74

Replying to @ProfJNMoyo and @I-am-Bucie

Why are we even talking about a political prisoner when you should be telling us if you are really the father of your “daughter” who committed suicide.

The statement “Your big head” by Larry Charamba in conversation 6.4 above, is an insult in the form of a personalised negative reference according to Culpeper (2011). The utterance has second-order linguistic variables which classify it as such, that is: “your” [determiner] + “big” [adjective] + “head” [noun]. Not only that, the four key variables of impoliteness are recognisable in the utterance.

Referring to the physically challenged in undesirable ways is something that is shunned in the Zimbabwean context (social norms) as it is considered unsuitable for use by any person (Chabata & Mavhu 2005: 257). Hence, using an undesirable phrase such as “big head” is evidence of a deliberate attempt to insult and consequently cause face damage. The responses arising as a result of the utterance, show emotions embedded in the evaluative statements.

Strikingly, in both responses by Ndini Harare and Phoenix to Larry Charamba’s utterance, there is a metapragmatic labelling of the utterance as an insult. For example, Ndini Harare says, “You spoiled a good thought by throwing an insult.” The determination of a prior utterance as an insult is evidence of how people within the context evaluate the utterance. Such metapragmatic labelling fulfils the first-order function.

In the above, I identified insults as one of the non-politic linguistic strategies which are employed as political trolling within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. I went on to demonstrate, with examples, how these insults manifest within the data. Findings reveal that the insults manifest in the following four forms: personalised negative vocatives, personalised negative assertions, personalised negative references, and personalised third-person negative references. To this end, it is evident that insults are a non-politic linguistic strategy employed in trolling in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere.

6.3.1.1.2 Pointed criticisms

On many occasions interactants find themselves directing destructive criticism to others. This is done through pointed criticisms (Culpeper 2011) which involves judging the merits and faults of something physical or abstract about a particular interactant. Raver, Jensen, Lee, and O'Reilly (2012: 178) define pointed criticisms as an evaluation that is inconsiderate in linguistic style and content, which exists at the intersection of performance feedback and interpersonal mistreatment. In this study, these evaluations came out as impolite in the given contexts thereby qualifying them as non-politic linguistic strategies. In terms of frequency, pointed criticisms average 21.8% per tweet. This rate makes pointed criticism the second highest employed non-politic linguistic strategy after insults, in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere.

The following constitute examples of utterances which carry pointed criticisms:

6.5 President of Zimbabwe tweet 2— Pointed criticisms.

President of Zimbabwe@edmnangagwa

22 years ago today, Zimbabwe lost a great man.

Dr Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo is a hero of the liberation struggle, a man of the people, and a visionary who built a better Zimbabwe. Every day we strive to continue your legacy of unity, love, and peace.

#RememberingFatherZimbabwe

David Mtema@david_mtema

Replying to @edmnangagwa

This is the man you once called a cockroach. A man you hunted day and night for his head, dead or alive. A man you hated for being Ndebele. Idiot Mnangagwa shame on you. Murderer, rapist and Gukurahundist. Please shut-up!

Larry Magede@gede0707

Replying to @david_mtema

Will you be able to defend these accusations in a court of law? Will you be able to justify these criticisms you are giving to the person of the President? These are highest levels of disrespect.

Kudzai Ushe @BGodfather54

Replying to @edmnangagwa

He did not advocate for this anarchy done by your players.

Amen Mpofu @ALastdayevents

Replying to @edmnangagwa

Wena! (Hey you). Did you not hound him while he was alive? You are celebrating his achievements now for political reasons. Nothing else stop it!

Love Candy @RamabulanaC

Replying to @edmnangagwa

The man you work your entire political life to get rid of, he died shamed reduced to nothing. You only use him when you want sympathy and political gain from those of his tribe. Of all people you are not supposed to be celebrating him. All is written in the book he wrote himself. Stop embarrassing yourself!

WinterOwen_K@wkarengesha

Replying to @edmnangagwa

Every day you spit on his vision.

Mutsa Murenje @MutsaMurenje

Replying to @edmnangagwa

I wish I could say the same about you. He found you to be a man of little probity in his memoir "The Story of My Life".

Mnumzana #PutSouthAfricansFirst @Melzbest

Replying to @edmnangagwa

And your people are destroying RSA (Republic of South Africa) as we speak. I suspect that it is you that sent them to do that and @CyrilRamaphosa is sleeping again.

Dylan Dimingu @DDimingu

Replying to @Melzbest

Learn to speak sense RSA has been heading towards the ground since 1994. It was at a slow pace, but it has been increased now. Foreigners cannot do business or stay in RSA without locals being customers or landlords. You are heading to rock bottom.

Using Example 6.5 above, it is clear that the tweet by the President of Zimbabwe was challenged, as is with all non-politic blueprints. The responses point negatively towards the image of the President. However, in making the criticisms, emotions and anger seem to be embedded in the words and phrases used to craft the responses. The emotions and anger are presented in a manner which attacks the face of the addressee. Taking David Mtema's response to the President as a point of departure for a first-order analysis, one recognises the evaluative language employed as non-politic.

“This is the man you once called a cockroach. A man you hunted day and night for his head, dead or alive. A man you hated for being Ndebele. Idiot Mnangagwa shame on you. Murderer, rapist and Gukurahundist. Please shut up!”

In example 6.5 above, the strategy of pointed criticisms emerges through phrases such as “you once called,” “you hunted,” and “you hated,” which point to past actions of the president that are not congruent with his current praise of Dr Nkomo. Raver et al. (2012: 177) assert that those who experience, or witness pointed criticisms perceive their evaluative linguistic character as intended to harm the reputation of the target. In David Mtema's response, the pointed criticisms are conveyed in an accusatory manner, which can be said to be associated with the intention to harm or destroy the reputation of the addressee, in this case, the president. Furthermore, insulting words such as “idiot,” “murderer” and “rapist,” though not pointed criticisms themselves embellish the pointed criticisms and make clear the intention to tarnish or destroy the reputation of the addressee.

From example 6.5, the response by Larry Magede to David Mtema's utterance shows how the other interactants metapragmatically perceive the pointed criticisms as inappropriate in the given context. Statements such as “Will you be able to justify these criticisms you are giving to the person of the president” and “These are highest levels of disrespect” are evidence of emotive evaluations emerging from the perception of the utterance as harsh and insensitive, negative feedback.

The second-order standpoint of pointed criticisms is supported sufficiently by the evidence of Culpeper's (2011) four key tenets of impoliteness in many of the responses to the President of Zimbabwe in example 6.5. Firstly, the utterance by David Mtema using words such as “idiot, murderer, rapist” reveals intentionality to purposefully communicate in a gratuitous conflictive manner. Secondly, words such as “idiot” violate the Zimbabwean social norms centred on a culture of respect for elders as mentioned by Booty (2017: np). This violation of social norms is further evidenced by the existence of a reprimanding utterance by Larry Magede towards David Mtema. Thirdly, in most of the responses given to the President of Zimbabwe, there is evidence of

linguistic strategies designed to attack face. Accusations and name calling are some of the strategies employed. Lastly, the aspect of emotions is made evident by the insulting phrases and punctuation marks. To this end, the existence of all four key aspects of impoliteness in the mentioned pointed criticisms is evidence that the pointed criticisms are indeed a non-politic linguistic strategy.

6.3.1.1.3 Unpalatable questions

Bagga, Piper and Ruths (2021: 2083) define unpalatable questions (UQs) as unpleasant and difficult-to-accept questions designed to antagonise addressees in online discourse. UQs have a close resemblance to an epilexis, a type of rhetorical question which is asked not to elicit information but to reproach, upbraid or rebuke (Zimmerman, 2005: np). This strategy puts the addressees in a vulnerable position to receive further attacks (Wijayanto, Hikmat & Prasetyrani, 2018: 98). In the data analysed, unpalatable questions have an average occurrence frequency rate of 8.9% per tweet. On many occasions, concerning the *Twitter* handles studied, UQs are asked to shame the interactant. The following example provides evidence of this:

6.6 Prof Jonathan Moyo tweet 1— Unpalatable Questions

Prof Jonathan Moyo @ProfJNMoyo

What would you do if you and your family survived a 2am fifteen-minute Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) attack on your house with 7 children one of them 12 years old, by 25 Special Air Services (SAS) snippers with semi-automatic weapons; randomly firing tracer bullets and stun grenades? Is this the New Justice? New Dawn? New Era? New Zim?

Responses

Ba_Reeva @ba_Reeva

Replying to @ProfJNMoyo

I thought you were smart; those things do not happen to people who are political scientists. *Kanti* 'Why is it?' they do not teach you to move on at university? Your time has come and gone...we just waiting to repatriate your remains...where should we take them...Tsholotsho?

Munyaradzi nyamagodo @mwnyamagodo

Replying to @ba_Reeva

What is your real point here? Let us have intellectual discussions please! Raise discussion points on substantive issues facing the nation, not these high school insults!

Dr Virimai V. Mugobo @Virimaimugobo

Replying to @ProfJNMoyo

Hey Jonathan so you mean that when your house was being attacked at 2am you took time to count the number of attackers?

Fabian @Fab_tapiwa

Replying to @ProfJNMoyo

@ProfJNMoyo, you do not know what a sniper is. Snipers do not miss; how could you escape unharmed with 7 children and your hangers on? You think we were born last night? You are bored in Kenya, so you start writing fiction.

In the above Example 6.6, the questions peddled by the interactants in response to Prof. Jonathan Moyo do not seek to elicit any answers but aim to shame him as an interlocutor for adopting a certain viewpoint. An example of such a question is that from Dr Virimai V. Mugobo who says, “Hey Jonathan so you mean that when your house was being attacked at 2am you took time to count the number of attackers?” This example reveals that UQs violate the public self-image an interactant wants to claim for themselves as they aim to challenge the credibility of an utterance and make the interactant feel embarrassed and angry.

When it comes to UQs the speaker and addressee should possess a shared understanding of the utterance. There are two effects that can occur when UQs are used. Firstly, when a UQ is posed and the addressee knows that their prior utterance is not credible, then the addressee feels embarrassed, and secondly, if the UQ is employed and the addressee believes their prior utterance to be credible, then they may feel attacked.

As mentioned earlier, for UQs to qualify as a non-politic linguistic strategy the addressee should perceive and construct the UQ as intentionally face-attacking (Culpeper 1996: 351; Wijayanto, Prasetyarini & Hikmat 2017: 2). This perception is carried through language which creates disharmony inherent in UQs. When employed, the language is evaluative and trespasses on the interactant’s interests, equanimity, or personal preserve. In Example 6.6, the responses carry a series of judgments, which intend to embarrass the addressee, should their prior utterance not be credible. Dr Virimai V Mugobo’s response mentioned earlier is typical of a UQ which carries judgment and violates the desire to be believed.

However, from a first-order analysis of politeness, it is other people’s evaluations that cause UQs to be considered non-politic. For instance, the response given by Munyaradzi Nyamagodo to Ba-

Reeva shows that Munyaradzi evaluates Ba-Reeva's UQs as face-attacking in the given circumstances. This evaluation is evident in phrases such as: "Raise discussion points on substantive issues facing the nation not these high school insults." This statement reveals that the UQ is perceived as an irrational and emotive utterance intended to embarrass the addressee in the given context.

The UQs addressed to Prof. Jonathan Moyo are further supported as non-politic linguistic strategies by Brown and Levinson's (1987) Face Constituting Theory (FCT). The utterance by Fabian in the above cited example will be used to review Culpeper's (2005) four key tenets of impoliteness. Fabian says, "@ProfJNMoyo, you do not know what a sniper is. Snipers do not miss; how could you escape unharmed with 7 children and your hangers on? You think we were born last night? You are bored in Kenya, so you start writing fiction."

Firstly, the utterance communicates the intention to purposefully communicate in a gratuitous conflictive manner through the following question "You think we were born last night?". This shows a purposeful intention to communicate in a gratuitous conflictive manner. The phrase "You think..." challenges the prior utterances. Merriam-Webster (2022: np) states that this phrase predominantly indicates that an opinion is considered incorrect. The phrase seeks to ignite conflictive responses by attacking the addressee's desire for to be believed. Secondly, in the Zimbabwean cultural context, respect for others is a pivotal cultural element and therefore, deliberately seeking to provoke disagreement is not acceptable. Hence, the UQ posed by Fabian, which provokes others in the social interaction, is a violation of social norms, which is the second of Culpeper's (2005) four key tenets of impoliteness. Thirdly, the UQ attacks face as it may sometimes challenge a position while suggesting that the speaker is not naive or gullible and cannot easily be fooled by what the addressee said prior. Lastly, in most cases, the issuance of UQs in my data is accompanied by the existence of insulting statements which reveal the emotions within the same utterance in which the UQ exists. The existence of Culpeper's four key tenets of impoliteness in many of the UQs justifies them being considered a non-politic linguistic strategy.

6.3.1.1.4 Condescensions

Condescensions are defined as utterances that are caustic and filled with the power to bring dialogues to an end and divide communities (Wang & Potts 2019: 1). They are characterised by language that shows a patronizing attitude through the use of negative words (Hank 1998: 156). The language in most cases portrays belittling, ridiculing, and demeaning behaviours (Culpeper, 2010: 3240). The use of condescensions within the interactions in this study occurs at a frequency rate of 10.1% per single tweet.

However, the language of condescension is not always openly negative or critical as it also includes insincere praise (over-politeness) (Huckin 2002: np). In most cases, where condescensions are employed, they tend to rest on a pair of conflicting pragmatic presuppositions: a speaker's presumption that they have a higher social status than the addressee, and an addressee's presumption that this is incorrect (Wang & Potts 2019: 1). Example 6.7 illustrates this point.

6.7 Jamwanda tweet 2— Condescension

Jamwanda @Jamwanda2

Hopeless MDC-Chamisa Municipality: This is what is happening just now on the road to Cranborne just after Makro. Treated water is gushing wild into a rivulet; meanwhile ratepayers' homes are dry. Their monies have been used to pay for purification of water which now gushes to waste! Why would you entrust power in such irresponsible, uncaring, and wasteful hands? Why? #RegisterToVoteZanuPF now!

Darkhorse @tapiwapi

Replying to @Jamwanda2

It is funny that the patriots will not allow the puppets to sit in the top office but allow them to run havoc in the nation's cities. Roads, sewer water all in shambles yet the patriots are on the watch. Funny the patriots complain well here.

Jamwanda @Jamwanda2

Before you go to busy patriots, focus on where you misplaced your X.

Mac Dee kataz @DeeKataz

Replying to @Jamwanda2

They are given money by the government to fix those problems. Did you give them? You stole money from the medical aid society and people suffered and died as result of you, big head.

Jamwanda @Jamwanda2

Replying to @DeeKataz

You are remarkably ignorant!!! Sit down!!!

Andile @Andile29191971

Replying to @Jamwanda2

In fact, you are the one who is arrogant and stupid. You are saying this because you fear Chamisa. Relax old man, your propaganda expired in 2012.

In Example 6.7 above, the existence of conflicting pragmatic presuppositions is evident, which is characteristic of condescensions. When being condescending, one is convinced that they are better than their addressee. This can be seen in Jamwanda's statements wherein he indicates that he believes that his party is a higher performer on issues of service delivery in comparison to the opposition party. This, however, is regarded as incorrect by the other interactants, as evidenced in the contradictory and condescending responses given to Jamwanda. Thus, these condescensions qualify as non-politic on two grounds, firstly, through the negative evaluative utterances given in response to an initial presupposition taken, and secondly, from a theoretical standpoint as reflected in Culpeper's (2011) four key tenets of impoliteness. This can be seen when Jamwanda's presupposition is challenged, in a face threatening way, in responses from other interactants such as Dark Horse, Mac Dee and Andile. Their responses reveal a threat to Jamwanda's positive face, which is the desire to be approved of, as they disqualify his statement. Responses by Jamwanda, such as "You are remarkably ignorant!!! Sit down!!!" are evidence that he has evaluated the initial responses given to his utterance as impolite. In this case, condescensions are used impolitely to both attack face and preserve face. As a result of their imbalanced nature of exalting oneself while despising others, condescensions are regarded as non-politic in the given context.

Condescensions, from a theoretical standpoint, qualify as non-politic linguistic strategies as they embody all four of Culpeper's (2011) key tenets of impoliteness. First, intentionality to purposefully communicate in a gratuitous conflictive manner is shown through the exalting and despising manner of condescensions. Jamwanda's utterance "Why would you entrust power in such irresponsible, uncaring, and wasteful hands? Why? #RegisterToVoteZanuPF now!" is evidence that he wants the other party to be seen negatively and simultaneously he markets his party as the preferred alternative. Secondly, there is violation of social norms, a feat which usually accompanies condescensions. In Example 6.7, it is evident that other interactants saw Jamwanda's utterance as violating social norms as they challenge his position of demeaning others. Thirdly, there is an attack to face. As condescensions seek to extol and despise at the same time, face becomes a vulnerable element. Lastly, there is evidence of emotion. The use of words and phrases that express strong feelings such as "You are remarkably ignorant" show the existence of emotions in the given interactions.

The following represents some of the condescensions gathered in this study:

-that	's/is being	babyish/childish, divisive, heartless, authoritarian, arrogant, dictatorial etc.
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Table 6.3 More examples of condescensions gathered in the study.

6.3.1.1.5 Dismissals

In many cases, interactants use dismissals in interactions. This refers to terms that show either a lack of interest in continuing with the discussion or which disqualify an interactant by highlighting or insinuating a lack of merit or credibility (Culpeper 2011: 135). Thus, dismissals are expressions intended to get rid of the addressee (Binti & Ghani 2018: 78). Such terms are employed in demeaning and disqualifying manners, sometimes in ways that carry negative emotions. When employed dismissals ignite heated negative emotional exchanges between the interactants. Thus, dismissals spark contestations between interactants as they are used to attack the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, and the right to non-distraction, such as freedom of action and freedom from imposition (Wijayanto, Prasetyarini & Hikmat 2017: 3; Brown & Levinson 1987: 61). The frequency of dismissals per tweet is 4.6%. The following is an example of how dismissals manifest in the interactions studied:

6.8 Jamwanda tweet 1— Dismissals

Jamwanda @Jamwanda2

This interview failed to gain traction. This guy has simply been overtaken by national narrative. He is useless and has no plan at all!!

Mix @The_Real_Kudzie

Replying to @Jamwanda2

Shut your fucking mouth, that is all I can tell you.

Jamwanda @Jamwanda2

Replying to @The_Real_Kudzie

Get lost young man. You cannot tell me to shut the Fuck up.

Cape to Cairo @TheAfricanDNA

Replying to @Jamwanda2

You are just a donkey. Go away!

Reason Nhekede @ZanoRangu

Replying to @Jamwanda2

@Jamwanda2 and your team are too bankrupt in terms of ideas. You cannot even have civilized debate to save yourself. Expecting anything beyond insults is way too farfetched for Zimbabweans. *Tirikubvisa mabhinya asina maideas* 'We are removing thugs without ideas'. #NgaapindeHakeMukomana #LetTheYoungmanHaveAChance'. #RegisterToVoteZW.

Example 6.8 above is typical of how dismissals manifest in the given context. Findings reveal that dismissals are employed in the attacking and defending of face. In most cases, the dismissals are more common in responses, than in main tweets. Culpeper (2016: 437), lists the following as examples of dismissals: "go away, get lost/out, shut it/your stinking/fucking mouth/face/trap/etc, shut the fuck up." In Example 6.8 the existence of Culpeper's instances of dismissals is evident in utterances by Mix, Jamwanda and Cape to Cairo. However, from a first-order perspective, the significance of the dismissals as non-politic linguistic strategies manifests in the evaluative linguistic qualities of the responses from interactants.

In Example 6.8, Jamwanda gives an evaluative remark when he says, "get lost young man, you cannot tell me to shut the fuck up." This statement reveals two things from a pragmatic standpoint. Firstly, Jamwanda is not happy with the prior dismissal addressed to him. Secondly, in the social hierarchy, Mix, who uttered the dismissal, is violating the Zimbabwean social norm of respecting elders, that is, if Jamwanda's use of the phrase "young man" is taken literally. In essence, in the Zimbabwean context, seniority is a highly valued social status, so a speaker, younger than the addressee, employing dismissals to their seniors is deemed unacceptable.

Approaching dismissals from a second-order perspective adds vigour to their qualification as non-politic linguistic strategies. Intentionality to purposefully communicate in a gratuitous conflictive manner, violation of social norms, attack on face and evidence of emotions, Culpeper's (2011) four key tenets of impoliteness, are evident in the dismissals. Firstly, the dismissals employed in the above example show evidence of seeking to disqualify targets by suggesting/insinuating that they lack merit or credibility. "You are such a donkey, go away" is a dismissive utterance laced with intention to purposefully communicate in a gratuitous conflictive manner, since the dismissal "go away" is an order preceded by name calling which is a deliberate speech act. The violation of social norms is shown through negative reactions to preceding utterances. "You cannot tell me to shut the fuck up" is a dismissive utterance that is evidence of this.

To use the dismissal “shut the fuck up” in the given context goes against Zimbabwean and *Twitter* social conventions that are founded on the principles of decency (The Twitter Rules, 2021). Hence, in most cases when employed, dismissals are viewed as discrediting a person’s worth in public by threatening the addressee’s negative face want, and by indicating (potentially) that the speaker intends to impede the hearer’s freedom of action (Brown & Levinson 1987: 65). This aspect speaks to the attack of face according to Culpeper’s (2011) four key tenets of impoliteness.

As evident in the above cited example, dismissals are by nature expressed in the form of orders and requests that carry emotion. When employed they invite retaliatory emotional utterances which can take the form of dismissals. The utterance by Mix and the response by Jamwanda are evidence of this.

Having approached the dismissals from a first-and second-order perspective it is apparent that they qualify as non-politic linguistic strategies based on the provided evidence.

6.3.1.1.6 Threats

Threat is a tactic used by a speaker to intimidate the addressee (Binti & Ghani 2018: 77). In this sense, a threat is a commissive speech act whose illocutionary purpose is to express a future undesirable consequence (physical and emotional harm) for the addressee under a certain condition to coerce the addressee not to make the condition true (Searle 1969; Blanco Salgueiro 2010). This strategy is not commonly employed in my data and only has a frequency rate of 0.4% per tweet. The following example serves to illustrate the existence of threats:

6.9 Nelson Chamisa tweet 1: Threats

Nelson Chamisa @Nelsonchamisa

An illegal government cannot demolish illegal structures. It can’t be normal for a government to specialise in destruction and demolition. And why always *Murambatsvina* ‘Move the rubbish’ during cold winters? Unless we deal with the illegal structure produced by rigged elections, illegalities will be difficult to stop.

Onetouch @OneOnOneEsq

Am also surprised because I voted for it so how is it illegal to you puppet leader?

Bothwel @Bothwelthods

Replying to @OneOnOneEsq

Stop calling our president a puppet, otherwise I will make life impossible for you!

Onetouch @OneOneEsq

Replying to @Bothwelthods

Are you trying to intimidate me? You think I will chicken out because of this lame threat?
Forget it.

In the above Example 6.9, Bothwel issues a threat toward Onetouch. The statement he utters has directives supported by negative commissive acts. When analysing the threat from a first-order perspective, it qualifies as a non-politic linguistic strategy based on the fact that the addressee of the threat (Onetouch) gives the feedback “...you think I will chicken out because of this lame threat?” which both informs that he is not amused by the threat and further metapragmatically identifies and labels Bothwel’s utterance as a threat. In issuing his threat Bothwel employs directives toward the hearer using the phrase “Stop calling...” and further expresses a possible negative consequence should the directive be not heeded by saying, “...otherwise I will make life impossible for you.” This characteristic of threats, juxtaposing a directive and a consequence within a sentence, is face threatening. In many instances threats are employed to assert power or domination over others. However, when a threat is thrown into a discussion, it is negatively evaluated by its addressee because it threatens the addressee’s negative face. Onetouch’s response to the threat issued by Bothwell testifies to this.

To ascertain whether the threats qualify as non-politic linguistic strategies Culpeper’s (2011) four key tenets of impoliteness are utilised. In most threats the tenet of intentionality to purposefully communicate in a conflictive manner is evident. This intention is frequently seen in directives, which are elements that show a need to command an addressee, “Stop calling our President a puppet.” Commissive acts also carry this intentional aspect by conveying a condition should the addressee not do as commanded, “...otherwise I will make life impossible for you.”

Violation of social norms is another key tenet which manifests in most of the threats. The study reveals that whenever threats are issued, they violate prescriptive social norms concerning how interactants should feel and act. The Zimbabwean community is guided by the *Ubuntu* philosophy highlighted earlier (see Section 2.5.2.1). *Ubuntu* is based on values of humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion, and associated values, ensuring a happy and qualitative community life in the spirit of family (Broodryk 2008: 17). The threat issued by Bothwel violates the *Ubuntu* values of respect as it seeks to make another member feel uncomfortable in the space which should give him happiness.

In the same threat in example 6.9, there is evidence that Bothwel is not heeding the public self-image that Onetouch desires for himself. Bothwel declares negative intentions by stating that he will make life impossible for Onetouch. This threat runs contrary to the negative face wants of Onetouch as it asserts sanctions against him unless he gives in to the directives.

Emotions are made evident in the threat through Bothwell’s use of emotive language. Momentrix Test Preparation (2021: np) define emotive language as the use of descriptive words, often adjectives, which show an addressee how a speaker feels, and which evokes an emotional response from the addressee and persuades them. The word “stop” and the phrase “otherwise I will make life impossible for you!” can arguably be considered as the use of emotive language employed to evoke an emotional response. Further to evoking emotions, this type of language intends to affect its audience. In this case, the emotive language employed suggests an imposed action that elicits an emotional response. In Example 6.9, the responses that result from the threat, “I will make life impossible for you” become heated and marred with negative emotions. Thus, this threat by Bothwel can be considered as inciting emotional responses from other interactants.

Having looked at threats from a first-order and second-order perspective, it is evident that they qualify as non-politic linguistic strategies.

In this subsection of my data analysis, I addressed research question number 1 which looks at the non-politic linguistic strategies utilised in political trolling within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. I established that political trolling in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere utilises the non-politic linguistic strategies in Table 6.4 below. The table also specifies the frequencies of their occurrence.

Non-politic linguistic Strategy	Frequency of Strategy per tweet
Insults	26.3%
Pointed criticisms	21.8%
Condescensions	10.1%
Unpalatable questions	8.9%
Dismissals	4.6%
Threats	0.4%

Table 6.4 Summary of the frequency of non-politic linguistic strategies

6.3.2 How political trolling on *Twitter* employs non-politic linguistic strategies in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors.

In this subsection, I provide a linguistic explanation of research question 1.1 which looks at how political trolling utilises non-politic linguistic strategies in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors. To arrive at the ‘how’ I utilise Culpeper’s (2005) super-strategies by which impoliteness can be ascertained. The findings of the previous research question (see Table 6.4 above) are utilised as examples and evidence of how FTAs or personal attacks are created and received from a Zimbabwean perspective on *Twitter*.

6.3.2.1 Bald on-record impoliteness

This strategy is employed when there is face at risk and when a speaker intends to damage the addressee’s face through a direct and clear impolite utterance (Bousfield 2008: 92). *Twitter* as a public platform, where political actors build, maintain, and sometimes damage their reputation, can be considered a risky platform for reputation management. This is apparent in most of the non-politic linguistic strategies discussed in the previous sections, which address research question 1. Although most of the strategies discussed earlier can be considered bald on-record impoliteness, it is the dismissals, pointed criticisms and unpalatable questions which most prominently carry bald on-record impoliteness elements. In what follows, I provide evidence of this, provided by the findings.

Dismissals are addressed directly at a target. As earlier mentioned, it is their nature to portray an interactant as lacking in merit or credibility by using demeaning and disqualifying utterances which expose face to embarrassment and shame. In Example 6.8 above, the phrase “shut your fucking mouth” assumes the bald on-record element by exposing the target’s negative face to damage. This phrase targets self-preservation by attacking the right to non-distraction such as freedom of action and freedom from imposition. The use of the possessive pronoun “your” in Example 6.8 is evidence of the element of directness embedded in bald on-record impoliteness.

In many cases, dismissals carried out as bald on-record impoliteness make the personal image vulnerable and expose the speaker’s intention to damage face. The vulnerability of face is embedded in the platform itself, which is public, and as a result allows for a wider audience of all interactions which take place on it. The more open and the wider the platform of discussion is, the more vulnerable face is.

Pointed criticisms are also carried out as bald on-record impoliteness. It is their nature to direct destructive criticisms to other interactants. In the data, pointed criticisms appear as bald on-record impoliteness in two ways. Firstly, Example 6.5, which is tweet 2 by the President of Zimbabwe, provides evidence that pointed criticisms are used in cases where there is much face at risk and

when a speaker intentionally seeks to damage the hearer's face. The following utterances from Example 6.5 illustrate this strategy; "you once called", "you hunted", and "you hated". These utterances, by pointing to past unpleasant actions done by the President of Zimbabwe, expose his face to the risk of further attacks from thousands of other interactants who follow him (see Table 6.2 for the number of followers of each political actor). Secondly, the existence of the pronoun "you" singles out the target of the utterance (in Example 6.5 it is the President of Zimbabwe) and is in line with the direct and clear performance of impolite utterances created through bald on-record strategies.

Unpalatable questions are also employed in a bald and on-record impoliteness way. UQs assume the bald on-record impoliteness nature by being negatively phrased in a manner designed to intentionally antagonise the targets. Using Example 6.6 as a point of reference to illustrate this, we see that the questions posed by interactants in response to Prof. Jonathan Moyo are structured in ways that do not seek answers from him but aim to shame him as an interlocutor for adopting a certain viewpoint. "You think we were born last night?" is a good example of a UQ conveyed as bald on-record impoliteness.

The target, Prof. Jonathan Moyo, is regarded as a respected and credible source on *Twitter* in terms of Zimbabwean political issues. His status and image are thus made vulnerable by UQs expressed as bald on-record impoliteness. Furthermore, the issuance of the UQs shows that the speakers intend to deliberately damage Professor Jonathan Moyo's face by directly challenging the credibility of his utterance. "You" implies directness towards the addressee, or target, while "think we were born last night?" puts the target's face at risk as it implies that the speaker is not naive or gullible to misleading information uttered prior by Prof. Jonathan Moyo. Such a UQ intends to damage the addressee's face by embarrassing them for touting a noncredible narrative. The qualities of the bald on-record impoliteness strategy are evident in the UQ examples provided.

To this end, many UQs are conveyed in a way that shows an intention on the part of the speaker to attack the face of the hearer. By assuming the bald on-record impoliteness strategy many UQs come across as personal attacks in a direct, clear, and unambiguous manner. The bald on-record impoliteness strategy makes it easy to identify the target of the UQs.

6.3.2.2 Positive impoliteness

Another strategy common in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors is positive impoliteness. This strategy is used in political trolling in a manner that damages the hearer's positive face want (his desire to be accepted) (Bousfield & Locher 2008: 134). In this case, the

utterances are designed to damage one's desire to be acknowledged as a part of a society (Siahaan 2019: 34).

Trolling using positive impoliteness strategies is carried out in numerous ways:

- 1) Ignoring or snubbing of the other.
- 2) Denying common ground with an interactant (see Example 6.6, the response Ba_Reeva gives to Prof. Jonathan Moyo shows disagreement).
- 3) Selecting a sensitive or undesirable topic to talk about (see conversation under Example 6.5: the response given by David Mtema to the President of Zimbabwe is centred around Gukurahundi, a genocide experienced in Zimbabwe between (1982-1987), which resulted in 20000 civilians being killed on ethnic grounds (Ndlovu 2019); also see conversation under Example 6.6, the Prof's main post which places focus on one of the incidences surrounding the removal of President Robert Mugabe from power).
- 4) Using inappropriate identity markers (see conversation under Example 6.9: Onetouch referring to Nelson Chamisa as a puppet leader. Such inappropriate identity markers are common under insults).
- 5) Being disinterested and unsympathetic with the hearer (see conversation under Example 6.6, Fabian's response to Prof. Jonathan Moyo shows that he is unsympathetic to Prof. Jonathan Moyo on an issue which nearly took the lives of all his family members).
- 6) Looking for disagreements (see conversation under Example 6.5, David Mtema's response to President of Zimbabwe seeks to create an environment where disagreements can occur by pointing out the wrongs which the President of Zimbabwe once did to a man he is now honouring in his posts).

Through the six elements above, it is evident that many non-politic linguistic strategies in the findings of the previous research question are conveyed in a positive impoliteness manner which denies the target the right to be accepted.

6.3.2.3 Negative impoliteness

Personal attacks are also framed in ways that attack the hearer's negative want (his desire to be free from imposition) (Thielemann & Kosta 2013: 239). This strategy epitomises disrespectful behaviour which is the central focus of this study. In cases where negative impoliteness is employed, personal attacks are often formed to scorn, frighten, and ridicule. They often invade

the hearer's space, literally or metaphorically, explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect, or put the other's indebtedness on record.

In the study, some personal attacks are in the form of impositions as highlighted in Example 6.7. The conversation is marred with condescension, scorn or ridicule and employs patronising language which emphasises the speaker's relative power over others. This is brought out through utterances such as the one by Jamwanda where he says, "Hopeless MDC- Chamisa Municipality ...why would you entrust power in such irresponsible, uncaring, and wasteful hands? Why? #RegisterToVoteZanuPF now!" Such statements are contemptuously framed in belittling through diminutives and negative adjectives. This belittling is often accompanied by imposition, for example, "Register to vote ZANU-PF now!" a statement that demands the hearer's commitment.

A person also employs personal attacks to explicitly thrust themselves offensively upon others. This is predominantly done through personalisation, and the use of pronouns such as 'I' and 'you'. Conversation 6.5 is an example of this, "This is the man you once called a cockroach. A man you hunted day and night for his head, dead or alive. A man you hated for being Ndebele...please shut up". Such utterances offensively thrust purported negative behaviours on the addressee; a characteristic which infringes on the addressee's right to be free from imposition.

On other occasions, personal attacks are conveyed in ways that invade the other's space. In this instance, a person positions themselves closer to the other than the relationship permits, or metaphorically and literally, asks for or speaks of information, which is too intimate, given the relationship (Colaco, Vijayarajoo & Lin 2021: 110). The following example by the President of Zimbabwe in Example 6.5 is typical of utterances conveyed as negative impoliteness: "22 years ago today, Zimbabwe lost a great man. Dr Joshua Nkomo is a hero of the liberation struggle, a man of the people, and a visionary who built a better Zimbabwe. Every day we strive to continue your legacy of unity love and peace." This statement invades others' spaces as it is considered an insult on the grounds of it being too intimate given the distant relationship which existed between the President of Zimbabwe and Dr Joshua Nkomo. This can be seen through the responses given to the utterance. BBC News (2018) attests to the distant relationship between the President of Zimbabwe and Joshua Nkomo when it asserts that as national security minister, President of Zimbabwe Emmerson Mnangagwa oversaw the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), which worked with the army to suppress and torment Joshua Nkomo and his party, Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). When contextualised, it can be said that the President of Zimbabwe through his utterance is positioning himself closer to Dr Joshua Nkomo than the relationship permits.

Some negative impoliteness strategies are employed in the form of frighten, where one instils a belief that an action detrimental to the other will occur. The utterance by Onetouch in Example 6.9, is typical of this. “Stop calling our president a puppet, otherwise I will make life impossible for you.” This intends to frighten others online which has been known to result in actual physical violence (Mugari 2020: 1).

6.3.2.4 Affective impoliteness

In this kind of non-politic linguistic strategy, the speaker makes their anger apparent to the hearer through a heightened display of emotion which consequently generates negative emotional atmospheres between the interactants (Huang 2014: 150). In numerous personal attacks, interactants use utterances such as the following: “You disgust me!”, “You embarrass me!”, and “You make me crazy!” among others. These utterances are typical of how the majority of interactions involve an unrestrained display of emotion in contexts where the emotions are deemed inappropriate. The use of the pronoun “you” followed by a negative noun such as “disgust” is evidence of blame associated with affective impoliteness. Many times, such utterances are made implying that the hearer is to blame for producing that emotional state. Example 6.5 attests to this, as the utterance by the President of Zimbabwe can be attributed to the emotional response by David Mtema, on the grounds of it being a direct response to issues raised by the President.

Globally, politics or political spaces are regarded as polluted because of language that assumes the affective impoliteness nature of carrying great emotions (Degirmenci 2016: 114). This is evident in most non-politic linguistic strategies realised under the previous research question as insults “you vagina,” pointed criticisms “the man you hated for being a Ndebele,” unpalatable questions “How could you escape unharmed with seven children on your hangers on?,” condescensions “you are remarkably ignorant sit down!,” dismissals “shut your fucking mouth!,” and threats “I will make life impossible for you.” Evident in all these strategies is the presence of affective impoliteness carried out through displays of emotion which consequently generate negative emotional atmospheres among interactants.

6.3.2.5 Coercive impoliteness

This strategy is used as a means of obtaining power through language (Culpeper 2011: 252). Personal attacks are phrased in a manner which raises a realignment between the speaker and the target so that the speaker profits at the expense of the hearer’s face wants (Mohammed & Abbas 2016: 79). The following is an example of how personal attacks assume coercive impoliteness:

Nhari Unendoro @nyawodzam

Replying to @ProfJNMoyo

— Shut up or else I will smash your balls!

and

Ndini Harare @HarareNdini

Replying to @DougColtart

— Stop it Dunder head before you regret it!

Using the above examples, it is evident that coercive insults are employed in an impolite manner to reduce someone's value and thereby increasing one's own. The utterances carry phrasal verbs in form of commands, for example, "shut up" and "stop it." These commands are also accompanied by threats, "I will smash your head" and "before you regret it" that come out as threats which carry or include a negative consequence should the hearer fail to take heed of the command. On most occasions where personal attacks take this form, the speaker situates themselves at a higher and more powerful social level than the hearer and uses this power as a compelling force.

In sum, in this sub-section of my data analysis, I addressed research question 1.1 which looks at how political trolling on *Twitter* utilises non-politic linguistic strategies in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors. I found that the non-politic linguistic strategies were employed through the following: bold-on-record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, affective impoliteness, and coercive impoliteness.

6.3.3 Why is political trolling used in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors on Twitter?

In this subsection I address research question 1.2 which looks at why political trolling is used in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors on *Twitter*. To arrive at the reasons, both the first- and second-order analytical approaches are utilised. The first-order approach provides for the metapragmatic analysis of data to identify instances where interactants give these reasons, within their interactions. The second-order approach provides a theoretical standpoint which supplements the first-order findings. In what follows, the findings are explained.

6.3.3.1 Political trolling as a means to vent

Brown, Westbrook and Challagalla (2005) define venting as the discharge of negative feelings by expressing or discussing them angrily with others. In this study, three reasons as to why interactants

vent are identified, firstly, they do so to draw attention to their dissatisfaction in pursuit of a solution. Many times, unhappy interactants express their dissatisfaction towards responsible political actors, albeit in a manner that attacks their image. The following example illustrates this:

6.10 Jamwanda tweet 2 — venting

Jamwanda @Jamwanda2

Hopeless MDC-Chamisa Municipality: This is what is happening just now on the road to Cranborne just after Makro. Treated water is gushing wild into a rivulet; meanwhile ratepayer's homes are dry. Their monies have been used to pay for purification of water which now gushes to waste! Why would you entrust power in such irresponsible, uncaring and wasteful hands? Why? #RegisterToVoteZanuPF now!!!

Spencer mauku @MaukuSpencer

Replying to @Jamwanda2

While your dissatisfaction is justified based on having identified a real problem which needs a solution. Remember, Chamisa does not have a party, its unjust to attack him, the councillors belong to Mwonzora. Chamisa only has a party when it suits you. You guys think Zimbabweans do not have brains.

Stanford Nyatsanza @stanyatsanza

Replying to @Jamwanda2

I am Pro Chamisa but the performance of our councillors in the local government is dismal. Should this continue, I am voting ZANU-PF!

The tweet by Jamwanda is evidence of venting because it discharges negative feelings through terms such as “Hopeless, irresponsible, uncaring and wasteful.” These terms employ denigrating language which undermine the target. Overall, the tweet expresses dissatisfaction with the wasteful running of water resources by the municipality. From a first-order perspective, it is apparent that Spencer Mauku metapragmatically points out the reason Jamwanda is venting, which is to express dissatisfaction in order to acquire a solution.

On the second-order level, I utilise Signorelli's (2017) characteristics of venting to firstly, identify the tweet as venting, and secondly, to illustrate the expression of dissatisfaction, which is one of the reasons people vent. According to Signorelli (2017: 2) venting comes across as an indirect way of complaining that reveals underlying negative perspectives on a given situation or individual(s).

These aspects are all shown through Jamwanda's tweet which is an indirect complaint indicating dissatisfaction with the state of affairs. "Treated water is gushing wild into a rivulet; meanwhile ratepayer's homes are dry." Signorelli (2017: 2) further states that venting engages other individuals who share the stated perspectives and feelings concerning the complaint. This is evident in the use of *Twitter*, which is a social convergence platform allowing for engagement with like-minded people who are likely to issue feedback on the complaints raised.

Interactants vent to disclose negative experiences to prevent others from suffering from similar incidents (Parra-Lopez, Bulchand-Gidumal, Guitierrez-Tano & Diaz-Armas 2011). In Jamwanda's tweet, it can be construed that there is an expression of dissatisfaction. Furthermore, the subsequent use of the phrase "why would you..." is a perlocutionary act meant to encourage interactants to make a different choice the next time they vote. This type of venting is meant to make the targeted individual (MDC-Chamisa) appear undesirable to the public given the disclosure the speaker is making.

Lastly, interactants sometimes vent to help individuals or organisations improve their performance albeit in a face-threatening manner. Stanford Nyatsanza's response to Jamwanda, "I am pro Chamisa but the performance of our councillors in the local government is dismal. Should this continue, I am voting ZANU-PF!" is expressed as venting, demanding improvement, while simultaneously attacking the image of the organisation he purports to like, by threatening to vote for the other party should his party not reform.

6.3.3.2 Political trolling as a means to sway public opinion and influence voters

In instances where there is an intention to sway public opinion, the speaker tends to highlight the wrongs of the other to draw the target's attention to a better alternative (Linville & Warren 2018). In Example 6.10, Jamwanda employs this tactic as he first exposes the wrongs of the opposition party, led by Nelson Chamisa, through statements such as "Treated water is gushing into a rivulet; meanwhile ratepayers' homes are dry", "Their monies have been used to pay for purification of water which now gushes to waste!" and "Why would you entrust power in such irresponsible, uncaring and wasteful hands?." All these utterances are meant to portray the leader of the opposition and his party as undesirable leaders. However, this kind of trolling, which attacks the image of the political leader and his organisation, is often accompanied by a rallying call to vote for the speaker's party. The cited example is no exception, and the call is brought out through the utterance "Register to Vote ZANU-PF now!". This is an obvious attempt to influence voters.

6.3.3.3 Political trolling as a means to mislead

Many times, incorrect impressions are used to frame issues or individuals in negative or undesirable ways through inconvenient truths. When misleading, one spreads misinformation and fake content causing the addressee to lose face by damaging their reputation. Using the conversation in Example 6.10, Jamwanda's tweet is considered misleading as it portrays opposition councillors as having the ultimate power to effectively run local councils. Jamwanda says, "Why would you entrust power in such irresponsible, uncaring and wasteful hands?" In Zimbabwe the functional controlling offices of urban local councils are controlled at a central government level and is dominated by ZANU-PF, Jamwanda's party. Madzivanyika (2011: 33) alleges that the efficient and effective provision of services in Zimbabwean urban local municipalities is undermined by a high level of central interference in the decisions of local councils. For that reason, Jamwanda's utterance can be considered misleading based on it having been uttered by a senior government official who is aware of how municipalities are run. Such misleading utterances, intended to attack the image of an individual(s), are common.

6.3.3.4 Political trolling as a means to harass

Harassment is defined as the use of language or actions to embarrass, humiliate, threaten, or intimidate an individual to gain power over them (Hoff & Mitchell 2009: 652). The most prominent reason for political trolling being used in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors on *Twitter* is harassment. It manifests in various ways, which can be established through a taxonomy of forms which include offensive names, purposeful embarrassment, and threats.

As a form of harassment, interactants address each other using sub-categories of harassment such as offensive names, an act known as name calling. Sahranc (2015) defines name calling as abusive or insulting language that hounds a person(s) by attributing an undesirable label. I established that several interactants resort to name calling during interactions as a strategy to negatively impact an opponent. The example below captures how name calling is carried out and how it is rendered as harassment.

6.11 Chamisa tweet 2 — harassment

Nelson chamisa @nelsonchamisa

Varashiki not *Varakashbi*? Thank you *Mujekesi.Vajekesi!* 'The lost souls not the thrashers? Thank you, the clarifier, or the clarifiers'.

James Matsika @JamesMatsika

Replying to @nelsonchamisa

Lieson Ngoromani is your rightful name.

Mugopower @mugopower2018

Replying to @nelsonchamisa

I did not know you also major in name-calling, labelling, etc.

Ernest Dzviti @DzvitiErnest

Ndopolitics dzacho sha kana zvichifadza vanhota why not? ‘That is politics my friend, if it pleases the voters, then why not?’

Charles Simba @riyanaasher571

Replying to @nelsonchamisa

Mr President now you are dabbling in elementary politics, you are better than this. Name calling of your opponents no matter how evil they are is just below the belt. Can we focus on removing this junta instead of “name shaming” which does not change the status of our struggling people.

Ernest Dzviti @DzvitiErnest

Replying to @riyanaasher571

As a member of the MDC Alliance, you should know better about respect. Should you need to address anything with our president you go through structures. No need to embarrass the president on *Twitter* with your cheap wisdom.

From a first-order approach, using Example 6.11 to illustrate the use of offensive names as a form of harassment, James Matsika refers to Nelson Chamisa as ‘Lieson’ Ngoromani, a disrespectful undesirable label. The name ‘Lieson’ is rooted in the undesirable label “liar” and then made to rhyme with the target’s name “Nelson.” To address a person of Nelson Chamisa’s stature (a leader of the biggest opposition party in Zimbabwe) with such a derogatory label is harassment, according to the earlier definition by Hoff and Mitchell (2009: 652). Leaders of stature do not want to be disrespected in such a way, especially on a public platform such as *Twitter*. Evidence that name-calling is indeed harassment stems from a first-order linguistic evaluation made by Mugopower. He says, “I did not know you also major in name-calling and labelling etc.” The fact that he categorises what Nelson Chamisa has said as name-calling is evidence that it qualifies as harassment, given the earlier definition.

The following constitutes a compendium of linguistic terms used to harass other interactants across the studied *Twitter* handles: “Junta,” “Dictator,” “Idiots,” “Propagandist,” “Puppets,” “Hypocrites,” “Swina,” “Ndeks,” “Clowns,” “Gay,” “Gukurahundist,” “Murderers,” “Tribalist,” “Blood suckers,” “Pig,” “Traitor,” “Satanist,” “Rats,” “Mafia,” among others.

As earlier captured in the definition of harassment by Hoff and Mitchell (2009: 652) embarrassment is a form of harassment. Embarrassment stems from imagining how other people judge our appearance or character. Elshout, Nelissen, and Van Beest (2017: 1581) consider embarrassing as the act of making the addressee feel powerless, small, and inferior in front of an audience. The goal of embarrassing is to draw others into negatively viewing the addressee, which conflicts with how the addressee feels they should be viewed.

In Example 6.11 above, Charles Simba directly expressed disappointment toward Nelson Chamisa, by publicly addressing his actions as immature and not befitting for a President, thus, causing embarrassment. Simba says, “Mr President now you are dabbling in elementary politics, you are better than this. In his stature, and according to Zimbabwean social norms, Nelson Chamisa, as the leader of the biggest opposition party in Zimbabwe, would like to be seen as mature and as an epitome of wisdom in public spheres. Charles Simba challenges this through public disapproval. Ernest Dzviti’s response to Charles Simba’s utterance gives us a first-order metapragmatic evaluation of the same utterance as an embarrassment through the following: “No need to embarrass the president on *Twitter* with your cheap wisdom.” From this response it is clear that that Charles Simba’s comment is considered as causing embarrassment in the Zimbabwean context.

6.3.3.5 Political trolling as a means to show political partisanship

The internet allows for easily built coalitions to empower communities for a united cause (Gladwell 2010:43). However, this can also result in social media sites such as *Twitter* becoming sites for contestation, propaganda, empowerment, and control (Matsilele & Ruhanya 2021: 384). As a result, these interactants often engage in *Twitter* interactions to troll other interactants as a means of showing political partisanship. Green, Palmquist, and Schickler (2002: 12) see political partisanship as an enduring expressive identity strengthened by political affiliations. Political partisanship remains a powerful influence on the political behaviour that manifests through language in social interactions within the Zimbabwean online political sphere.

Bearing in mind that those who engage in political partisanship are motivated to argue against contradicting beliefs and convictions (Taber & Lodge 2006: 759), trolling is employed to show

political partisanship and interactants often engage in language which discredits opponents in an attempt to show political affiliation. In doing so, according to Bishop (2014: 2), interactants express strong negative opinions on certain issues based on whether the issues correspond with the policies of the political party they support or not. This show of political partisanship whether solicited or not, can reveal one's political affiliation to other interactants.

In Example 6.8, Reason Nhekede's utterance materialises as trolling, meant to show political partisanship, as he refers to Jamwanda and his party as bankrupt of ideas. Referring to Jamwanda's party as lacking in innovation is first-order evidence of language which discredits opponents. Not only that, Reason Nhekede further labels Jamwanda and his compatriots as "mabhinya" or "thugs" in English. In his response Reason Nhekede says, "@Jamwanda2 and your team are too bankrupt in terms of ideas. You cannot even have civilized debate to save yourself. Expecting anything beyond insults is way too farfetched for Zimbabweans. *Tirikubvisa mabhinya asina maideas* 'We are removing thugs without ideas'. #NgaapindeHakeMukomana '#LetTheYoungmanHaveAChance'. #RegisterToVoteZW."

Given the context that Jamwanda's prior utterance attacks the reputation of the opposition party, Reason Nhekede's (recently cited) trolling can be construed as being motivated by his desire to defend his party's political position. The data reveals that an attack on the reputation of an opposing party is often accompanied by sloganeering which identifies strongly with a show of political partisanship. Reason Nhekede, like many other interactants, when attacking those who oppose him like Jamwanda accompanies his strong negative language with his party's slogan and an encouragement to register to vote for it "#NgaapindeHakeMukomana which translates to #LetTheYoungmanHaveAChance. This is a slogan associated with Nelson Chamisa's party.

6.3.3.6 Political trolling as a means to provoke

Provocation is a communicative action whose purpose is to elicit an emotional rather than a cognitive or pragmatic response (Leone 2017: 3). When provocation is utilised, it aims at increasing the negative emotional tone of an addressee's answer, in terms of indignation, anger or rage (Leone 2017: 3). This is done to draw attention away from the addressee to the speaker. The following example illustrates this:

6.12 Prof. Jonathan Moyo tweet 2— Provoking

Prof. Jonathan Moyo @ProfJNMoyo

His name is MAKOMBORERO HARUZIVISHE; he is a political prisoner in Zimbabwe!
#MakoMonday

Legendary LordVarys @Munyab9

Replying to @ProfJNMoyo

The North Remembers. Prof. is now using hashtags...no it will not work. Simple!!!

Dr Chibs @prchibanda

Replying to @Munyab9

It worked in Zambia and even in Morocco. It will work too back here Moron.

Afro Roots @Afroroots54

Replying to @Munyab9

That is a tired reference point.

Prof Jonathan Moyo @ProfJNMoyo

Replying to @Munyab9

Stupid!!!

Terrence Chibaya @TerrenceChibay1

Replying to @Munyab9

*Poor musorobhangu! Zvekuita muchinja zvirikukunetsa! Ropa ndere ZANU-PF iri Prof. Dzokerai kuZANU-PF. We are a forgiving party after *tambokuita* punish. ‘Poor bighead! It is hard being an oppositionist! Your blood is ZANU-PF Prof. Go back to ZANU-PF. We are a forgiving party after having punished you’.*

In Example 6.12 above, the response by Legendary LordVarys is typical of the type of provocation that mars most interactions. Legendary LordVarys is provoking Prof. Jonathan Moyo by reminding him that he is now using the *Twitter* platform that he once regarded as useless when he was still a Minister in the Mugabe regime. Legendary LordVarys provocative response immediately becomes the centre of heated emotional responses from other interactants, taking attention away from the main post by Prof. Jonathan Moyo. It appears on most of the *Twitter* handles studied that provokers do not care much about the pragmatic significance of their utterances when compared to the potential emotional responses generated by them. It also appears that the goal of provocation is to evoke an insult from the target and other interactants to draw attention from the original discussion.

Thus, from a first-order perspective, the responses generated from the utterance by Legendary LordVarys show that he had provoked Prof. Jonathan Moyo. The reactions to his utterance are metapragmatic linguistic evaluations that align with the definition of provocation provided earlier by Leone (2017: 3). Firstly, his utterance managed to draw attention to him and secondly, it managed to elicit emotional responses from other interactants.

In this subsection I addressed research question 1.2 which probes the reasons why political trolling is used in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors on *Twitter*. I found that political trolling is used as a way of venting, swaying public opinions, misleading, harassing, showing political partisanship, and provoking. In the next Sub-section, I address research question 2, 2.1 and 2.2.

6.4 Which component of face is predominantly targeted in personal attacks on *Twitter* by Zimbabwean political actors engaged in trolling behaviour?

In this subsection I address research question 2 which looks at the component of face predominantly targeted in personal attacks on *Twitter* by Zimbabwean political actors engaged in trolling behaviour. As explained earlier in Section 3.3, according to the Politeness Theory (PT), face has two components, the negative face, and the positive face, which are basic wants every interactant knows and desires (Brown & Levinson 1987: 62). Either negative or positive face can become vulnerable in every interaction that takes place. From a second-order perspective, the PT offers a clear rubric of the kind of linguistic utterances that can be classified as either violating the positive or negative face. Building on research question 1's findings, which investigated non-politic linguistic strategies utilised in political trolling within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, insults, pointed criticisms, unpalatable questions, condescensions, dismissals and threats were weighed against the PT to establish the component of face they mostly violated.

The PT details linguistic aspects and materials that either violate or please the positive or negative face. The positive face, which refers to an interactant's desire for their wants to be thought desirable (Brown & Levinson 1987: 101), is predominantly fulfilled through interactants claiming common ground, conveying that speaker and addressee are co-operators, and fulfilling the addressee's wants. The negative face refers to an interactant's want to have their freedom of action unhindered and their attention unimpeded (Brown & Levinson 1987: 129). The negative face is fulfilled through being direct, not assuming, not coercing, and not impinging on the addressee. However, insults, pointed criticisms, unpalatable questions, condescensions, dismissals, and threats mostly violated the want to be desirable rather than the want to have freedom of action unhindered or unimpeded.

In this subsection, I addressed research question 2, which looks at face predominantly targeted in personal attacks on *Twitter* by Zimbabwean political actors engaged in trolling behaviour. I conclude that Zimbabwean political actors predominantly target the positive face in personal attacks on *Twitter*. Much of the trolling which pervades the studied *Twitter* spaces reveals that speakers do not care about the addressee's preferred public self-image or personality which speaks to the positive face.

6.4.1 How is the identified component of face being attacked?

In this sub-section, I address research question 2.1, which examines how the positive face identified is being attacked. Using the findings of research question 1 which include insults, pointed criticisms, unpalatable questions, condescensions, dismissals and threats, viewed through the lenses of the PT, I noted that they point to the positive face which is attacked in three ways. Firstly, positive face is attacked in manner which shows the speaker has a negative evaluation of an aspect of the addressee's positive face. Secondly, in a way that shows that the speaker does not care about, or is indifferent to, the addressee's positive face, (Brown and Levinson 1987: 66) and lastly, in a way that speaker damages their own positive face by revealing a vulnerability in terms of face, that is then attacked.

6.4.1.1 Acts that show that a speaker has a negative evaluation of an aspect of the addressee's positive face

Interactants often utilise expressions of disapproval, insults, ridicule, criticism, accusations complaints and reprimands to attack a speaker's positive face. Through these linguistic acts, the speaker shows that they do not approve of the addressee's wants. The disapproved wants can be acts, personal characteristics, beliefs, or values (Brown & Levinson 1987: 66). The following example is evidence of the existence of such acts within the studied corpus:

6.13 Hon. Temba P. Mliswa tweet 2— Acts that show that speaker has a negative evaluation of addressee's positive face.

Hon. Temba P. Mliswa @TambaMliswa

I think for progress it is time that we name and shame those derailing the country. Who is Mudha? What credentials does he have to be the State Security Minister? None, except for his reputation for taking over people's mines in Kwekwe and killing people.

Chitova @madyira05

Replying to @TambaMliswa

If Mudha is not fit to be state security minister what makes you then?

Tendai Masara @masara_tendai

Replying to @TembaMliswa

Denigrating Mudha is an attack on ED as the appointing authority. Why are you fighting Mudha and July?

Augustine kancube-mzila @augustinemzila

Replying to @TembaMliswa

What you have described above is Mnangagwa. It is ridiculous of you to want to blame the appointees and not the appointing authority. Mnangagwa is the worst thing to happen to our country!

Mathew @Mathew15427172

Replying to @TembaMliswa

Zvarvadzaka coz matangirwa kutora, ko ive zvwaiuraya vanhu kuKaro i uchitora mafarms avo. 'It has pained you that he has taken them before you. You also used to kill people in Karoi taking over their farms'.

Tri tarullez @R_Ndangana

Replying to @TembaMliswa

Uyu anorwara nyu 'This one is sick'

Eria The Tishbite @the_eria

Replying to @TembaMliswa

We are tired of Shona politicians; they are corrupt and useless!

Ranga @RangaChidembo

Replying to @TembaMliswa

With due respect @TembaMliswa, who appointed Mudha and for what? Let us call a spade a spade. The country's progress is being derailed by brother @edmnangagwa and his party which you adore so much. #RegisterToVoteZW

Example 6.13 above, is evidence of how negative evaluations of positive face are expressed. Through his response to Hon. Temba P. Mliswa, Chitova shows that he does not want to cooperatively maintain Hon. Temba P. Mliswa's positive face. His statement, "If Mudha is not fit to be state security minister what makes you then?" comes across as contempt as it shows that Chitova feels that Hon. Temba P. Mliswa is worthless or beneath consideration. The use of the words (if and what) in Chitova's utterance brings an element of insincere comparison which is denigrating. Chitova's statement is an indication of how contempt is used to attack positive face as it portrays the Hon. Themba P. Mliswa as being worse than the person he is speaking ill of.

From a first-order perspective, one can derive the contemptuous nature of the utterance from the evaluative remarks used in the statement. The word "if" is used by Chitova to introduce a conditional clause, comparing the subjects under discussion, albeit in a rhetorically denigrating manner toward the addressee.

From a second-order perspective, contempt is a negative evaluation that attacks positive face (Brown & Levinson 1987: 66). This supplements the first-order notion that Chitova's statement is contempt.

Speakers attack positive face through expressions of disapproval. At the centre of the positive face, is the need for approval. Using Example 6.13 above, Tendai Masara's statement, "Denigrating Mudha is an attack on ED as the appointing authority. Why are you fighting Mudha and July?" is typical of how disapprovals are expressed in many interactions. According to Salih (2018: 14), a disapproval is a statement which displays a negative emotional evaluation of an utterance, driven by the belief that it is bad or wrong. This is in line with an intention to show that a speaker has a negative evaluation of the addressee's positive face.

From a first-order perspective Tendai Masara's utterance uses evaluative language which links it to the concept of disapproval as defined by Salih (2018: 14). In his utterance, he uses a dispraising style to express his disapproval of actions taken by Hon. Themba P. Mliswa. The word "denigrating" as used in his utterance, is a negative evaluation that Tendai Masara would have rather viewed in positive light. Additionally, the use of the adverb of manner "why" is evidence of the disapproving nature of his utterance as it questions the actions initially taken by the addressee. Brown and Levinson (1987: 66) perceive disapproval as an act that shows the negative evaluation of positive face, a feat from the second-order perspective which supplements the first-order analysis.

Criticism is another form of negative evaluation of an aspect of the addressee's positive face. Oxford Languages (2022) defines criticism as the expression of dissatisfaction of someone or something based on perceived faults or mistakes. It is this expression of dissatisfaction which aligns criticism to the aspect of negative evaluation of the positive face. In the conversation in Example 6.13 above, Augustine kancube-mzila uses the criticism to attack the positive face of Hon. Temba P. Mliswa. From a first-order perspective, in his utterance, he uses evaluative statements to express dissatisfaction concerning the blaming of the appointees, instead of the appointing authority, by the Hon. Themba P. Mliswa.

In his own words he says, "It is ridiculous of you to want to blame the appointees and not the appointing authority." The statement implies a negative evaluation of the position assumed by the addressee Hon. Temba P. Mliswa, which is a position the speaker, Augustine kancube-mzila, does not see as desirable. Such open negative evaluations mar many of the criticisms pervading the interactions. The second-order nature of criticisms is derived from Brown and Levinson (1987: 66) who perceive criticisms as negative evaluations of positive face.

Accusation is another act which is employed to show that the speaker does not approve of the addressee's wants. Oxford Languages (2022) defines an accusation as a charge or claim that someone has done something wrong or illegal. In Example 6.13 above, Mathew uses an accusation to attack the positive face of Hon. Themba P. Mliswa. Mathew, in his utterance, claims that the addressee, Hon. Temba P. Mliswa, killed people in Karoi and took over their farms. This image painted by Mathew is undesirable to the addressee based on it being the anchor of his argument to disqualify Mudha as the State Security Minister.

It is from the first-order evaluative utterance that one learns of the undesirable similarity between Mudha and Hon. Themba P. Mliswa. The statement "You also used to kill people in Karoi taking over their farms" accuses addressee Hon. Temba P. Mliswa through the use of the word "you", which singles someone out, followed by a strong claim. Judging by the fact that Hon. Themba P. Mliswa spoke strongly of the State Security Minister as not being fit for office based on his alleged reputation of killing people and taking over their farms, one can imagine how denting this accusation is to the image he desires. Brown and Levinson (1987: 66) include accusations as acts which attack positive face. This supplements the first-order position.

Interactants use insults to show negative evaluation of the addressee's positive face. Insults as defined earlier by Culpeper (2010: 3241) are derogatory statements and implications that produce a display of low values aimed at a target. Using Culpeper's definition as a guide, one can construe that insults violate the addressee's feelings or wants through the element of denigration. In

Example 6.13 above, Tri tarullez calls Hon. Themba P. Mliswa “sick”. To refer to any person on a public platform in such a manner in Zimbabwe is considered an insult when it is not backed by facts but rather expresses negative subjectiveness. Such insults are used to show an addressee that the speaker does not approve of the image they are portraying. Insults are predominantly employed directly through the use of words “you” or “they” which specify the target of the accusation. Brown and Levison (1987: 66) cite accusations as acts which violate the addressee’s positive face.

In some cases, interactants use contradictions or disagreements to show their negative evaluation of the addressee’s positive face. This act is closer to disapproval, discussed earlier; the only difference is that the speaker indicates that they think the addressee is wrong, misguided, or unreasonable about an issue. In Example 6.13 above, Augustine kancube-mzila’s utterance, “What you have described above is Mnangagwa. It is ridiculous of you to want to blame the appointees and not the appointing authority. Mnangagwa is the worst thing to happen to our country!” is a contradiction which indicates, through the word “ridiculous” that he thinks the addressee, Hon. Themba P. Mliswa is wrong. The word shows a strong negative evaluation which in turn attacks the addressee’s need to be desirable.

6.4.1.2 Acts that show that a speaker does not care about (or is indifferent to) an addressee’s positive face

There are several acts which speakers employ to indicate they do not care about the addressee’s positive face. A detailed explanation of each act and how it is conveyed is provided.

Speakers sometimes express violent out-of-control emotions. On many occasions these emotions are expressed towards those with opposing views as a way of venting, provoking, or harassing. Many non-politic linguistic strategies identified utilise emotive language, defined earlier by Momentrix Test Preparation (2021: np) as the use of descriptive words, often adjectives, which show the addressee how a speaker feels, and which evokes an emotional response from the addressee. For instance, in Example 6.1, cited earlier, the insult hurled by Admire Bere is laced with emotive language. “*Inve beche*” which translates to ‘You vagina’ is an out-of-control emotive insulting utterance.

Condescensions are also expressed in a violent out-of-control manner. The phrase “you are remarkably ignorant!” by Jamwanda in the conversation in Example 6.7, is evidence of this. Referring to someone as “vagina” or as “remarkably ignorant” shows a lack of desire to see the addressee’s reputation as desirable. In all the provided examples it is evident that when statements are driven by emotion the speaker gives the addressee a probable reason to fear them or be

embarrassed by them. Thus, the expression of violent, out-of-control emotions indicates that in some respects the speaker does not want what the addressee desires.

Speakers show that they do not care about the addressee's positive face through irreverence and reference to topics which are inappropriate in the given context. Such acts indicate that the speaker does not value what the addressee values and does not fear what the addressee fears. Such acts are used as a way of venting, swaying public opinion to influence voters, misleading, harassing, showing political partisanship, and provoking. On numerous occasions, irreverence is shown through a lack of respect.

On occasion, speakers may raise topics which are considered inappropriate in the given context. One of the ways this done is by mentioning negative past actions not consistent with the current actions of a political actor. This act is prominent in pointed criticisms and is largely employed to provoke and sway public opinion to influence voters. For example, in conversation 6.5, the President of Zimbabwe praises the late Dr Joshua Nkomo, stating that he strives to uphold his legacy of unity, peace and love. Yet, David Mtema responds to the President in a manner which damages his image by raising a controversial topic of Gukurahundi. David Mtema says, "... Idiot Mnangagwa shame on you. Murderer, rapist and Gukurahundist..." The mentioning of Gukurahundi, especially directed to the person of President of Zimbabwe is an attack on his desirability as his name is at the centre of the Gukurahundi genocide that occurred in Zimbabwe during the 1980s, when an estimated 20 000 Ndebele people died (Mpofu 2021: 44). Thus, mentioning of such a controversial topic to the person of the President is not desirable as it reminds people of his alleged unpleasant past which contradicts with the image, he is portraying of himself today. By mentioning the controversial topic, the speaker, David Mtema indicates that he does not value the addressee's values.

Speakers also show that they do not care about an addressee's positive face by presenting unwelcome news about the addressee or boasting about themselves to the addressee. On several occasions, unwelcome news is used to vent, sway public opinion and influence voters, mislead, harass, show political partisanship and to provoke. Such news indicates that the speaker is intentionally trying to cause the addressee distress and to show that they do not care about the addressee's feelings. A typical example of this within the corpus is evident in conversation 6.13, where Mathew tells Hon. Temba P. Mliswa that he used to kill people in Karoi and take over their farms. The substance of an utterance of this nature is not in its truthfulness but in its ability to cause distress and harm the feelings of the addressee. Thus, mentioning such unwelcome news (whether true or fabricated) dents the addressee's need to be desirable.

Boasting by a speaker to an addressee is a common feature which is often employed to sway public opinion and influence voters, mislead, show political partisanship and to provoke. According to Oxford Languages (2022) boasting is an act of talking with excessive pride and self-satisfaction about one's achievements, possessions, or abilities. As a way of out-competing each other, political actors talk with excessive pride about their achievements. The following is a typical example of boasting:

6.14 Jamwanda tweet 2- Boasting.

Jamwanda @Jamwanda2

...what is happening to the few municipalities under the so-called party of excellence MDC?
Nothing! In the larger country ZANU-PF is resurfacing all roads...excellence!

The above indicates that the speaker does not care about the addressee's need to be desirable, or positive face, (either the party or its members). Referring to the MDC with the phrase "so-called party of excellence" reveals that Jamwanda considers the reference to excellence as inappropriate. When boasting is employed it is generally accompanied by a negative exposition of the addressee's short comings. Such juxtaposition is meant to make the speaker more desirable to the audience for the purpose of either swaying public opinion, misleading, showing partisanship, or provoking. The boasting from Jamwanda cited above, supports his negative exposition of MDC-Chamisa Municipality, presented below:

6.15 Jamwanda tweet 2 – Negative exposition

Jamwanda @Jamwanda2

Hopeless MDC-Chamisa Municipality: This is what is happening just now on the road to Cranborne just after Makro. Treated water is gushing wild into a rivulet; meanwhile ratepayer's homes are dry. Their monies have been used to pay for purification of water which now gushes to waste! Why would you entrust power in such irresponsible, uncaring, and wasteful hands? Why? #RegisterToVoteZanuPF now!!!

Dangerously emotional or divisive topics ranging from politics, sexuality, race, tribe, and religion are employed as acts of attacking the positive face. Speakers, through their utterances, create a dangerous-to-face atmosphere which reveals that they are unconcerned about the addressee's feelings or wants. For example, in Example 6.13, Eria the Tishbite, raises a dangerous topic which attacks one of the major tribes in Zimbabwe, the Shona people, when he says, "We are tired of Shona politicians; they are corrupt and useless!" The use of the term "Shona" in an utterance laced

with negativity is dangerous as it attacks the positive face of every Shona person within that *Twitter* space. In a country where tribal rivalries underlie many of the political differences (Day 2008: 85), out-grouping or pinpointing a specific tribe concerning negative issues is highly inflammatory as it dents their need to be desirable. When employed such topics ignite negative emotions and divide interactants. The use of ingroup and outgroup terms in negative utterances makes the addressees feel undesirable and violates their feelings and wants.

However, the ingroup and outgroup terms are not a preserve for tribal topics, they are employed to show differences in political, sexual, and religious affiliation, albeit in ways that attack the positive face of a certain grouping. Findings reveal that speakers resort to dangerously emotional, divisive topics to attack the addressee’s positive face in an attempt to draw attention and instigate the addressees to react in an offensive manner. The offensive reaction solicited acts in favour of the attack to the positive face. The more offensive one is, the more one reveals their undesirability to the audience. The dangerously emotional, divisive topics are a common feature under condescensions and unpalatable questions. Findings further reveal that such acts are employed to provoke, show political affiliation, harass, mislead, and sway public opinion. The table below captures statements which reveal this.

Twitter Handle Source	Dangerously emotional divisive Utterance	Purpose of speech in given context
Nelson Chamisa @nelsonchamisa	<i>Varashiki not varakashi?</i> ‘The lost souls not the thrashers’.	To provoke, and to show political affiliation
Pith and Fulcrum @CharlesMahlahla	It was going to be shocking that these Gukurahundist will let peace prevail till the end of the year. Why abducting citizens???	To provoke and sway public opinion.
Andrew Maimba @andrew_maimba	<i>Pfutseke Doug. Tiri kukuziva Zimu pambe pfumi.</i> ‘Stupid Doug. We know you colonialist’.	To provoke and show political affiliation
Nkunz’emnyama@ magalela69	I always knew that there is something wrong with Zimbabweans, but I did not know it was this bad. You call following the very same whites you kicked out to come back and lick their arses, and be treated like slaves “achieving”	To provoke
Farie @fmakunike	Mnangagwa funded the army which was involved in the Gukurahundi massacres. He was the mastermind. Down with ZANU-PF	To mislead, and sway public opinion.

Table 6.5 Examples of emotionally divisive utterances

Speakers show no particular interest in the desirability of the addressee’s positive face; this statement is supported by the continuous realisation of blatant non-cooperation in the data. This manifest through acts which disruptively interrupt the addressee’s talk by running contrary to the positive face wants of the addressee. Such acts show a lack of application for specific modes of reasoning universally expected in such contexts (Brown & Levinson 1987: 64). This blatant non-cooperation is brought out through non-politic linguistic strategies such as condescension, unpalatable questions, pointed criticisms and insults. For example, in conversation 6.5 where the President of Zimbabwe is remembering a national hero and pledging to continue his legacy, Mnumzana brings a completely unrelated topic into the discussion. To show his blatant non-cooperation Mnumzana accuses Zimbabweans of destroying South Africa, something which does not show heedfulness of the addressee’s face. In general, people want their discussions to be thought of as desirable and expect people to contribute relevantly to them (Brown & Levinson 1987: 63). However, this is violated through instigating irrelevant discussions, which take away focus from the main topic under discussion.

Offensive address terms are intentionally used to misidentify the addressee in order to embarrass or shame them. Such acts reveal that the speaker has no particular care about the desirability of the addressee’s public self-image or personality. For example, in the conversation under Example 6.11, Nelson Chamisa refers to ZANU-PF members as “*Varashiki?*” which translates to “The lost souls”. Such a term misidentifies the addressees as it is taken from the word “*Varakashi?*” meaning ‘the thrashers’. According to GV Sub-Saharan Africa (2019: np), Varakashi are people who have been given a mandate by the President of Zimbabwe to troll social media platforms, especially *Twitter*, and criticize anyone who dares to challenge his policies or leadership. However, in the cited conversation, Example 6.11, Nelson Chamisa intentionally uses an offensive address term “*Varashiki?*” which misidentifies the Varakashi online brigade as ‘lost souls’. This example is typical of the many offensive address terms which are employed to misidentify the addressees to embarrass them. Table 6.6 below highlights a list of some offensive address terms realised in the corpus and their corresponding semantic analysis:

Offensive address term	Meaning in Zimbabwean Context	How the term misidentifies the addressee
Dissidents	Dissidents are referred to as “ <i>vapanduki?</i> ” a reference to rebels, insurgents, and enemies of the state (Matsilele, 2019:14). Commonly, use of the term is intended to arouse fear, panic,	On social media the term is used to refer to anyone who opposes ZANU-PF’s rule, regardless of political affiliation (Matsilele, 2019:25).

	terror, and trauma in the general populace (Zhira, 2004; Epprecht, 2013).	
EDiot	It is a derogatory term used to label one as foolish. It is used to refer to the President of Zimbabwe Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa and those who support him. It derives from the initials of his first and second names. The term is a combination of the two initials and the word idiot. It is a profanity.	It is an epithet derived from a combination of President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa's initials (ED) and the word idiot. This word expresses an undesirable attribute regarded as a characteristic of the president.
<i>Pambe pfumi</i> 'Colonialist'	In the Zimbabwean context, this term is used to refer to British white people who colonised the Black dominated Southern African country in 1890. It is a Shona word which refers to a person who supports the subjugation (Kohn & Reddy, 2017: np).	Zimbabwe has surpassed 40 years of independence. However, the term is still used to refer to anyone white despite having been born in independent Zimbabwe or having nothing to do with the colonisation of Zimbabwe. The term is used indiscriminately to include all whites even non-British.
Selous scout	An offensive address term which derives from the much-hated special forces unit of the Rhodesian Army, dominated by whites that operated during the Rhodesian Bush war from 1973 until the reconstitution of the country as Zimbabwe in 1980 (Baxter, 2012:50). They were tasked with locating guerrilla (black freedom fighters) groups within their operational areas, with intention to direct airborne reaction forces to attack, kill or capture them (Baxter, 2012:50)	This is used to refer to ordinary white people who oppose or criticise the ZANU-PF ruling party. Whoever finds himself/herself on the receiving end of the term is seen as not worthy of trust and an enemy of the Black state and people.
<i>MaShurugwi</i>	Refers to violent machete-wielding gangs of young and middle-aged men, unleashing a reign of terror in gold mining communities	The term is now used to refer to anyone who is seen to be engaging in violent acts.

	(Magawu, Mlevu, Nhachi & Nyapokoto, 2020:1).	
Junta	A Junta is a military or political group that rules a country after taking power by force (Oxford Languages, 2022).	The term is used to refer to the government of President Mnangagwa despite having contested and won in the harmonised elections.
Puppets	Refers to a person typically controlled by others (Oxford Languages, 2022).	The term is used to refer to anyone who supports the opposition parties. Such people are purported to be being used by the Western countries to reverse the gains of the country's liberation struggle by advancing a regime agenda change (Rori, 2021:np)
Mr Four Fingers	Refers to anyone who is alleged to be involved in male gender attraction.	The term was first used by Susan Mutami who is Hon. Temba P. Mliswa's former girlfriend. Susan Mutami alleges that Hon. Temba P. Mliswa, due to his homosexuality tendencies, had at one point forced her to dip four of her fingers into his anus (The Zimbabwe Mail, 2021:np)
<i>Gukurabundists</i>	Refers to perpetrators of the genocide in Zimbabwe which began in 1982 until the Unity code in 1987 (Gusha, 2019:1).	It is now being used to refer to anyone who supports ZANU-PF.

Table 6.6 List of offensive address terms and their meanings

6.4.1.3 Acts which are self-destructive

Many times, speakers find themselves attacking their own positive face through various face-damaging acts. In such cases, speakers issue an apology as confession to a prior transgression. Although the apology is issued with the intention of correcting a past wrong, it is often met with retribution, mostly by opposition members. In most cases, speakers are left more undesirable than they were before their apologies. The following is an example of how this can manifest:

6.14 Prof Jonathan Moyo tweet 1— Acts which attack speaker's own positive face.

Prof. Jonathan Moyo @ProfJNMoyo

Replying to @TheRealLeoX @ZANUPF_Official

I apologise for the many wrong doings that were done by the ZANU-PF government to which I was part of. However, many of these wrong doings I bear no knowledge of!

Tinashe Mukomba @AfricaNOborders

Replying to @ProfJNMoyo

Generalising your opinions to find remorse. Moyo you are a criminal and they treated you as such. You have been an executive policy maker for years coming up with all Bills to suppress the opposition and those who beg to differ. Moyo is in no position to point fingers at his former friends.

Kembo @tendaikembo

Replying to @ProfJNMoyo

Wakadya mari dzedu ive ‘You spent money meant for us’. We will not forget our enemies and our enemies can never be my friend.

Costen Maraga @04sakunatsa

Replying to @ProfJNMoyo

Chinhu ichi ndimi makachigadzira mudhara. At least maiva ne plan dzekutiza. Ko imi 2008 pamaitiponda tisina kana plan yekutiza maiti batisi vanhu here? ‘You created this system boss. At least you had a plan of escaping. In 2008 you were beating us up when we had no plan of escaping. Did you think we were not human?’.

Using the Example 6.14 above, Prof. Jonathan Moyo’s utterance indicates that he regrets being part of a system which soiled his image. In his utterance, he makes it obvious that he wants to be desirable to the addressees. The need for this desirability is revealed through his offering of an apology for past transgressions and by him claiming to have no knowledge of the many past wrongdoings of his political party. This remorseful acknowledgement of past failures indicates a desire to correct past mistakes. However, many such apologies in the studied data end up attacking the speaker’s own positive face as they invite retribution rather than acceptance. In conversation 6.14, responses given to Prof. Jonathan Moyo are typical of the many undesirable responses given in such contexts in the studied data. An example of such a response is that from Tinashe Mukomba who says, “Generalising your opinions to find remorse. Moyo you are a criminal and they treated you as such. You have been an executive policy maker for years coming up with all Bills to suppress

the opposition and those who beg to differ. Moyo is in no position to point fingers at his former friends.” These types of responses are laced with evaluative statements like “Moyo you are a criminal” which show that the speakers have a negative evaluation of the apology tendered.

On other occasions, speakers endanger own positive face through self-contradiction. For many *Twitter* handles credibility affirms the creation and maintenance of a desirable reputation. Interactants are quick to identify lies and dishonourable behaviours such as insults, threats, or condescension when they arise. However, when inconsistencies are picked up by addressees, they openly point them out to the speaker in challenging and potentially embarrassing ways. Example 6.6 is typical of this phenomenon. Prof. Jonathan Moyo’s utterance is deemed inconsistent by the many addressees who respond to him. Prof. Jonathan Moyo says, “What would you do if you and your family survived a 2am fifteen-minute Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) attack on your house with 7 children one of them 12 years old, by 25 Special Air Services (SAS) snippers with semi-automatic weapons; randomly firing tracer bullets and stun grenades? Is this the New Justice? New Dawn? New Era? New Zim?” The other interactants found it difficult to believe that he could have escaped and survived an attack by the Zimbabwean Defence Forces at two o’clock in the morning with seven children. The respondents view his narrative as inconsistent. The inconsistency is highlighted by the addressees’ evaluative responses. For example, Dr Virimai V. Mugobo says, “Hey Jonathan, so you mean that when your house was being attacked at 2am you took time to count the number of attackers?” This statement insinuates that it is impossible for Prof. Jonathan Moyo to have counted the number of his attackers while being attacked. The phrase “so you mean” is challenging the prior position by Prof. Jonathan Moyo and shows that the speaker feels that he is being insincere.

Speakers further endanger own positive face through out-of-control emotional outbursts. On several occasions during the interactions, speakers fail to control their emotions and resort to using profanities when responding to addressees. In Example 6.3, Prof. Jonathan Moyo says, “You are one stupid who thinks or wish that my family and I were at our home when Mnangagwa’s murderous Special Forces got there. What a dunderhead!” The words “stupid” and “dunderhead” carry vitriol and reveal the speaker’s negative reactions to prior utterances.

In Example 6.7, Jamwanda says to an interactant, “you are remarkably ignorant”. Again, such an utterance reveals an uncontrolled outburst of negative emotions. Whenever such out-of-control outbursts occur they are met negatively by the addressees and the other interactants. In Prof. Jonathan Moyo’s case, Ollen responds by saying, “Why are you swearing? A whole minister losing rationality and insulting me in public.” According to Chipere (2020: 313), in Zimbabwe significant

political actors such as Prof. Jonathan Moyo and Jamwanda are expected to exhibit exemplary behaviours which make them desirable. Hence, all outbursts undermine their desirability.

In this subsection, I addressed research question 2.1, looking into how the positive face is being attacked on *Twitter*. My findings reveal that the positive face is attacked through the following: acts that show that the speaker has a negative evaluation of an aspect of the addressee's positive face; acts that show that the speaker does not care about (or is indifferent to) the addressee's positive face; and acts which are self-destructive.

6.4.2 Why might these aspects of face be the ones that are targeted?

In this subsection, I address research question 2.2, which looks at the reasons positive face is targeted. The non-politic linguistic strategies established earlier reveal that positive face is a highly targeted aspect of face as several of the identified non-politic linguistic strategies attack the need to be desirable. At the centre of positive face lies the desire for the self-image being presented to be appreciated and approved of by other interactants (Brown & Levinson 1987: 66). There are several reasons why this aspect of face is mainly targeted. From the many interactions analysed, I established that much of the attack to the positive face is done by speakers to the addressee. At this stage, it bears repeating that speaker refers to anyone who is issuing an utterance at a given time, while an addressee is anyone to whom the utterance is directed/targeted at a given time. However, in the interaction process, these roles are not fixed as participants take turns to be the speaker and addressee.

When looking at the two types of face, the positive face predominantly aligns with social interactions, as it centres on an interactant's need to be accepted, appreciated, and approved by others. As an aspect of face, the positive face gives power to the speaker. It is at their discretion to honour and respect, own or addressee's, positive face. The overarching goal of most people on social platforms of political inclination hinges on desirability, as approved and honoured by other interactants. However, the positive face is made vulnerable to attacks as the aspect of respect lies in the speaker's compliance to honour the addressee's face. However, this compliance, according to The Vincentian (2017: np), is never guaranteed as "the nature of the game of politics is that our politicians are so bedevilled that they can potentially turn off their consciences to gain political mileage." Thus, the positive face becomes more targeted and vulnerable as speakers tend to ignore it in cases of social breakdown, urgent cooperation, or in the interests of gaining political mileage (Brown & Levinson 1987: 62).

An attack on the positive face makes it possible for the speaker to show that they do not care about the addressee's feelings, wants and position. As previously mentioned, the concept of positive face centres around desirability or likeability, meaning the interactants wish that one or more of their wants, acts, personal characteristics, beliefs, or values be desired by other interactants (Brown & Levinson 1987: 66). However, in spaces of political competition, such as the studied *Twitter* handles, political opposition sometimes means that an opposition addressee is acted upon, or reacted to, in an undesirable manner. The approval of political desires in the studied context equals the projection of a good image for the addressee, a feat unpopular due to political competition. Using the conversation in Example 6.5, David Mtema's response to the President of Zimbabwe shows that he does not find the image the President wants to project as desirable. Hence, he attacks the President's positive face by saying, "This is the man you once called a cockroach. A man you hunted day and night for his head, dead or alive. A man you hated for being Ndebele. Idiot Mnangagwa shame on you. Murderer, rapist and Gukurahundist. Please shut-up!" This utterance tarnishes the President of Zimbabwe's desired image of living up to the legacy of unity, love and peace as advocated for by the late Dr. Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo.

The attack on positive face makes it possible for the speaker to indicate that they think the addressee is wrong or misguided about an issue. Carsten, Dreu, Pliskin, Rojek-Giffin, Meder and Gross (2021: 1) state that politics often involves contentious strategies that aim to advance one's own group interests at the expense of another group, resulting in the use of expressions of disapproval, criticism, complaints, accusations, and insults (Brown & Levinson 1987: 66). These acts are utilised to show the incompatibility of individual interactants or groups through opposing standpoints. For example, in Example 6.6, Fabian disagrees with and challenges Prof. Jonathan Moyo's claim that he had survived an attack by Special Air Services (SAS) snipers along with his seven children. In his utterance, Fabian indicates that he thinks Prof. Jonathan Moyo is lying and being unreasonable in his narrative. The positive face does not permit disapproval, contradictions, and challenges. Hence, in a contentious space of a political nature it is easy for it to emerge as highly targeted.

Perpetrators who attack positive face do so as it enables them to scare or embarrass the speaker. This kind of attack often displays violent out-of-control emotions. The study reveals that many interactants use emotionally charged language to assert power over the addressee. A typical example is conversation 6.9, where Bothwel responds to an interactant by saying, "stop calling our president a puppet, otherwise I will make life impossible for you." Such an utterance is an attempt to instil fear into addressees and is meant to compel the addressee to do what the speaker wants.

The forceful compelling of an addressee by the speaker violates the principle of positive face which hinges on desirability.

Positive face is targeted because it is vulnerable to utterances that cause distress. On many occasions, speakers raise unpleasant points about the addressee, in a manner which reveals that they are not concerned with the addressee's feelings, and which aim to cause them distress. The following example by Ignasio Shongatu Mushoperi @ISMushoperi is typical of this. "Unfortunately, you have been doing the same things when you were in office. You attacked people with the same weaponry and now it is an issue because the same weaponry was pointed to you and your family?" In this case, Shongatu Mushoperi is pointing to an undesirable past action which is not consistent with the image Prof. Jonathan Moyo is trying to project. In this case, distress is employed to create an undesirable image, which attacks positive face.

Positive face is vulnerable to dangerous-to-face atmospheres. As observed in examples provided earlier, speakers raise emotionally divisive topics ranging from religion, race, sexuality, ethnicity, and politics. One such example is the mentioning of the Gukurahundi genocide addressed earlier. The overarching goal of raising such a dangerous-to-face atmosphere is to make the addressee find themselves undesirable in the given context. In conversation 6.5, David Mtema addresses the President of Zimbabwe using the highly emotionally charged term "Gukurahundist". As mentioned earlier, an estimated 20 000 civilians were killed by the state between 1982 and 1988 (Killander & Nyathi 2015: 463). The fact that thirty years later the alleged perpetrators of these crimes are still in charge of Zimbabwe's political and security infrastructure, makes it difficult for the survivors and relatives of those who died to co-exist harmoniously with anyone who is labelled with such a term (Killander & Nyathi 2015: 463).

In this subsection, I addressed research question 2.2 which looks at the reasons why positive face is predominantly targeted.

Among the findings, I established that the act of respecting with regard to positive face lies in the speaker's compliance with honouring the addressee's face. However, speakers in a political space tend to ignore this in cases of social breakdown or in the interest of gaining political mileage (Brown & Levinson 1987). A speaker further attacks positive face to demonstrate that they do not care about the addressee's feelings, wants and position. It is also attacked as a way of indicating that the speaker thinks the addressee is wrong or misguided with regard to an issue. Further evidence reveals that positive face is targeted due to its vulnerability in terms of utterances that cause fear, embarrassment or distress, a reaction commonly sought in spaces of political contestation.

In the next section, I address research question 3, 3.1 and 3.2.

6.5 Linguistic face-saving strategies to redress face threatening acts on digital platforms such as *Twitter*.

In this subsection, guided by the findings from the first and second research questions, I address research question 3 and consider linguistic face-saving strategies which political actors can employ to minimize or redress the identified face-threatening acts.

6.5.1 Face saving strategy one: Claiming common ground

This mechanism involves speakers claiming common ground with addressees by indicating that both speaker and addressee belong to a group that shares specific wants, goals, and values (Brown & Levinson 1987: 103). On many occasions, speakers intentionally reveal that they have no interest in seeing the addressees' wants as desirable. Thus, speakers convey that the addressee's want (goal, or desired object) is detestable and unimportant to the speaker (Brown & Levinson 1987: 103).

In instances where speakers want to achieve pro-social behaviour, that is, smooth social relationships, Gomez (2021: 732) advises employing the strategy of claiming common ground. According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 103) there are three ways a speaker can claim common ground. Firstly, the speaker can convey a mutual admiration or interest with regard to an addressee's wants. Secondly, the speaker can highlight common group memberships and wants, and finally, a speaker can claim a common perspective with the addressee.

In what follows, using the data as a point of reference, I explain and illustrate how claiming common ground can be employed successfully in the given context using various strategies.

6.5.1.1 Claiming common ground sub-face-saving strategy one: Notice and attend to addressee's interests or wants

According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 104) the speaker ought to notice something good about the addressee and show appreciation for it. This strategy is employed in cases where the speaker wants to make the addressee feel good about themselves thus, saving the addressee's face (Njuki & Ileri 2021: 12). Through the non-politic linguistic strategies earlier established, one realises that non-politic strategies are employed in ways which show that the speaker dislikes the interests or wants of the addressee. There are cases where speakers make their interests and wants apparent in their utterances as highlighted in the following example by Prof. Jonathan Moyo, "His name is Makomborero Haruzivishe, he is a political prisoner in Zimbabwe, I sympathise and support his cause." Despite making it apparent that he sympathises and supports Makomborero Haruzivishe,

Prof. Jonathan Moyo still received unfavourable responses from other interactants through pointed criticisms and condescensions.

To redress FTAs from non-politic linguistic strategies of this nature, it is advisable to try and claim common ground by conveying that a want of an addressee is admirable or interesting to the speaker too. This suggests that the speaker should take notice of aspects (interests, wants, needs) which addressee might want the speaker to notice and approve of (Brown & Levinson 1987: 104). Using the above cited example, it should be noted that Prof. Jonathan Moyo wants to be seen as a person who sympathises and supports Makomborero Haruzivishe. In the conversation in Example 6.15 which follows, I highlight an instance where an interactant fails to claim common ground by failing to notice and attend to the addressee's interests, wants and needs. Examples of main tweets and certain responses may have been provided earlier but are repeated here to show how the linguistic face-saving strategy may be operationalised.

6.15 President of Zimbabwe tweet 2— Claiming common ground

President of Zimbabwe@edmnangagwa

22 years ago today, Zimbabwe lost a great man.

Dr Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo is a hero of the liberation struggle, a man of the people, and a visionary who built a better Zimbabwe. Every day we strive to continue your legacy of unity, love, and peace.

#RememberingFatherZimbabwe

David Mtema@david_mtema

Replying to @edmnangagwa

This is the man you once called a cockroach. A man you hunted day and night for his head, dead or alive. A man you hated for being Ndebele. Idiot Mnangagwa shame on you. Murderer, rapist and gukurahundist. Please shut up!

It is evident in David Mtema's response to the President of Zimbabwe in example 6.15, that he fails to notice that which the speaker hopes addressees will notice and approve of, that being his praise of the late Dr Joshua Nkomo. David Mtema's response is typical of many responses in the corpus which make no effort to claim common ground with the addressee and which also point out past wrongs. In cases such as the above, the addressee is left feeling that his projected image

is undermined. The following response from the same conversation serves as a typical example of how to claim common ground by noticing and attending to the addressee's interests.

6.16 President of Zimbabwe tweet 2— Example of claiming common ground by noticing and attending to addressee's interests or wants.

Ayanda Moyo @GoldAyanda

Replying to @edmnangagwa

Dr. Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo was and is indeed a hero of the liberation struggle, a man of the people and a visionary who built a better Zimbabwe. The new dispensation is following his footsteps. #RememberingFatherZimbabwe

This response by Ayanda to the President of Zimbabwe shows that Ayanda has noticed aspects that the President of Zimbabwe wanted noticed and approved of. From a first-order perspective, responses which notice and attend to an addressee's interests, wants, or needs, such as Ayanda's, are better received by interactants, including the addressee, than responses such as David Mtema's which ignite negative reactions. Thus, always seeking to notice and attend to addressee's interests or wants should be a strategy interactants use in minimizing or eliminating the FTAs.

When a political actor initiates a tweet, they should be cognizant of the need to notice and attend to their addressee's wants. This implies that a speaker needs to be aware of the type of tweet that might attract undesirable effects to their face and avoid them. In these scenarios, conversations should be restricted by interactants to areas of common ground between the speaker and the addressees. This can be achieved by understanding verbal construction of utterances, where these utterances are used, focussing on safe topics, and being aware of the kind of social relationships in which such a strategy is deployed.

In cases where face has been attacked, perhaps due to a prior utterance that one has made (as is the case in Example 6.15 with the President of Zimbabwe), the strategy of claiming common ground by noticing and attending to addressee's interests and wants can be applied. In the above case, the President is not supposed to defend himself or even engage in personal attacks. From a first-order perspective, the strategy of not responding to such comments is effective in preventing the discussion from escalating. I refer to this strategy as the silent drift strategy. It fits perfectly into claiming common ground by noticing and attending to a hearer's interests or wants. In Example 6.15 it is evident that David Mtema wants to embarrass the President of Zimbabwe and needs to feel that he is controlling the narrative. In this instance, the President of Zimbabwe should

be able to notice David Mtema's interests and wants and by ignoring the personal attack, would meet the wants of the perpetrator, allowing him to feel that he has control.

6.5.1.2 Claiming common ground sub-face-saving strategy two: Exaggerate interest for, approval of or sympathy for addressee

This strategy reveals to the addressee that the speaker thinks of the addressee's wants as desirable. It is carried out through exaggerated intonation, stress, (both of which are not readily available in a written *Twitter* discourse) and intensifying modifiers (Brown & Levinson 1987: 104). Brown and Levinson (1987: 104) observe this strategy as a positive face mechanism of redressing FTAs. In Ayanda's response above, Example 6.16, an element of claiming common ground through exaggeration of interests or approval is noticeable through the use of the intensifying modifier (indeed). One notes that Ayanda's utterance would still have made sense had she just said, "Dr. Joshua Nkomo is a hero of the liberation struggle." Thus, adding an intensifying modifier (indeed) to such an utterance is arguably a form of exaggeration.

The exaggeration serves as a position identity marker to clearly indicate to the addressee that the speaker is overly interested in the wants of the addressee. In this case, the speaker avoids being ambiguous in meaning and uses obvious agreeing expressions. "Dr Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo was and is indeed a hero of the liberation struggle..." In this example, this is evident in the use of the word 'indeed' which is an intensifying modifier. Such a word gives emphasis and strength to the meaning of the utterance and makes it easy to get the point across explicitly. However, for intensifying modifiers to work effectively they should only be employed in situations where the speaker intends to show interest, approval, or sympathy. This approval, however, can occur in two ways, one can show approval by agreeing to the sentiments echoed by an interactant or, by agreeing to the act one implies from the sentiments.

Other intensifying modifying expressions, serving the same function, and which are employed to claim common ground through exaggerating interest, approval or sympathy include, but are not limited to, sure/ly, exactly, wonderful, absolutely, and well said. These expressions came from the different *Twitter* handles studied. The following are a few examples of how they were employed.

6.17 Nelson Chamisa tweet 2— Example of utterance with intensifying modifiers.

Mr Lee@BossMhofela

Replying to @nelsonchamisa

'Well said!' Thank you for clarity Mr President.

Vee Ndlovu

Replying to @daddyhope

‘Absolutely’, they are a bunch of losers.

In a context marred by linguistic toxicity, many interactants are falling victim to personal attacks which leave them feeling embarrassed and embittered towards other interactants. This bitterness stems from being attacked by insults, threats, pointed criticisms, condescensions and dismissals. In many cases in the data, this impolite behaviour is elicited by prior utterances from previous speakers.

The impact of the toxicity on addressees is worsened when a speaker fails to claim common ground with the victims of personal attacks through a show of exaggerated sympathy as well as the presence of a public audience witnessing the embarrassment and shame. From the data it can be seen that a show of exaggerated sympathy can be used as a face-saving strategy. The dialogue which follows shows the application of the exaggerated sympathy strategy.

6.18 Prof. Jonathan Moyo tweet 1— Claiming common ground through exaggerated sympathy.

Prof. Jonathan Moyo @ProfJNMoyo

What would you do if you and your family survived a 2am-15-minute ZDF attack on your house with 7 children one of them 12 years old, by 25 SAS snipers with semi-automatic weapons: randomly firing tracer bullets and stun grenades? Is this the New Justice? New Dawn? New Era? New Zimbabwe?

George Sithole @sitholeg2003

Replying to @ProfJNMoyo

I absolutely feel your pain. When you survived such as you describe above, thank and praise God every day. Just know that those criminals will have their moment of truth as surely as the sun rises from the East.

Prof Jonathan Moyo @ProfJNMoyo

Replying to @sitholeg2033

Amen!

In the above, George Sithole uses exaggerated sympathy through the word ‘absolutely’, which is an intensifying modifier. The use of this word shows that George Sithole is emphasising his

sympathy in definite terms towards the addressee Prof. Jonathan Moyo. Thus, George Sithole saves Prof. Jonathan Moyo's positive face by claiming common ground using exaggerated sympathy. In the corpus, this strategy is effective as addressees often respond kindly to the sympathy they receive, as is the case with the 'Amen' proclaimed by Prof. Jonathan Moyo in response to George Sithole.

The positive reception of tweets and responses that show exaggerated sympathy in the corpus indicates that exaggerated sympathy is a good face-saving strategy. Thus, the strategy of claiming common ground is further accentuated by its inclusion under Brown and Levinson's (1987: 103) face-saving strategies which redress positive face.

6.5.1.3 Claiming common ground sub-face-saving strategy three: Intensify interest in the addressee

In the corpus, much of the positive face of the interactants is violated by ignoring the addressee's desires and interests. In many cases, speakers portray the addressees as boring, and not worthy of attention or inclusion. This shows unfriendliness, distance, and dissension. These characteristics are a common feature of FTAs which violate the positive face in the corpus.

Brown and Levinson (1987: 106) suggest the strategy of intensifying interests to an addressee, as a face-saving strategy which can redress the above-mentioned FTAs. This is a way for a speaker to make known to the addressee that they share some of their desires. To do this, the speaker conveys that the addressee is admirable or interesting by using expressions that portray the addressee as a desirable participant in the conversation (Brown & Levinson 1987: 106).

Based on the corpus, the existence of this phenomenon can be observed from the data presented below:

6.19 Doug Coltart tweet 2— Claiming common ground through intensifying interest in the addressee

Doug Coltart @DougColtart

ALERT: I am informed by the family of Solomon Chanengeta that he was abducted by 6 men in plain clothes claiming to be soldiers from 451 Muzaradope Street, Karoi at about 10pm this evening. He was then driven away in a Honda Fit. If anyone has information, please contact +2778 176 063.

Mambo Svosve @Chiefsvosve1

Replying to @DougColtart

Thank you, Doug. It works to publicize such atrocities. Apparently, this regime is so afraid of the people of Zimbabwe. *Simba revanhu vachariona very soon* ‘they shall see the power of the people- very soon’.

Doug Coltart @DougColtart

Head bowed. Thank you for noticing the importance of this noble act.

In the above Example 6.19, Mambo Svosve employed the strategy of intensifying interest in the addressee. He does this by mentioning the addressee’s name, Doug Coltart, in his utterance. In this example, it is clear that the strategy works well when one points out an area of agreement with an addressee. Here, Mambo Svosve agrees with Doug Coltart and intensifies interest by addressing him by name. According to Brown and Levinson’s (1987: 107) PT, the feature of this strategy is in the use of tag questions or tag expressions such as ‘name calling’ that draw the addressee as a participant into the conversation.

Notably, the tweet by Doug Coltart received backlash, with interactants hurling insults, pointed criticisms, dismissals, and unpalatable questions at him. Doug Coltart responds to none of the FTAs that come his way. However, when Mambo Svosve employs the intensifying interest strategy of claiming common ground, Doug Coltart responds. Inversely, Mambo Svosve, by choosing to employ the strategy of intensifying interest in the addressee, is also saving his positive face as he remains desirable in the addressee’s eyes. Ideally, instead of waiting for negative responses from other participants in order to start saving face, Doug Coltart could have framed his tweet in a way that claimed common ground through intensifying interest in the addressee. The following example shows how: “Fellow Zimbabweans, I am certain that you do not condone abductions. Please note that I am informed by the family of Solomon Chanengeta that he was abducted by 6 men in plain clothes claiming to be soldiers...” A response such as the above would portray Doug Coltart as someone pursuing the interests of his addressees and would probably not draw as much vitriol as he initially received.

The suggested example shows that the use of intensifying interest in the addressee is not only employed after an attack but is a proactive process that a political actor initiating a tweet thread can employ. This is necessary to avoid attacking the positive face of the addressee/s as well as avoiding backlash that may arise from messages which do not show interest in the addressee.

The strategy of intensifying interest in the addressee is not only supported by the addressee from a first-order perspective as witnessed by the response given to Mambo Svosve by Doug Coltart, it

is also supported by the public sphere theory which overemphasizes civic-minded or civil discourse that is politely inclusionary (Adut 2012: 238). The corpus reveals that interactants co-exist better when the discourse is civil and shows intensifying interest in addressees.

6.5.1.4 Claiming common ground sub-face-saving strategy four: Use ingroup identity markers

The data reveals that the study sample comprises interactants from different political backgrounds, which may be referred to as intergroups. Intergroup contact can be perceived as threatening and therefore harmful to positive face due to one group's actions, beliefs, or characteristics often challenging the goal attainment or well-being of another group (Riek, Mania & Gaertner 2006: 336).

As mentioned earlier, Zimbabwe is a polarised country where some political opposition is sometimes met with enmity. As such, there is often a negative display of attitudes towards the outgroup. This is noted in the corpus via the non-politic linguistic strategies mentioned earlier which include insults, pointed criticisms, unpalatable questions, condescensions, dismissals and threats. Evidence reveals that the outgroup is treated discriminately through hostility, negative evaluations and by being attributed negative traits and responsibility for negative incidents (Sales-Wuillemin, Masse, Urdapilleta, Pullin, Kohler & Gueraud 2014: 94). However, Brown and Levinson (1987: 107) suggest that by using any of the innumerable ways of conveying in-group membership, speakers can implicitly claim common ground with an addressee. This includes in-group use of address forms, language, dialect, jargon or slang, and ellipsis (Brown & Levinson 1987: 107). In what follows, I provide examples of how some in-group identity markers can be operationalized.

6.20 Example of the use of outgroup identity markers

Tenskwatawa @thulas83075575

ZANU-PF members of parliament are corrupt and evil murderers.

The above Example 6.20 is typical of how outgroup identity markers are employed. Terms which directly identify the addressees are employed to attack the addressees' integrity and reputation as they are always accompanied by negative remarks. In the above example, the term ZANU-PF is a good example of an outgroup identity marker as it excludes non-ZANU-PF members. Many times, when such an identity marker is used, the assumption is that it is coming from someone outside the group and hence it is often met with negative backlash. In such situations, in order to redress

the FTAs resulting from out-grouping, speakers should employ the address forms which convey ingroup membership. Below I demonstrate how the above statement can be presented using ingroup address forms.

6.21 Claiming common ground — Example of the use of ingroup identity markers.

‘Our’ ZANU-PF members of parliament are corrupt and evil.

The use of the ingroup identity marker ‘our’ brings about a sense of belonging. Such an ingroup identity marker neutralises or softens FTAs as it is normally perceived to have been uttered by one from within the group. The power of ingroup identity markers is that an FTA is perceived as less threatening when coming from someone familiar, compared to how it is perceived when coming from the outgroup.

The claiming of common ground as a linguistic face-saving strategy goes beyond claiming in-group membership. It also includes the claiming of common points of view, opinions, attitudes, knowledge, and empathy (Brown & Levinson 1987: 102). The following section shall illustrate face-saving strategies which derive from this aspect.

6.5.1.5 Claiming common ground sub-face-saving strategy five: Seek agreement

Another important face-saving strategy is to seek ways in which to agree with the addressee. One of the ways to do this is limiting conversation or comments to ‘safe topics.’ Brown and Levinson (1987: 112) state that the raising of safe topics allows the speaker to stress their agreement with the addressee thereby satisfying their desire to be right, or to have their opinion validated.

From a first-order perspective, the corpus reveals that tweets which are limited to non-political, non-religious and non-sexual issues are embraced positively by many interactants. While controversial issues cannot be expected to be omitted from political interactions, it is imperative that safe topics not be presented in a controversial manner. Speakers should therefore be socially aware of the potential to trigger conflict through the topics they choose to raise. Most political actors continue to receive negative backlash as a result of failing to observe this strategy. The following example illustrates this point:

6.24 Makomborero Haruzivishe tweet 2— Seek agreement

Makomborero Haruzivishe @MakomboreroH

Chikurubi is an inhumane place. It is not even fit for animals. In a new Zimbabwe it must be erased for sure. The handcuffs, leg irons, high walls and steel bars are meant to

dehumanize us like caged chimpanzees and deflate our spirits, but we always come out stronger! #PeoplePower

Tau @owentau

Replying to @MakomboreroH

Not saying you deserved to be there, but it is a maximum prison and not a hotel. Handcuffs, high walls, leg irons and steel bars are there for a reason and do not lie that they will be removed. Let us not tweet for likes. Be real!!

George Chinyande @ChinyandeGeorge

Replying to @MakomboreroH

That is exactly where a violent lawless idiot thug like you deserve to live.

Sharks @Sharks79883528

Replying to @MakomboreroH

Do not worry comrade all shall be fine. Even our liberation heroes such as Nkomo, Ziyapapa and Tongo were jailed like this. #Godisinit

In the above Example 6.24, Makomborero Haruzivishe is raising a highly arguable topic wherein he condemns the state of one of Zimbabwe's maximum-security prisons and suggests that in a 'new' Zimbabwe such institutions should not exist. It can be argued that Makomborero Haruzivishe expects approval of his perceptions. However, judging by most of the negative evaluative responses the topic he raised can be deemed unsafe as it exposes him to attacks.

Findings reveal that limiting comments to safe topics is a relative phenomenon which varies from person to person. Hence, when determining safe topics, political actors should consider context and how interactants might perceive topics they raise. In this case, unsafe does not mean dangerous to others only, it also means it may be threatening to one's reputation.

The issue of seeking agreement is not limited to the initiator of the conversation when considering that all interactants have desired images which need protection. Using the conversation in Example 6.24 above, Sharks' response to Makomborero Haruzivishe is typical of a response which seeks agreement. Sharks says, "Do not worry comrade all shall be fine. Even our liberation heroes such as Nkomo, Ziyapapa and Tongo were jailed like this. #Godisinit" Responses of this nature do not generate friction between a speaker and an addressee, as reflected in the corpus.

6.5.1.6 Claiming common ground sub-face-saving strategy six: Avoid disagreement

This strategy appears similar to the strategy of seeking agreement, however, there are areas of difference (Downlatabadi, Mehri & Tajabadi 2014: 417). When it comes to the strategy of avoiding disagreement, attention is given to the context. This denotes that the context pushes participants towards disagreement, but the participants try to avoid such disagreement to settle their disputes (Downlatabadi, Mehri & Tajabadi 2014: 417). The strategy of avoiding disagreement is especially relevant in political contexts.

Many of the face threatening acts witnessed on *Twitter* handles can be circumvented by avoiding disagreement. It is however a difficult strategy to employ in a public political sphere as this is a space where free and equal citizens come together to share information, debate, discuss, and deliberate on common concerns, unrestrained (Ogugbemi 2008: 17). Such an environment is highly contentious and thrives on expressions of different opinions. In what follows Brown and Levinson (1987: 113) suggest numerous sub-strategies for avoiding disagreement in similar contexts.

In instances where the speaker sees that the addressee's face has been made vulnerable by their previous utterance, Brown and Levinson (1987: 113) suggest that interactants employ the 'token agreement' sub-strategy where the desire to agree or appear to agree with addressee leads to mechanisms for pretending to agree, instances of 'token' agreement. In this case, speakers twist their utterances to hide their disagreement. Drawing from Brown and Levinson (1987), the rule of token of agreement yields the following example (where Lisah Ncube is responding to Hon. Temba P. Mliswa):

6.25 Hon. Temba P. Mliswa — Claiming common ground through avoiding disagreements.

Hon. Temba P. Mliswa @Temba Mliswa

The Malaba judgement should be respected. The court has spoken, and the decision should be respected. People may have their sentiments but let us respect the independence of the judges. That is important. The judiciary should remain independent and not behave like politicians.

Lisah Ncube (Dutchess of Matebeleland) @lisah_ncube

Replying to @ThembaMliswa

Yes absolutely, but the judiciary is captured. Ziyambi twice threatened judges who ruled against Malaba. As far as we are concerned Malaba is a "thief injustice" his term expired,

and he was imposed by Mnangagwa as a power consolidation plot for 2023. Legitimacy comes through respecting the constitution.

Chief Nyamukoho Katsande @chief_katsande

Replying to @TembaMliswa

I get you Temba.

PapaNono @NockstheGreat

Replying to @TembaMliswa

If you can answer me one question, I will agree with your sentiments. What is so special about Malaba such that a whole country can change its statutes to accommodate him? Answer that then I will agree with your sentiments.

Hon. Temba P. Mliswa @TembaMliswa

Good question PapaNono, it is not about Malaba being special it is about the constitution. Once I find time, I will share with you the statutory evidence which supports what the government did about his case.

In this example, Lisah Ncube is saving the face of Hon. Themba P. Mliswa by responding to a preceding utterance using token agreement, “Yes absolutely, but...” instead of a blatant ‘No.’ The most prominent feature of token agreement is the use of the extreme adjective ‘absolutely’ by Lisah Ncube after Hon. Temba P. Mliswa had spoken about respecting the judiciary. This kind of extreme adjective is used to claim some common ground with the speaker by agreeing in part to their utterance. This partial agreement, presented as token agreement, allows Lisah Ncube to then present a disagreement in a manner which avoids conflict. The corpus reveals that disagreeing statements usually supersede the initial statement of agreement. Hence, in cases where token agreements are employed, they are received warmly by the addressees as many do not recognise that the agreement is a ritualized linguistic ‘template’ to avoid open conflict and blatant disrespect.

A further output of the face-saving strategy desire to avoid disagreement is through the social ‘white lie,’ where a speaker, when confronted with the necessity to state an opinion, chooses to lie rather than damage the addressee’s positive face (Brown and Levinson 1987: 115). In such a scenario, the speaker conventionally avoids confrontation through a lie, pretending that genuine reasons exist as to why they cannot comply. In Example 6.25 above, Chief Nyamukoho Katsande’s response, “I get you Temba” is a white lie strategy as it does not reveal the truth behind it.

However, what is evident in his response is the strategy's ability to appease the addressee's self-esteem. The corpus further reveals that the following are commonly used in white lies: 'that is okay, you are correct, you said it better, I totally understand', among others.

The strategy of avoiding disagreement through white lies is common within the corpus. Interactants employ the strategy driven by the need to maintain civility within their discussions. The corpus reveals that this strategy emerges in situations where the speaker and addressee have established prior warm relations, or where they have a general liking for each other. In cases where the desire for harmony or conformity is crucial Brown and Levinson (1987: 123) consider the white lie a better strategy than attacking the addressee's positive face.

6.5.1.7 Claiming common ground sub-face-saving strategy seven: Presuppose familiarity in the speaker-addressee relationship

This strategy is employed using familiar address forms which presuppose that the addressee is 'familiar' (Brown & Levinson 1987: 123). However, the address forms are predominantly generic and employed when a speaker engages with a distant addressee. Nevertheless, when used they either soften or redress the threat of FTAs. The address forms may seem routine, but the PT suggests that they are helpful in pre-supposing familiarity. This is illustrated in the conversation below, 6.26.

6.26 Makomborero Haruzivishe — claiming common ground through presupposing familiarity in the speaker-addressee relationship.

Makomborero Haruzivishe @MakomboreroH

Dear Comrades and Friends,

In case you are wondering. I am enduring prison quite well. I have been prosecuted countless times over the past decade that I made a gentlemen's agreement with pain.
#PeoplePower

In Example 6.26, Makomborero Haruzivishe presupposes familiarity with the addressees by using familiar address forms such as "comrades" and "friends". Through their meaning, these address forms imply that the addressee is not an enemy of the speaker and hence they should sincerely accept. In the corpus, many of these address forms are used by members of an ingroup even when seemingly addressed to the general populace and tend to support the addressees positive face by showing appreciation and support. Other address forms which speakers can employ to presuppose

familiarity include, but are not limited to, ‘compatriots, colleagues, fellow, mate, brother, sister, love etc.’

The strategies which have so far been suggested are all centred on the claiming of common ground. While it has been proven herein that the strategy can be employed in various forms, it is not the only driver of face-saving strategies. In the next section, I focus on another class of positive-politeness strategies which derive from the want to convey that the speaker and addressee are cooperatively involved in the interaction (Brown & Levinson 1987: 125).

6.5.1.8 Face saving strategy two: Convey that the speaker and addressee are co-operators

This strategy redresses face by conveying that the speaker and addressee are co-operators (Brown & Levinson 1987: 25). There are several ways in which this strategy can be employed.

Firstly, making an offer or offering a promise can convey that the speaker and addressee are co-operators. When using this strategy, a speaker claims (within a certain sphere of relevance) that whatever the addressee wants, the speaker wants for them as well and will help them obtain it (Brown & Levinson 1987: 25). Central to this strategy is the idea of giving offers and promises which satisfy the addressee’s positive face, instead of responding using dismissals, pointed criticisms or condescensions. These promises and offers are not always sincere.

The interaction between Hon. Temba P. Mliswa and Papa Nono in Example 6.25, is typical of how interactants convey cooperation using the strategy of promising. While Papa Nono does not seem to be convinced by the position which Hon. Temba P. Mliswa has taken on the Malaba judgement, he does not present his argument negatively. Instead, Papa Nono offers a promise to agree with Hon. Temba P. Mliswa if he provides supporting evidence to his prior utterance.

This strategy of offering to agree is more favourably received in the data than disapproval.

In Example 6.25, Hon. Temba P. Mliswa’s response, “Good question Papa Nono....” shows that the strategy is positively received. In a show of further cooperation, he responds, in the form of a promise, to provide evidence. It must be noted, however, that some of the promises, or offers, used as strategies to show cooperation were never fulfilled within the context of the conversations from which they arose. For example, Hon Temba P. Mliswa never came back with the evidence he promised to provide to Papa Nono in conversation 6.25 during the period that this data was gathered. Thus, promises are speech acts that support the positive face wants of both interactants by assuring the addressee that the speaker has positive regard for them and supports and accepts one of their desires (Brown & Levinson 1987: 87).

The second manner in which the strategy can be employed is by including both speaker and addressee in the activity. This strategy is accomplished by using the inclusive ‘we’ form when the speaker means ‘you’ (Brown & Levinson 1987: 127). The use of ‘we’ calls upon cooperative assumptions which reflect togetherness. This strategy is an active face-saving strategy wherein speakers save the addressee’s positive face by involving themselves in the blame attributed to the addressee. This strategy is common among many political memberships in the corpus. Example 6.27 illustrates this strategy.

6.27 Makomborero Haruzivishe tweet 1— Conveying that speaker and addressee are co-operators by including both speaker and addressee in the activity.

Makomborero Haruzivishe @MakomboreroH

Dear Comrades and Friends,

In case you are wondering, I am enduring prison quite well. I have been prosecuted countless times over the past decade that I made a gentlemen’s agreement with pain.
#PeoplePower

Isaac C Munzvovi @IMunzvovi

Replying to @MakomboreroH

We are together in this Mako. Your persecution will forever be remembered. Keep soldiering on. #FreeMako #RegisterToVote2023.

The response by Isaac C Munzvovi in Example 6.27 above aptly captures the cooperativeness of the speaker and the addressee by use of the inclusive ‘we.’ The term ‘we’ makes the speaker, in this case Issac C Munzvovi, appear to be included in the same activity with the addressee, Makomborero Haruzivishe. The above example shows that the term ‘we’ is being used to stress the cooperativeness of the speaker’s actions. Thus, the addressee Makomborero Haruzivishe is made to feel desirable.

The speaker and the addressee can convey cooperativeness through the “give or ask for reasons” technique. This strategy involves the speaker giving reasons as to why they want what they want (Brown & Levinson 1987: 128). This strategy is used when the speaker does not want to impose upon, or be seen to not care about, the hearer (Njuki & Ileri 2021: 5). It is a strategy that considers the addressee’s feelings and wants as it is motivated by the desire to make the addressee see the reasonableness of the speaker’s FTAs. Brown and Levinson (1987: 128) assert that giving reasons

is a way of implying that ‘I can help you’ or ‘you can help me,’ thus assuming cooperation. Example 6.13 highlighted earlier and repeated below illustrates this strategy.

Hon. Temba P. Mliswa @TembaMliswa

I think for progress it is time that we name and shame those derailing the country. Who is Mudha? What credentials does he have to be the State Security Minister? (*Asking for reasons*)
None, except for his reputation for taking over people’s mines in Kwekwe and killing people (*Giving reasons*).

Tendai Masara @masara_tendai

Replying to @TembaMliswa

Denigrating Mudha is an attack on ED as the appointing authority. Why are you fighting Mudha and July? (*Asking for reasons*)

Ranga @RangaChidembo

Replying to @TembaMliswa

With due respect @TembaMliswa, who appointed Mudha and for what? Let us call a spade a spade. The country’s progress is being derailed by brother @edmnangagwa and his party which you adore so much. #RegisterToVoteZW

In the above example, Hon. Temba P. Mliswa is addressing his audience on issues he feels are derailing the country. In doing so, he employs a name-and-shame strategy and states that Mudha does not have the credentials to be the State Security Minister. However, the speaker, Hon. Temba P. Mliswa, employs the give reasons technique as he feels that his audience might want to know why he is shaming Mudha. He gives the reason as Mudha having the reputation for taking people’s mines in Kwekwe and killing people. Giving this reason is a technique which redresses the FTA of his utterance by revealing to the audience that he, the speaker, is willing to cooperate in making the issue clear to the audience.

The response to Hon. Temba P. Mliswa by Ranga is typical of the ‘ask for reasons technique’, which shows cooperation through a willingness to open civil dialogue. Ranga asks Hon. Temba P. Mliswa to tell him who appointed Mudha and for what reason. This strategy works by assuming that there is always a good reason a speaker might have issued an FTA. The strategy of giving or asking for reasons is effective in redressing FTAs as sometimes interactants provide each other

with convincing reasons. On many occasions in the corpus, interactants co-exist respectfully when they ask for and/or give reasons for comments.

Assuming or asserting reciprocity is another technique for showing cooperativeness. This strategy, according to Brown and Levinson (1987: 129), is employed by claiming or giving evidence of reciprocal rights or obligations arising between a speaker and addressee. The technique calls upon an open display of a condition(s) which leads to face respect between speaker and addressee by pointing to the reciprocal benefit of observing the condition given. In the following example, I provide evidence of this strategy by Jamwanda from the corpus. He says, “Listen here, I will always engage respectfully with those who address me with respect on my *Twitter* handles”. His utterance clearly indicates how assuming or asserting reciprocity works. It is evident that this is an ‘I will do X for you if you do Y for me’ strategy. The strategy highlights, to the addressee, the mutual vulnerability of face between the interactants and hence acts as a deterrent to many FTAs which could arise during the interactions. There is evidence of the effectiveness of this strategy in the corpus as the above example by Jamwanda indicates.

6.5.1.9 Face saving strategy three: Fulfil addressee’s want for themselves.

This strategy involves the speaker deciding to redress the addressee’s face, directly, by fulfilling some of the addressee’s wants, “thereby indicating that he/she (speaker) is taking interest in addressee’s wants as a way of pleasing him/her, in some respects” (Brown & Levinson, 1987:129). These wants include the want to be liked, admired, cared about, understood, and heard, among others (Brown & Levinson 1987: 129). This is achieved through the sub-strategy of issuing the addressee with gifts such as sympathy, understanding and co-operation. The sub-strategy entails that a speaker should be in a position of demonstrating that they know some of the addressee’s wants and wants them to be fulfilled (Brown and Levinson 1987: 129). The following example, previously shown, is repeated here to illustrate this strategy.

6.28 Prof. Jonathan Moyo — Fulfil addressee’s want for themselves.

Prof. Jonathan Moyo @ProfJNMoyo

What would you do if you and your family survived a 2am, 15-minute Zimbabwe Defence Forces attack on your house with 7 children, one of them 12 years old, by 25 SAS snipers with semi-automatic weapons, randomly firing tracer bullets and stun grenades? Is this the New Justice? New Dawn? New Era? New Zim?

George Sithole @sitholeg2003

Replying to @ProfJNMoyo

When you survived such as you described above, thank and praise God every day. Just know that those criminals will have their moment of truth as surely as the sun rises from the East. I am deeply sorry you went through that.

Prof Jonathan Moyo @ProfJNMoyo

Amen!

Ceceilia Musakwa nee Chipiri @MusakwaCecelia

Replying to @ProfJNMoyo

Surely that is so pathetic! No one deserves to experience that.

In the above Example 6.28, it can be construed that Prof. Jonathan Moyo is inviting the addressee's sympathy. He does this by inviting the addressee to participate in the conversation through the phrase, "What would you do...?" Such a phrase indicates that the speaker is soliciting a response from a fellow interactant. Through his utterance, Prof. Jonathan Moyo narrates a dangerous situation that he experienced with his family at the hands of the ZDF. He ends his utterance by probing his addressee to think deeply about the behaviour of the new system of governance.

Though Prof. Jonathan Moyo's utterance received a lot of attacks to his positive face (desirability), there are a few individuals who use the strategy of giving gifts to an addressee. In the above example, George Sithole is giving the gift of sympathy to Prof. Jonathan Moyo. In his utterance, George Sithole shows feelings of pity and sorrow for Prof. Jonathan Moyo's misfortune by saying "I am deeply sorry you went through that." Ceceilia Musakwa nee Chipiri also employs the same strategy stating, "Surely, that is so pathetic! No one deserves to experience that." The strategy of issuing gifts, such as sympathy, understanding and cooperation is well received by addressees. The fact that the speaker and addressee find themselves in a highly competitive and contentious environment makes them especially appreciative of tokens of sympathy, understanding and cooperation, whenever they are presented. This is affirmed in the above example by the "Amen" given by Prof. Jonathan Moyo to a speaker who had gifted him with sympathy.

However, the strategy of giving gifts not only manifests in the corpus through a show of sympathy, but sometimes presents itself in the form of understanding and cooperation. As earlier mentioned, the corpus of this study stems from a highly competitive and contentious environment, wherein understanding and cooperation seem to be very limited. In instances where an interactant

demonstrates understanding or cooperation towards the speaker, cordial exchanges emerge. The following example illustrates this:

6.29 Hopewell Chin'ono tweet 1— giving the gift of understanding and cooperation.

Hopewell Chin'ono @daddyhope

Meet ZANU-PF's Director of Information Tafadzwa Mugwadi *nemuramba wake* 'with his catfish'. He is a youth that defends looting of public funds in Zimbabwe by ZANU-PF youths, whilst youths suffer without jobs, no medical care, no clean drinking water, or a place to call their own. Leave a word for him. #RegisterToVote2023

Dr Admire Dziks @DrDziks_admire

Replying to @daddyhope

He is being used by ZANU-PF like a tissue paper. *Nhama ine nharo* 'Poverty is stubborn'.

Hopewell Chin'ono @daddyhope

You can say that again my brother, wish he could wake up and smell the coffee.

In Example 6.29, Dr Admire Dziks gives Hopewell Chin'ono the gift of cooperation. In several cases in the corpus, positive face is attacked through non-cooperation. However, as a face-redressing strategy, Brown and Levinson (1987: 129) suggest that interactants provide each other with the gift of cooperation. For this to happen the speaker is expected to produce a request that the addressee must comply with. In Example 6.29, Hopewell Chin'ono produced a request by saying "Leave a word for him," and Dr. Admire Dziks complied with the request by saying, "He is being used by ZANU-PF like a tissue paper. *Nhama ine nharo* (Poverty is stubborn)." This utterance, by Dr. Admire Dziks, represents a 'word' as requested by Hopewell, which is directed to Tafadzwa Mugwadi, the person being discussed.

Hopewell's positive face, in the above case, is appeased by, firstly, the compliance of his addressee to his request and secondly, by the demonstration of cooperation by affirming Hopewell Chin'ono's sentiments about Tafadzwa Mugwadi. In many instances, where this strategy is employed, cordial interactions are witnessed. In several cases, responses which include endearments characterise interactions after the issuance of the gift of cooperation. Hopewell Chin'ono reveals this through his utterance, "You can say that again my brother [...]" The endearment, "my brother" in that statement is evidence of how cordial interactions can become when someone issues a gift of cooperation.

In this sub-section, I addressed research question 3 which looks at the linguistic face-saving strategies that political actors can utilise to redress face threatening acts on digital platforms such as *Twitter*. I found three main strategies which include claiming common ground, conveying that the speaker and addressee are co-operators and fulfilling the addressee's want. Under strategy number 1 of claiming common ground, there are seven sub-strategies that can be performed to save face. These include noticing and attending to an addressee's interests or wants, exaggerating interest for approval or sympathy for the addressee, intensifying interest in the addressee, using ingroup identity markers, seeking agreement, avoiding disagreement, and presupposing familiarity in the speaker-addressee relationship. The second strategy of conveying that speaker and addressee are co-operators is performed by making an offer or promise, which satisfies the addressee's positive face, using inclusive terms such as "we", when the speaker really means "you" and, through the give, or ask for, reasons technique.

6.5.2 How recommendations can be utilised to redress face-threatening-acts on digital platforms such as *Twitter*.

In this sub-section of my data analysis, I address research question 3.1 which looks at how the linguistic face-saving recommendations can be utilised to redress FTAs on digital platforms such as *Twitter*. The identified recommendations in the previous section require calculated implementation to be successful. In this section, I suggest contextualised ways in which interactants can employ strategies to redress FTAs on *Twitter*.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 76), the seriousness or weightiness of a particular FTA is made up of both the risk to a speaker's face and risk to an addressee's face.

This implies that in any interactional position assumed, whether as speaker or addressee, one needs to be mindful of the recommendations highlighted earlier and the strategies for utilising the recommendations, which will be discussed in this section. Petterson and Karlstrom (2011: 1) point out that everything a political actor does impacts their reputation. Thus, the first step any political actor should take before engaging on *Twitter* is to consider the possible implications of their utterance to their own or another's reputation, as any act can impact their reputation, either positively or negatively. Hence, when employing the recommendations put forward earlier, one should take into consideration the three social dimensions as prescribed by the PT, the symmetric social dimension of similarities or differences within which the speaker and addressee stand, abiding *Twitter* rules and the use of the interactional function of language. In what follows, I discuss the symmetric social dimension of similarities or differences within which the speaker and addressee stand.

6.5.2.1 Consider the symmetric social dimension of similarity or difference within which the speaker and addressee stand

According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 77), this strategy is based on an assessment of the frequency of interaction, and the kinds of interactions exchanged between a speaker and an addressee. This signifies that before one employs a face-saving strategy, one should ask how familiar they are to the addressee and what type of interactions they normally have. Consideration of these two relational factors is important as they contribute to the impact and understanding of any face-saving strategy in any given context.

In cases where there is a large social distance between a speaker and an addressee (that is speaker and addressee are strangers), then the face-saving strategy should be implemented in a manner that clearly shows the speaker's good intentions towards the addressee. Thus, in interacting with a distant speaker, the face-saving strategy should be employed in a manner that informs the addressee that the speaker wants to claim common ground, cooperate, or fulfil their wants. In what follows, I highlight an example of how this can be done on *Twitter*:

6.30 Doug Coltart tweet 1 —Considering symmetric social dimension through intent.

Doug Coltart @DougColtart

New York Times journalist @moyojeffrey has finally been released after 21 days in custody. His detention was characterised by a series of illegalities and violations of his constitutional rights including prison officials' refusal to release him yesterday despite being granted bail.

Nicolate Gwati @NicolateGwati

Replying to @DougColtart and @moyojeffrey

I agree with you Doug. The craziness of the Zimbabwe judicial system. How can we trust the justice system in Zimbabwe when the courts that we are supposed to rely on have lost their integrity.

In the above Example 6.30, Nicolate Gwati makes her intentions of claiming common ground with Doug Coltart clear. Instead of only giving a statement which concurs with Doug Coltart's utterance, Nicolate makes the following metapragmatic utterance, "I agree with you Doug." The statement is a typical example of how the face-saving recommendations can be employed to minimise the potential for misunderstanding. This strategy should be used in situations where one is interacting with a distant person on *Twitter*.

6.5.2.2 Abide by the *Twitter* rules

Along with the conventional face-saving strategies discussed in the previous section, *Twitter* etiquette should also be considered in order for the linguistic recommendations to be impactful (Cheplygina, Hermans, Albers, Bielczyk & Smeets 2020: 4). As stated in previous chapters, *Twitter's* purpose is to serve the public conversation (Twitter 2022) and thus, the non-politic linguistic strategies identified earlier such as insults, condescensions, threats and dismissals are discouraged. *Twitter* rules encourage interactants to participate in conversation freely and safely (Twitter 2022).

The linguistic recommendations proposed by this study are not meant to replace *Twitter* rules; however, they are intended to supplement the rules. Thus, in performing the linguistic recommendations, an interactant should always align with the *Twitter* rules. What this suggests is that the need to appease the positive face should not infringe on *Twitter* rules, as any violation of the rules becomes a threat to another interactant. For example, in terms of the strategy of claiming common ground, a speaker might be compelled to use hate speech toward a certain group, only because it makes them desirable to their many followers. In this type of situation, it is advisable that an interactant be guided by *Twitter* rules. To repeat, the performance of all linguistic recommendations raised in this study should always be aligned with *Twitter* rules.

6.5.2.3 Use the interactional function of language

Interactional language is the language we use to establish and maintain social relationships and manage reputations (Brown and Yule 1983). It is seen as a tool for polite behaviour as it communicates the attitude of the speaker to the addressee by showing positive affective involvement (Santamaria-Garcia 2013: 129). Hence, I advise here that in the performance of the linguistic face-saving strategies, interactants put strategies across using interactional language. Examples of linguistic features of interactional language include greetings, small talk, recounting recent experiences and compliments (Siumarlata 2017: 1499). *Twitter* presents several conventional features which supplement the use of interactional language (Santamaria-Garcia 2013: 127). This includes the use of emojis and media. These features assist in making the speaker's intentions clear to the addressee by communicating the nuances of mood and emotion (Pratama 2019: 33).

The chance of coming across as face-threatening can often be reduced using emojis or media. Emojis can be used to give the addressee an idea of what the speaker is experiencing and can also clarify a statement by mitigating ambiguous and negative interpretations (Kindred & Roper 2004; Roed 2003). Therefore, in utilising the linguistic face-saving recommendations, interactants are advised to employ language that advocates for good relations and reputations. In cases where such

language alone is not enough to achieve this, I advise the use of the conventional features of *Twitter* which facilitate an interactional atmosphere. Thus, employing this strategy reduces the chances of a face-saving strategy being misconstrued.

6.5.2.4 Employ the hedging strategy

The promotion of one's meaning on *Twitter* bears a particular risk of face loss, so interactants should present themselves as carefully as possible when they express their face-saving strategies (Rentel 2014: 357). Wales (1989) describes hedging as the "qualification and toning-down of utterances or statements in order to reduce the riskiness of what one says." Thus, hedging enables interactants to minimise the risk of reputation loss should their face-saving strategy be misinterpreted. This strategy can be utilised through the use of tentative verbs. For example, while conveying that an addressee is admirable or interesting, one may point out that the approval or interest is based on their individual competence (Rentel 2014: 358). Example 6.31 will be used to illustrate how a tentative verb may be employed to augment a face-saving strategy:

6.31 Nelson Chamisa tweet 2— Hedging through the use of a tentative verb.

Mr Lee@BossMhofela

Replying to @nelsonchamisa

Well said! Thank you for clarity Mr. President.

The response from Mr Lee uses the strategy of claiming common ground by showing exaggerated approval. This strategy could be made more impactful by employing the tentative verb 'seem' to express it. Thus, the above utterance by Mr. Lee could be conveyed as follows: "It seems well said to me. Thank you for clarity Mr President." The hedging done through the tentative verb "seem" tones down any absolute imposition the utterance might carry. Bearing in mind that this interaction is happening on a public platform, it is advisable not to express oneself in certain terms, as this might be considered an imposition of one's ideas on others.

In addition to employing tentative verbs to augment a face-saving strategy, hedging can also be employed impactfully to a face-saving strategy by combining the use of the impersonal 'one' with the conditional form of the modal verb 'could' (Rentel 2014: 359). This suggests that the speaker makes it clear that they consider the position they are taking as one option among other possibilities. In the following example, I consider the face-saving strategy of conveying that the speaker and addressee are co-operators and suggest how hedging can be used to make it impactful.

6.32 Hon. Temba P. Mliswa tweet 2 —Hedging through combining the impersonal and modal verbs.

Hon. Temba P. Mliswa @TembaMliswa

I think for progress it is time that we name and shame those derailing the country. Who is Mudha? What credentials does he have to be the State Security Minister? None, except for his reputation for taking over people's mines in Kwekwe and killing people.

Ranga @RangaChidembo

Replying to @TembaMliswa

With due respect @TembaMliswa, who appointed Mudha and for what? Let us call a spade a spade. The country's progress is being derailed by brother @edmnangagwa and his party which you adore so much. #RegisterToVoteZW

The response from Ranga is a face-saving strategy which conveys that a speaker and hearer are co-operators. This face-saving strategy can become more impactful when expressed through hedging. Thus, Ranga's hedged response to Hon. Temba P. Mliswa would read as follows:

With due respect @TembaMliswa, who appointed Mudha and for what? Let us call a spade a spade. 'One could' say that the country's progress is being derailed by brother @edmnangagwa and his party which you adore so much...

In the revised version of Ranga's utterance, the use of the combined impersonal 'one' and the modal verb 'could', hedge the face-saving strategy of giving and asking for reasons by making Ranga's position of blaming Mnangagwa seem to be one assumption among other possible assumptions.

This strategy tones down imposition, and the face-saving strategy is then more likely to be positively received by the addressee. Although, the face-saving strategy of giving and asking for reasons is sufficient in the given context, I contend that hedging the strategy would make it more impactful.

Another way to make the face-saving strategy more impactful is for the speaker to hedge their linguistic face-saving strategy by using prepositional phrases, which underline that the opinion expressed in the face-saving strategy is based on their point of view (Rentel 2014: 359). This type of hedging works well with the strategy of conveying that the speaker and addressee are co-operators which is achieved by giving or asking for reasons. The example below illustrates this.

6.33 Jamwanda tweet 2— Hedging through the use of prepositional phrases.

Jamwanda @Jamwanda2

Hopeless MDC-Chamisa Municipality: This is what is happening just now on the road to Cranborne just after Makro. Treated water is gushing wild into a rivulet; meanwhile ratepayer's homes are dry. Their monies have been used to pay for purification of water which now gushes to waste! Why would you entrust power in such irresponsible, uncaring, and wasteful hands? Why? #RegisterToVoteZanuPF now!!!

Pikaz @Jawachawa

Replying to @Jamwanda2

Rates are paid to council not to the Ministry. What are they using the rates for?

Pikaz in his response uses the face-saving strategy of conveying that a speaker and an addressee are co-operators through the giving and asking for reasons technique. Although this technique redresses face, there are ways to improve its impact one of which is hedging through the use of prepositional phrases. The following shows how Pikaz could have responded: “*To me, this is a mystery because* rates are paid to council not to the Ministry. What are they using the rates for?” According to Rentel (2014: 359), by using a prepositional phrase “To me, this is a mystery because [...],” one does not claim that their point of view should be adopted by the addressee, hence, the probability of face-redress becomes very high.

Another hedging technique that can be employed to convey face-saving strategies is the use of the conditional clause “If I got it right/If I understood well” (Rentel 2014: 360). This technique reduces the impact of a claim which might be carried in a face-saving strategy. Pikaz’s response in Example 5.33 would be expressed as follows: “If I understood well rates are paid to council not to Ministry. What are they using the rates for” In this statement, the impact of Pikaz’s response is reduced by the conditional clause, “If I understood well...”

6.5.2.5 Minimize status and authority

Pratama (2019: 37) states that in the cyber world, people’s status and authority appear to be the same because everybody has the same right to speak on the platform. It is therefore advisable that political actors implement face saving strategies without negatively using their social status and authority to augment their face-redress. It is argued by Pratama (2013: 38) that when figures with higher status and authority present themselves in humble ways their message is well received by the public. To do this effectively, as established in the corpus, interactants should limit discussions

about their possessions, titles, academic qualifications, financial positions, and other narratives that may portray them as being pompous when putting across a face-saving strategy when they sincerely want to save-face.

In this sub-section of my data analysis, I addressed research question 3.1 looking at how linguistic face-saving recommendations can be utilised to redress FTAs on digital platforms such as *Twitter*. I established that if the recommendations in this study are to be successful the following should be considered alongside their use: the symmetric social dimension of similarity and difference within which the speaker and addressee stand, use of the interactional function of language, the use of hedging strategies, and the minimising of status and authority.

6.5.3 Reason(s) why these face-saving strategies are important

In this sub-section, I address research question 3.2 and focus on providing reasons as to why the strategies provided in the previous section are important. In doing so, the importance of the recommendations is explained vis-a-vis the Zimbabwean political context in which this study rests.

6.5.3.1 Promotes peaceful co-existence of political actors and the public

This study was largely prompted by political actors ceasing their use of *Twitter*, often with them citing that the platform has degenerated into a site for irrationality and mob lynching (Qukula, 2020: np). Many political actors have pointed out that information on *Twitter* is being distorted and twisted for a hate-filled agenda that inflicts maximum damage to the reputations of political actors. While this is arguably true, the strategies raised within this study can equip political actors with several ways to co-exist with their adversaries on *Twitter*. Thus, the recommendations may enable political actors to positively manage their own, as well as others,' reputations when they face a reputational threat on *Twitter*. While total peaceful co-existence in political contexts is difficult to achieve, the provided recommendations provide for a toning down of the possible effects.

6.5.3.2 Promotes the maintenance of good reputation

The biggest challenge the *Twitter* platform poses to political actors is the threat to their desired reputation. Many political actors who use the platform to gain political mileage have been left embarrassed and humiliated. As mentioned before, in trying to defend themselves, political actors are being forced to employ aggressive, rude behaviours or quit the platform in cases where their self-presentation is threatened.

However, the recommendations provided in this chapter highlight several ways in which political actors can avoid embarrassing or humiliating themselves and others by managing attacks directed

at either. If utilised as suggested in this study, the recommendations can help political actors maintain a positive image by enabling them to mitigate efforts made to damage their reputations. The recommendations are important as they all aim at achieving the desirability goal, which many political actors seek on *Twitter* (Lopez-Meri, Marcos-Garcia & Casero-Ripolles 2017: 796).

6.5.3.3 Provides a Zimbabwe-centric face-saving pragmatic strategies

Considering that face-saving strategies are a Western concept which have not been fully explored from an African perspective (Brown 2007: 31), the recommendations I have established contribute significantly to the understanding of face issues from a Zimbabwean perspective. The strategies arrived at are based on practical considerations. This indicates that the strategies have been put forth based on their ability to be effectively applied to the Zimbabwean context. The strategies provide for frames of expectations – appropriate social behaviour, against which both the speaker and the hearer judge relational work on social media when engaging in Zimbabwean political issues. I further posit that the recommendations can deal with impolite relational work such as aggressiveness, disrespectful behaviours, harassment, hate speech, outrageous claims in the form of fake news and character assassinations which currently pervade the Zimbabwean political *Twitter* spaces.

In this sub-section, I addressed research question 3.2 by looking at reasons why the face-saving strategies I provided are important. It emerged from the study that face-saving strategies are important because they promote a peaceful co-existence of political actors and the public, they promote the maintenance of a good reputation, and they provide Zimbabwe-centric face-saving pragmatic strategies.

6.5.4 Summary

This chapter examined and interpreted textual data to provide insights that address the research questions of the study, establishing a clear link between the identified patterns and the research objectives. The primary goal of the chapter was to reveal the patterns within the data and draw meaningful connections to the research questions.

To fulfil this objective, the chapter commenced by identifying and analysing the non-politic or inappropriate linguistic strategies employed by Zimbabwean political trolls in their personal attacks on *Twitter*. This investigation shed light on the specific methods and tactics used to target opponents in the virtual political space.

Furthermore, the chapter looks into the identification of the specific component of “face” that became the primary focus of personal attacks against Zimbabwean political actors on *Twitter*. By

examining the nature of the attacks, the study illuminated which aspects of an individual's self-image were most frequently under assault.

Lastly, the chapter concluded by delineating face-saving strategies that could serve as remedies for countering non-politic or inappropriate linguistic strategies on *Twitter*. These strategies were derived from a comprehensive analysis of the collected data and aimed to mitigate the potential harm caused by the identified negative tactics.

As readers proceed to Chapter 7, it is essential to keep in mind the central findings of this chapter. The identified linguistic strategies, targeted components of face, and proposed face-saving tactics will serve as foundational elements for the subsequent discussions and conclusions.

Chapter seven

Data discussion

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focuses on the data analysis. In this chapter, I discuss the findings as presented in Chapter 6. Importantly, I provide a critical analysis and interpretation of the results of this thesis and demonstrate the significance of the findings in relation to the research questions. To achieve this, I summarise the main findings, analyse and interpret results, relate findings to existing literature, discuss the implications of the findings and identify areas in need of future research.

7.2 Research question 1: Non-politic linguistic strategies utilised in political trolling within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere

As mentioned in both Chapter 3 and 6, non-politic linguistic strategies constitute a breach or violation of the social interaction norms (Locher 2006: 255) and refer to the concept of impoliteness which has rarely been discussed in conjunction with linguistic reputation management (Culpeper 2016:421). Therefore, probing into the non-politic means investigating the impolite linguistic behaviours of social interactions. Seminal scholars of the impoliteness field, i.e., Culpeper et al. (2003: 1545) define impoliteness as linguistic and non-linguistic strategies used in communication to attack face/reputation of others resulting in social conflict and disharmony between the interactants. Culpeper (2016: 437) came up with nine impoliteness/non-politic linguistic strategies that can be employed to achieve impoliteness effects.

Out of the nine impoliteness linguistic strategies suggested by Culpeper (2016) only six non-politic linguistic strategies emerge from the data, namely insults, pointed criticisms, unpalatable questions, condescensions, dismissals and threats. In contrast, message enforcers, silencers and negative expressives were not found in the current corpus. The investigation of these impoliteness strategies has been a subject of research in sociopragmatics for a long time, almost as much as politeness strategies (Culpeper 2016: 421). However, it is important to note, as Culpeper (2016: 436) suggests that impolite linguistic strategies may not always have the same meaning in every situation or context. Hence, it is crucial to understand that impoliteness strategies mentioned earlier should not be seen as commonplace, as their emergence and interpretation in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere may be influenced by the specific context.

The reason why message enforcers, silencers and negative expressives are not found in the data could be due to the influence of the conversational context. According to Culpeper (2016), these

three strategies are primarily used in spoken interactions. Therefore, the absence of these non-politic linguistic strategies in this study which focuses on written communication, supports Culpeper's (2016) statement.

In the data analysis chapter, it is found that the non-politic linguistic strategies identified are formed through specific linguistic structures (see specifically section 6.3.1.1), Insults for instance can be constructed in three different ways which include:

- (1) Personalised negative vocatives, which have a pronoun and a negative noun e.g., —[you] [vagina/idiot/puppet/fool/liar/little moron/loser/pig/coward]
- (2) Personalised negative assertions, where a pronoun accompanies a verb in a singular presentation to give negative weighting to an adjective e.g., — [you] [are] [so/such a] [bitch/shit/disappointment/etc.] and,
- (3) Personalised negative references, which comprise of a determiner, negative adjective and noun e.g., — [your] [big] [head].

Pointed criticisms are constructed using a demonstrative pronoun, verb and adverbs e.g., — [This/that/it] [is/was] [absolutely/unspeakably/etc.] [rubbish].

Unpalatable questions (UQs) are constructed as difficult to accept questions designed to antagonise addressees with a subject, verb, object, and a negative linguistic expression e.g., — [you] [think] [we] [were] [born last night?].

Condescensions are constructed through combining demonstrative pronoun, verb, noun, prepositional phrase, and a verb phrase e.g., — [Why] [would you entrust] [power] [in such irresponsible, uncaring, and wasteful hands] [Register] [to vote ZANU-PF now!].

Dismissals are constructed using an imperative verb and an adverb e.g., — [go] [away].

While threats comprise of directives that are supported by negative commissive acts e.g., — [stop calling...] [otherwise I will make life impossible for you].

Certain non-politic linguistic strategies used in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere for example insults, condescensions, and threats exhibit linguistic characteristics like those outlined by Culpeper (2016: 437); in contrast, pointed criticisms, dismissals, and unpalatable questions (UQs) are supported by additional linguistic structures that may be considered characteristic for the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. According to Culpeper (2011) pointed criticisms involve assessing the strengths

and weaknesses of something whether it is a physical object or an abstract idea, related to a specific person or situation. However, in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, pointed criticisms go beyond this evaluation. They are expressed in an accusing manner and use insulting language to make them more intense. In other words, people in Zimbabwean *Twitter* not only judge something but also accuse others in a way that includes offensive language to make the pointed criticism stronger. Similarly, Culpeper (2016: 437) describes unpleasant and challenging questions as UQs. In the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, these types of questions are presented with added insults to provoke the recipient into responding in a way that damages their reputation.

In the next section, I discuss the insights gained from the noted frequencies.

7.2.1 Insights gained from the frequencies with which the identified non-politic linguistic strategies occur.

Insults are the most frequently employed non-politic linguistic strategy in my corpus, followed in this order by pointed criticisms, condescensions, unpalatable questions, dismissals, and threats. Table 6.4 shows how frequently the various non-politic linguistic strategies are employed by interactants in their political discussions online. The frequencies emerging from the corpus suggest that in every interaction happening on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere there is a 72.1% chance that an impolite utterance may be issued. The high frequency raises expectations that the language utilised will likely be impolite and arguably makes apparent the importance of the linguistic face-saving strategies recommended in this study.

The frequencies provide a basis of understanding how the non-politic linguistic strategies in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere compare to other contexts. Considering that Culpeper (2016: 437) produced a list of several probable non-politic linguistic strategies that includes insults, pointed criticisms, unpalatable questions, condescensions, message enforcers, dismissals, silencers, threats and negative expressives which he says manifest differently in diverse contexts. Thus, the identified frequencies within this study function as an index of how the non-politic linguistic strategies are employed in the Zimbabwean context. Notably, the frequencies reveal nothing distant from other findings as they can be compared to other contexts for their similarity and differences.

Joo, Lim and Kim (2016) establish that insulting language is more likely to be used when discussing controversial topics or engaging in political discussions compared to other non-politic linguistic strategies. This finding aligns with the results of this study and those conducted by Wang (2020), which also identify insults as a commonly employed non-politic linguistic strategy in political interactions. Looking at it from a linguistic perspective, it can be argued that individuals involved

in political discussions worldwide often resort to using insulting language as a means of launching personal attacks at each other.

The frequencies emerging from the corpus closely compare to those in Wang's (2020) who in his social media corpus identifies insults and pointed criticisms as commonly employed non-politic linguistic strategies. Thus, the ranking of insults and pointed criticisms being high in both studies indicates that online interactants across different contexts prefer to employ positive impoliteness strategies in their informal discussions. In addition, I noted that the index of the frequencies is not affected by the formality of discussions. Panjaitan, Siti and Ginting's (2021) focus on identifying impoliteness strategies in a formal online environment and their findings establish insults and pointed criticisms as frequently employed non-politic linguistic strategies. A notable difference between my study and that of Panjaitan, Siti and Ginting's (2021) is in the way the contexts influence the non-politic linguistic strategies. In a formal environment the insults and pointed criticisms are performed through bold-on-record impoliteness, while in informal contexts they are performed through positive impoliteness. This implies that in formal environments insults and pointed criticisms are formulated using language that is direct, clear, unambiguous, and concise without any attempt to mitigate the potential FTA. On the other hand, in informal settings insults and pointed criticisms are often delivered through positive impoliteness with the goal of making the recipient feel less desirable.

From a linguistic point of view, the observation that insults emerge as having a high frequency rate in both Wang's (2020) study and in this study, emphasises the importance and widespread use of insulting language in personal attacks. It demonstrates how insults are commonly employed across different cultures and contexts indicating that their popularity goes beyond cultural and situational boundaries. Hence, it seems that regardless of different cultural backgrounds online interactants at a global level find it easier to use insults as impoliteness strategies compared to any other linguistic impoliteness strategy. Thus, insults can be considered as the non-politic linguistic strategy that transcends various contexts the most, making it the least reliant on specific situations to convey impoliteness (Hamno 2019: 8). Additionally, I posit that the consistency in the frequency findings implies that online platforms have the potential to cultivate a distinct and uniform linguistic culture, sometimes prevailing over individual cultural influences.

To this end, the current findings on the frequency with which the identified non-politic linguistic strategies occur supplement findings of Panjaitan, Sumarsih and Ginting (2021). Their study identifies positive impoliteness as the dominant super-strategy for performing insults and pointed criticisms. While non-politic linguistic strategies are also performed through the following super-

strategies: withholding politeness, sarcasm/mock impoliteness, bald-on-record impoliteness and negative impoliteness; these strategies are seldomly used to perform the non-politic linguistic strategies in the present corpus.

7.2.2 Insights gained from the association between the non-politic linguistic strategies and the context.

In this section I draw insights from the non-politic linguistic strategies established in this study and provide an explanation as to why this is the case in the given context (the medium and the socio-cultural environment of the interactants). I substantiate the discussion by situating the insights within the body of literature earlier reviewed. I posit that the non-politic linguistic strategies and context influence each other to determine what can be deemed as sincere political expression or hate speech. Distinguishing between sincere political expression and hate speech is a difficult undertaking worldwide (Benesch 2018: 188) due to various factors. These factors include cultural and social context, diverse political ideologies, online anonymity, and political polarization.

This study's findings reveal that language plays a major role in building the negative perception *Twitter* receives from the general populace. In the earlier chapters, I pointed out that Amnesty International in 2018 describes *Twitter* as a toxic place because of the abusive and reputation tainting language witnessed on the platform. The current study reaffirms this assertion by confirming the existence of non-politic linguistic strategies which are being employed to tarnish the images of others in a toxic manner. Thus, in the given context, the non-politic linguistic strategies established in this study further the branding of political discussions as filled with antagonising and polarised linguistic overtones that are mainly offensive as earlier noted by Pindayi (2021). Inversely, the platform has influence on the language used by its users. I noted that the presence of people from different political orientations with irreconcilable perspectives is bringing about impolite discourses as interactants engage in contentious reputational warfare. This corroborates Pindayi's (2021: 192) view about *Twitter* that the presence of *Varakashi* or 'Thrashers' who are pro-ZANU-PF and the oppositionists necessitates the use of violent language. In the data this discourse is playing out on the platform in the form of the non-politic linguistic strategies identified.

Drawing from the high levels of impolite language within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, it is evident that the non-politic linguistic strategies are not always defined by linguistic structures, as the context plays a crucial role in identifying ordinary utterances as non-politic. Many times, the non-politic language is unleashed based on the context in which an interactant find themselves. As

highlighted in the literature review, politics in Zimbabwe is gendered and mainly a masculine domain. In the analysed corpus, it is evident that women who participate in the political context under study often face harsh criticism through the use of the identified non-politic linguistic strategies. This is exemplified in Example 2, where K Laz, a man, insults LynneM, a woman, by saying, “Stop telling me what is wrong you bitch! Who invited you to this male discussion? Go breastfeed your fatherless child.” This instance serves as evidence that in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere non-politic linguistic strategies are employed to denigrate women’s involvement in politics. However, this finding does not make the studied context any different as it resonates the general treatment many women across the globe receive in different political contexts. Like Machingura and Machingura (2011: 121), I note that in the Zimbabwean political context the non-politic linguistic strategies are being used to serve the patriarchal agenda through facilitating harmful and hurtful gendered behaviours. As quoted in Nyavaya (2022) one political activist Linda Masarira points out that women are on the receiving end of the impolite language that targets the moral, psychological, and physical attributes of womanhood by virtue of participating in a male dominated political context.

The non-politic linguistic strategies presented in this study are a product of a cosmopolitan context comprising diverse political actors and a wide set of multifaceted political discourses. Many politeness studies hardly probe into the non-politic linguistic strategies associated with a pool of individuals within the same field. Focus is mainly placed on isolated incidents performed at individual level. An example of such study is that of Bustan and Alakrash (2020) who focus on Donald Trump and his tweets addressing Middle East countries.

The association between the non-politic linguistic strategies and context provide insight into what is deemed impolite in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. The six non-politic linguistic strategies presented are indicators of various possible ways the impolite behaviour can manifest in the given context. An understanding of the nature of interactions that make the manifestation of each non-politic linguistic strategy possible is captured through the various scenarios I provide in the data analysis to illustrate the behaviours.

7.2.3 Insights gained on the usefulness of first-order and second-order analyses for identifying non-politic linguistic strategies

By arriving at non-politic linguistic strategies that reflect both the insider’s and outsider’s point of view, the study establishes that it is possible to combine successfully the first-order and the second-order analytical approaches in one study. Previously, studies such as Alavidze (2018); Balogun and

Murana (2018); Njuki and Ireri (2021) etc. employ the strategies in isolation. However, when employed in isolation the approaches draw criticisms for their shortcomings. Combining the two approaches according to Haugh (2007) benefits any study of impoliteness. Ononye (2020: 5) states that meanings attached to polite behaviour change in the sense that what constitutes politeness at one time may differ at other epochs. However, engaging the first-order approach means that the non-politic linguistic strategies arrived at reflect what interactants themselves may consider as impolite at the time their interactions occur.

It is important to interpret the data I present by considering the non-politic linguistic strategies as a result of both the social norms of the Zimbabwean Twittersphere and scientific theories. This implies that these strategies reflect how impolite behaviour is perceived and discussed by members of the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, as well as how politeness is conceptualized in scientific terms.

7.2.4 Insights gained on the nature of non-politic linguistic strategies

The non-politic linguistic strategies that I have identified do not appear to be unique to the Zimbabwean Twittersphere or specific to the Global South. These strategies to a greater extent, exhibit similarities to those observed in the Global North. Findings reveal that this might be a product of the fact that the interaction analysed is mainly in a colonial language exported from the Global North, English, and occurs in a cultural practice, that originated in the Global North, namely the use of *Twitter*. The implication is that online users on platforms like *Twitter* sometimes transcend the influence of their own cultural backgrounds in performing these non-politic linguistic strategies. This finding indicates that individuals participating in global online platforms have the ability to override the cultural context they belong to and adopt non-politic linguistic strategies that are shared across different cultural contexts. As noted earlier, insults, condescensions, dismissals and threats observed in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere display a linguistic structure comparable to what Culpeper (2011) identified in interactions within British contexts. While the pointed criticisms and unpalatable questions in the Zimbabwean context may employ additional linguistic devices (refer to Section 7.2 for these additional devices) their fundamental linguistic structure remains similar to that found in the British context. The similarity in linguistic structure between non-politic linguistic strategies used by *Twitter* users on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere and the Global North suggests that there is a certain level of convergence in linguistic behaviour on global platforms such as *Twitter*.

Insults are a common form of communication across various contexts although the way they are linguistically structured and delivered can vary greatly. In some contexts, such as the Zimbabwean

Twittersphere and the Global North, insults are expressed overtly and explicitly with the target being directly referred to in an undesirable linguistic manner. This direct nature of insults is considered inflammatory and provoke retaliation from the target. However, in the Indian context, as Bedi (2021) notes, insults are communicated indirectly through use of jokes, backhanded compliments, or mimicry. These forms of insults may not be as overt, but they can still carry harmful intentions and meanings. The construction of insults in Zimbabwe and the Global North, as compared to the Indian context, downplays the idea of convergence of linguistic behaviours on global digital platforms such as *Twitter*. This suggests that recognising the contextual and cultural disparities in the expression of insults remains crucial in preventing misinterpretations and fostering successful communication across cultures.

The pointed criticisms are made up of evaluative language which is accusatory and laced with emotions of anger. Insulting words, such as “idiot”, “murderer”, “rapist”, are used to embellish the pointed criticisms. Many of the interactants in formulating their pointed criticisms on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere explicitly target their subject and bring up past unpleasant actions of the addressee not congruent with their current actions. However, this nature of formulating pointed criticisms should not be generalised to represent the rest of the Global South as this is not the case in the Brunei society of Southeast Asia as highlighted by Binti and Ghani (2018: 77). The presentation of past unpleasant actions and the embellishing of pointed criticisms through insults is a prominent feature in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. Culpeper (2016) states that in much of the Global North pointed criticisms are performed through using direct terms that are supported by words that show disgust of what the addressee would have done for example “This is/absolutely/ rubbish”.

Unpalatable questions (UQs) are formulated as rhetorical inquiries, devoid of the intention to elicit a response, but rather to assert a specific viewpoint. They are framed in a way that exhibits a discernible hostile disposition towards the addressee. The corpus analysis indicates that the deliberate intention to engage in gratuitous communication is often ambiguous when UQs are used independently. However, the findings demonstrate that on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, UQs are frequently accompanied by the use of swear words. For example, someone would ask, “You think we were born last night, you fool?” In some cases, swear words such as “fuck”, “shit” etc. are used along with UQs. The performance of these UQs on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere exhibits a slight deviation from their typical usage in British interactions, as observed by Culpeper (2011). While the use of UQs as a form of impoliteness extends beyond the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, their application in the Zimbabwean context demonstrates a slight departure from

other contexts as earlier explained. In a study examining impoliteness in British English, Bousfield and Locher (2008) discovered that UQs are commonly employed to express sarcasm, criticism, and to question the intelligence or knowledge of the addressee, without resorting to the inclusion of profanity. Likewise, Kadar and Haugh (2013) examined impoliteness in Japan and revealed that while UQs serve to express discontent and criticise the addressee, they are never accompanied by profanity. Thus, the incorporation of swear words alongside UQs on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere highlights the cultural and contextual specificity regarding their expression in different contexts.

The nature of condescensions in the corpus can be described in three ways. Firstly, on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere condescensions are presented in a manner where the addressee is treated as inferior to the speaker. This manifests through language that belittles and dismisses opponents. This type of language is often used to assert dominance and undermine the credibility of opposing views, without addressing the substantive issues at hand. Secondly, condescensions are also presented using sarcasm which involves employing statements that appear to be positive yet intended to be mocking or dismissive. Thirdly, condescensions are presented in patronizing language which involves talking down to an opponent as if they are inferior or naive. Insight can be drawn from the study findings and literature explored. The issue of engaging in condescending behaviour such as belittling opponents or using mocking language is not specific to Zimbabwean political actors. For example, Van't Riet and Van Stekelenburg (2022) state that US President Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential campaign employed such condescending language. Condescending behaviour by political actors is contributing to climates of incivility in both the Global South and North.

Dismissals play a crucial role in both the act of attacking and defending of one's face. Consistent with expectations, dismissals are more prevalent in response tweets compared to main tweets. Notably, the findings of this study reveal a distinctive pattern wherein dismissals are almost invariably accompanied by evaluative statements. For example, one would say, "get lost young man, you cannot tell me to shut the fuck up". While the first part of this sentence is a dismissal on its own, the second part is an evaluative statement that almost always characterise dismissals in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. On the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, the practice of coupling dismissals with evaluative statements is prevalent, in contrast to the Global North. Culpeper (2011) suggests that dismissals in the Global North typically occur without the presence of evaluative statements. However, in the analysed data this non-politic linguistic strategy consistently incorporates additional linguistic elements. This indicates the manner interactants on the

Zimbabwean Twittersphere perform their dismissals. For example, the interactants embellish the dismissals with insults i.e. “You are such a donkey, go away” (See Example 6.8). This discrepancy highlights a contrast with dismissals observed in the Global North, as described by Culpeper (2011), where they are predominantly employed independently such as phrases like “shut up”, “go away” etc.

Threats on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere are presented in a juxtaposing manner where a directive and a consequence intertwine in the same utterance. This finding is consistent with the study of Culpeper (2016) and Wijayanto, Prasetyarini and Hikmat (2017). Binti and Ghani (2018: 77) define a threat as a tactic used by the speaker to intimidate the addressee. In the current corpus threats are always accompanied by a certain condition which when not met may lead to a negative ‘violent’ consequence on the addressee. The conditional form comprises of the speaker’s implicit injunction as well as possible consequences in cases of non-compliance (Limberg 2009: 1376). Thus, many of the threats take the following form, “If you do/do not do X” accompanied by “I will/will not Y”. One would present themselves as commanding one to follow a certain order through the directive utterance “if you do/do not do X” clause, failure to do so they would face consequences. The linguistic resemblance in the structure of threats between the Zimbabwean Twittersphere and other examined contexts by Wijayanto, Prasetyarini and Hikmat (2017) and Culpeper (2016) implies that threats are utilised universally as a linguistic mechanism to assert dominance and control over others, irrespective of cultural and contextual variations. Additionally, the presence of conditional clauses in threats, as evident in the corpus suggests that speakers possess an awareness of the potential consequences of their actions and are using threats as a means of influencing addressee’s behaviour.

As earlier stated in the literature review the political discourses in Zimbabwe are violent (Saidi & Munemo 2012: 4). The findings emerging from this study confirm this assertion; the non-politic linguistic strategies identified are characterised with violent discourses as they include speech or language that encourages or justifies violence, hatred, or discrimination against individuals or groups. I provided evidence of how such violence is manifesting through examples under Section 6.2.1.1. In their make-up, the non-politic linguistic strategies are carefully constructed with linguistic items like words, phrases, and adjectives whose semantic drive is to redefine opponents in a negative or derogative way. In the corpus, such speech leads to violent verbal exchanges between interactants. This is further evidence of the potential violent nature ingrained in the non-politic linguistic strategies.

The existence of non-politic linguistic strategies within the interactional data of the Zimbabwean Twittersphere brings validation of Culpeper (2011) impoliteness formulae. Culpeper (2011) in his formulae provides a rubric of all possible non-politic linguistic strategies that can emerge from various interactional contexts and provides examples of how such non-politic linguistic strategies can manifest themselves. Findings show the existence of Culpeper's impoliteness triggers within empirical data from the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. The main insight the correlation brings is that Culpeper's impoliteness formulae should not be treated as a Global North rubric which does not apply outside of its context such as the Global South.

To conclude, non-politic linguistic strategies employed in various contexts have been investigated. As such, the ones I established in this study may seem routine, however they carry the significance of emerging from a context which ought to be interrogated based on its own socio-cultural linguistic values. Thus, the non-politic linguistic strategies identified and the way they emerge in the corpus is important to illuminate comparisons to other contexts.

7.3 Research question two: How political trolling on *Twitter* employs non-politic linguistic strategies in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors.

In this section, I discuss the findings in relation to the literature providing a broader linguistic explanation of how political trolling engages the non-politic linguistic strategies in the performance of personal attacks. This discussion leads to the concept of five impoliteness super-strategies (Culpeper 2011) that reveal the overarching ways in which non-politic linguistic strategies can be used in communication. To offer a linguistic explanation of the 'how', I utilise the five impoliteness super-strategies from Culpeper (2011). These are bald on-record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, affective impoliteness, and coercive impoliteness. These super-strategies provide a framework for understanding how impoliteness can be used strategically in political interactions. The specific super-strategy used depends on the political context and the speaker's intended goal.

The non-politic linguistic strategies are employed in a bald on-record impoliteness manner. This means that the non-politic linguistic strategy is formulated in language that is direct and clear with the intention of damaging the addressee's face/reputation (Bousfield 2008: 92). Though, several of the non-politic linguistic strategies can be performed through bold-on-record impoliteness (Culpeper 2011), in this study it is the dismissals, pointed criticisms and unpalatable questions which are mostly conveyed through the bold-on-record impoliteness method. As widely discussed

in the literature (Bousfield 2008: 92), the bold-on-record impoliteness strategy explicitly expresses in an unambiguous manner the intention to cause face damage to a clearly identifiable target.

In the current corpus, dismissals are directly addressed to an identifiable target for example, “shut your fucking mouth” (see Example 6.8) has the possessive pronoun ‘your’ which unambiguously directly identifies a target. It also has an insulting phrase “fucking mouth” that shows the intention to cause face damage. Pointed criticisms are also performed through bold-on-record impoliteness for example, “This is the man you once called a cockroach. A man you hunted day and night for his head, dead or alive. A man you hated for being Ndebele...” (see Example 6.5). The repetitive use of the word ‘you’ shows how direct and specific the pointed criticism is towards its identifiable target. In this utterance the speaker shows evidence of intentionally seeking to damage the addressee’s face by pointing out past actions not congruent with the target’s current actions. UQs also assume this bold-on-record linguistic structure through being directly negatively phrased in a way designed to intentionally antagonise the targets. For example, “You think we were born last night?” (see Example 6.6). This utterance does not seek any answers but makes it clear that its purpose is to shame the known addressee for adopting a certain viewpoint. The use of the word “you” implies directness towards the addressee.

The findings of this study align with Onwubiko’s (2020: 230) research which also highlights the bold-on-record impoliteness strategy as a prominent method employed by Nigerian political actors on *Facebook* to convey non-politic linguistic strategies. Within the Nigerian context, Onwubiko (2020: 231) explains that the utilization of bold-on-record impoliteness strategies explicitly reveals the speaker’s conscious intention to undermine the positive face of a target. According to Onwubiko (2020: 232), the primary objective of employing the non-politic linguistic strategy in a bold-on-record impoliteness manner is to discredit and tarnish the target’s self-worth in the public sphere. In the Nigerian context, the motivation behind using this strategy is rooted in the electorate’s pre-existing socio-political knowledge and belief that individuals lacking political expertise and forthrightness are unfit to govern Nigeria. In Zimbabwe, the prominence of the bold-on-record strategy should be viewed in line with the suppression of freedom of speech and expression (see Chapter 2 for detailed discussion) that currently exists in the mainstream media. For Zimbabwean people, the online platforms present the little space available for political interactants to directly engage with their opponents with limited state interference. As a result of the limited liberties, they find online, interactants resort to issuing the non-politic linguistic strategies in language that makes clear the intention of damaging the addressee’s face/reputation using attention getters for instance “You idiot listen to me”.

In addition to online platforms, the bold-on-record approach to performing non-politic linguistic strategies has been observed in parliamentary discourses in various countries worldwide, including Zimbabwe and South Africa (Akuka, Hammond & Wornyo 2021). In parliamentary interactions there is often immunity from persecution for employing impoliteness at least within the confines of the parliamentary setting (Mendel 2018: 99). Therefore, the various motivations in the use of the bold-on-record impoliteness strategy across different contexts highlights the importance of considering the socio-political and cultural factors that influence the linguistic behaviour of using direct and confrontational language to tarnish the target's self-worth in public eyes.

The non-politic linguistic strategies are issued in a positive impoliteness manner. The positive impoliteness super-strategy implies that the non-politic linguistic strategies are designed and presented in a way that damages one's desire to be acknowledged as a desirable member of a society (Siahaan 2019: 34). Among the identified non-politic linguistic strategies, positive impoliteness is mainly apparent in insults, unpalatable questions, pointed criticisms, condescensions, and dismissals. This realisation is consistent with Culpeper's (2011) empirical analysis which identifies the same non-politic linguistic strategies as corresponding to positive impoliteness outcomes. The finding further confirms Hamno's (2019) research which demonstrates that insults and pointed criticisms are typically conveyed through positive impoliteness strategies. Though Hamno's study evaluates the purpose of US President Donald Trump's impolite output on social media platform — *Twitter*, its findings and the findings of this study indicate a significant degree of offensive linguistic language in political discourses. Moreover, regarding the functional aspect of the positive impoliteness strategy, the results from these studies suggest that political actors employ this strategy with a coercive intent to undermine the appearance and abilities of their target. For example, in this study the data shows that political slogans are being employed to undermine other interactants. ZANU-PF interactants in their bid to undermine their targets are using the "Down with so and so!" slogan which has violent overtones and is inciteful. This slogan according to Makumbe (2012) means that a person is undesirable or should be killed.

In the Nigerian context, Onwubiko (2019) states that the positive impoliteness is used by political actors on *Facebook* to engage in name-calling, and use of taboo words. The difference in the purpose of engaging in positive impoliteness in both Zimbabwe and Nigeria may be rooted in the social norms. As discussed in Section 2.5.1.2, Zimbabwe exhibits a higher degree of acceptance towards aggressive or violent rhetoric in political discourse which can be attributed to the country's history of political stability. This is being reflected in the use of violent political slogans. In contrast, Nigeria, places emphasis on employing language that upholds decorum and avoids violent

sloganeering. This emphasis is rooted in Nigeria's history of experiencing various deadly political contestations (Ikeke 2019). However, a common characteristic observed in the aforementioned contexts is the utilization of positive impoliteness to fulfil objectives related to controlling targets and reinforcing power dynamics which often involve undermining the target's "quality face"/ "social identity face." (Hamno 2019: 12).

The use of positive impoliteness to convey the non-politic linguistic strategies is interesting as it highlights the deeply rooted polarity in Zimbabwean politics as mentioned under Chapter 2. The corpus shows that several interactants employ positive impoliteness to express their political opposition by portraying their target in an undesirable manner. This is not unique to the Zimbabwean context as it is a common strategy in many political settings where opponents meet (Akuka, Hammond & Wornyo 2021: 7). However, in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere positive impoliteness is rendering utterances provocative through the implementation of strong insulting language and metaphors that discredit the target. Such metaphors include words such as "vampires", "puppets", "pigs", "blood suckers" etc. Generally, the use of positive impoliteness by Zimbabwean political actors reveals important insights about their communication strategies, their underlying motivations, and the broader political and social context in which they operate. However, these insights are not necessarily universal, and may vary depending on context and circumstances involved.

The non-politic linguistic strategies are also employed in a negative impoliteness manner. This implies that the strategies are framed in ways that attack the addressee's negative face want which speaks to his/her desire to be free from imposition (Thielemann & Kosta 2013: 239). While this strategy is used less frequently than the positive impoliteness strategy to formulate the non-politic linguistic strategies in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, it still warrants attention. The limited occurrence of the negative impoliteness strategy is not exclusive to the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. Hamno (2019: i) observed a similar trend in his study of the U.S. Twittersphere, where negative impoliteness was found to be infrequently used. Both studies identify condescensions as the primary non-politic linguistic strategy expressed through negative impoliteness. The similarity in findings across these studies conducted in different regions regarding the infrequent use of negative impoliteness in conveying non-politic linguistic strategies suggests that there may be some universality in how the Global South and Global North communicate and express impoliteness. While Hamno (2019: i) identifies dismissals and threats as being conveyed through the negative impoliteness strategy, this study additionally highlights pointed criticisms as performed using the negative impoliteness strategy. This suggests that despite

similarities in linguistic behaviour, there may also be differences in how the Global South and Global North express themselves through negative impoliteness. Moreover, this distinction supports Bousfield (2008: 92) argument that non-politic strategies are “multi-face-directed” as they do not “solely indict one type of face over another.”

In Ibrahim’s (2020) investigation of impoliteness in British political tweets, negative impoliteness was established as the most common manner in which impoliteness is expressed. This contrasts with Hamno’s (2019) findings and the results of this study which established positive impoliteness strategy as more frequently used than negative impoliteness. It is interesting to note the differences between the results of this study and those of Ibrahim (2020), particularly with regard to the contexts in which tweets were collected. The contexts provide insight into the differing results. This study presents tweets from a Global South context, the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, while Ibrahim (2020) collected tweets from the Global North context, the British Twittersphere. The socio-cultural differences between these two contexts provide possible insight into the differing results. The Zimbabwean society is largely collectivist, while the British society is largely individualistic (Errasti, Vazquez, Villadangos & Moris 2018: 377). In an individualistic society emphasis is placed on individual rights over collective duties. This implies that negative face wants are highly valued. As a result, negative impoliteness is commonly used in such contexts. In contrast, the results of the current study indicate that in collectivist societies, emphasis might be placed on collective duties over individual rights. Thus, positive impoliteness might be more frequently used in such contexts. While this study acknowledges the similarity in impolite behaviour between the Zimbabwean and the US Twittersphere, it also highlights the contrast between the Zimbabwean and British Twitterspheres. This emphasizes the importance of avoiding generalizations when it comes to impolite behaviour and its expression across different contexts.

In the corpus, the non-politic linguistic strategies conveyed through negative impoliteness are expressed in ways that scorn, frighten, ridicule, and invade the addressee’s space literally or metaphorically. This results in speakers positioning themselves closer to the addressee than what is appropriate for their relationship causing the addressee to feel intimidated or apprehensive about the possibility of detrimental actions being taken against them. The use of negative impoliteness as a linguistic strategy in the data involves condescensions and pointed criticisms towards the addressee. This finding aligns with Onwubiko’s (2020: 227) research on the purpose of employing the negative impoliteness strategy which includes intentions to intimidate, display condescension, invade the other’s personal space and explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect. In both studies, condescensions, in particular are directed at the physical features of the addressee, such as

their head or nose. This type of language is personal and infringes on the individual's right to non-imposition. Pointed criticisms, on the other hand, are phrased in a manner that antagonises the addressee by invading their personal space. For example, in the corpus a speaker questions Prof. Jonathan Moyo about the paternity of his daughter who committed suicide (see Example 6.4). Although Onwubiko's (2020) findings regarding the purpose of employing the negative impoliteness strategy are derived from a Nigerian *Facebook* political context, the similarity observed in findings from a Zimbabwean *Twitter* corpus suggests a potential homogeneity among African political actors in their utilization of the negative impoliteness strategy.

The data reveals that negative impoliteness is mainly used in non-politic linguistic strategies meant to convey vitriolic messages. Thus, the negative impoliteness strategy is often used by interactants who perceive themselves as inaccessible to their target. This is particularly evident on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere where less well-known interactants are using negative impoliteness to attack more senior and powerful political actors in Zimbabwe. In such cases, sensitive and intimate personal matters are discussed as exemplified in the case of Prof. Jonathan Moyo. However, it is interesting to note that in British contexts as suggested by Culpeper (1996) when interactants engage in negative impoliteness they mainly ridicule their target, while in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere interactants mainly employ imposition as their negative impoliteness strategy. The difference can be attributed to the socio-political context where there is a significant democratic discrepancy between the two states. The English context has a greater degree of freedom of speech which allows its members to exercise it on various platforms, whereas Zimbabwe has constricted freedoms. Therefore, whenever Zimbabwean interactants find any platform with considerable freedom such as *Twitter*, they tend to utilise imposing vitriol as a way of venting.

In the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, the non-politic linguistic strategies are often conveyed through the affective impoliteness strategy for the purposes of making the speaker's anger apparent to the addressee and projecting blame on the addressee for producing that negative emotional state. As said in the previous chapter, affective impoliteness involves producing a non-politic linguistic strategy in a heightened emotional outburst manner (Joan 2015: 19). In political spaces such as the Zimbabwean Twittersphere that are highly contested and polarised, interactants sometimes find themselves angry at each other. Therefore, when non-politic linguistic strategies are expressed through affective impoliteness, they are employed in a manner that attributes blame to the addressee for evoking an emotional state. Hamno's (2019) study on the U.S Twittersphere states that promoting such a purpose is typically achieved with 'conventionalized formulae' such as "insults" and "threats". This is evident in the corpus which includes various examples of insults,

pointed criticisms, condescensions, dismissals and threats. Examples such as “your bloody thirst leader”, “the man you hated for being Ndebele!”, “you are remarkably ignorant sit down!”, “shut your fucking mouth!” and “I will make life impossible for you” demonstrate the prevalent use of affective impoliteness to convey non-politic linguistic strategies.

Additionally, the use of words such as “octogenarian dictator”, “genocidal”, “Gukurahundist,” “tyrannical” etc. further emphasizes the emotional state of the speaker, often displayed through the use of exclamation marks. Interesting in the data is that the presentation of non-politic linguistic strategies through the affective impoliteness affirms the position of Saidi and Munemo (2012) who perceive the language of Zimbabwean political discourses as violent. Saidi and Munemo (2012: 1359) state that the discourse used in Zimbabwean political spaces not only exacerbate violence but is also violent to the interactants. In the corpus, the affective impoliteness strategy is employed to injure the dignity, feelings, and self-respect of interactants of different political orientations.

Significant differences can be observed in the specific linguistic characteristics and cultural context of affective impoliteness in the two Twitterspheres cited above. In the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, non-politic linguistic strategies are frequently expressed through affective impoliteness characterised by an intensified emotional outbursts, in which the speakers aim to make their anger evident to the addressee. This observation is particularly relevant in Zimbabwe, a highly contested and polarized political environment where interactants frequently experience anger towards each other. In contrast, while affective impoliteness is also present in the U.S Twittersphere, the specific linguistic expressions differ. Hamno’s (2019) study highlights the common use of “identity-based insults” in the U.S Twittersphere, including attacks based on personal characteristics like race, gender, and sexual orientation which are not as prevalent in the Zimbabwean context. Nevertheless, U.S. political actors cannot be entirely exempted from deploying heightened emotional expressions. As Hamno (2019: 27) reveals, Trump employs similar emotionally charged language to amplify his attacks.

Lastly, the non-politic linguistic strategies are conveyed in the form of coercive impoliteness. This implies that the speaker formulates and present a non-politic linguistic strategy in a manner that seeks to gain profits or current benefits are reinforced or protected at the expense of addressee’s face wants (Mohammed & Abbas 2016: 79). In the corpus, personal attacks are phrased in ways that make one gain power over the other interactant through manipulative use of language. This manifests through insults, condescensions, dismissals and threats. While Culpeper (2011: 253) and Ibrahim (2020: 67) indicate that in the British context coercive impoliteness occurs in situations

where different social structural power or social status exists, my corpus reveals that in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere it is also used in an equal relationship as a way of bringing about a gain in social power. Thus, I suggest that engaging coercive impoliteness to convey non-politic linguistic strategies should not only be perceived as a product of established power imbalances between interactants, but should also be seen as a way to establish such power.

The use of coercive impoliteness to convey non-politic linguistic strategies in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere highlights the complex relationship between language, culture, and power. According to Sifuna (2017), African communication is often characterised by a direct and assertive communication style that values the expression of opinions and the confrontation of issues. However, the use of coercive impoliteness can be perceived as an intensified use of such communication style that ultimately raises ethical and moral concerns regarding the use of language as a tool for social control. The observation made on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere confirms Culpeper's (2011: 257) argument that there exists an overlap between coercive impoliteness and bullying as linguistic functions of impolite output within contexts of power imbalance. Tedeschi and Felson (1994: 171) note that coercion can be utilized to inflict social harm, which involves damaging the target's social identity, power, or status. This study affirms Tedeschi and Felson's (1994: 171) observation as coercive impoliteness negatively impacts the climate of Zimbabwean political discussions on *Twitter* by violating the social identities and statuses of the interactants. What is being experienced as a result of coercive impoliteness is an environment of fear, division and mistrust which undermines the social capital that emerges from the harmonious cross-pollination of ideas between political opponents.

7.3.1 Conveying the non-politic linguistic strategies: The Zimbabwean perspective

This section supplements evidence provided under research question 1.1. In the field of discourse analysis, specifically in the analysis of impoliteness linguistic strategies a gap exists in the categorisation of African political actors' non-politic linguistic strategies into an established taxonomy of conveying impoliteness such as that of Culpeper (2011). Therefore, this study provides a preliminary classification of such non-politic linguistic strategies into Culpeper's (2011) five super-strategies of impoliteness as performed on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. Evidence in the corpus suggests that the manner of how non-politic linguistic strategies are employed can be explained through Culpeper's (2011) five super-strategies of impoliteness.

While the non-politic linguistic strategies such as insults, pointed criticisms, unpalatable questions, dismissals, condescensions and threats are considered known terms throughout the globe, it is the

manner in which they manifest (linguistic structuring) in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere that I bring as new evidence within the studies of impoliteness. Furthermore, I argue that, if one is to successfully manage their reputation on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere — and more globally on social media platforms then they must familiarise themselves with the way such non-politic linguistic strategies are deployed in given contexts. I claim that it is difficult for a natural speaker of any language to successfully circumvent a non-politic linguistic strategy without knowledge of how it is conveyed linguistically. Specifying here the five super-strategies of impoliteness arguably contributes social awareness to the manner in which non-politic linguistic strategies are deployed specifically in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere.

7.3.2 Reasons why political trolling is used in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors on *Twitter*.

This section presents a discussion of reasons as to why political trolling is used in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors on *Twitter*. Yang and Fichman (2017: 1808) argue that when evaluating the appropriateness of linguistic face-saving strategies in response to trolling, the underlying reasons behind the trolling behaviour should be considered. The assessment of appropriateness is contingent upon contextual constraints within any given social interaction (Price & Bouffard 1974: 579). According to the corpus there are six reasons why political trolling is used in personal attacks.

On the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, political trolling is commonly utilised as a means of launching personal attacks with the intention of provoking. According to Leone (2017: 3) the term “provocation” can be described as a communicative act that aims to elicit an emotional response, rather than a cognitive one. Within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, a highly competitive environment, interactants engage in fierce competition to draw the attention of the general public. The competition is prevalent in alternative digital media like *Twitter* as the political sphere is constricted in almost all mainstream media channels. The mainstream media is often subject to control and influence by the ruling party, as observed by Alexander (2006: 46) in Section 2.3.5. Therefore, by using provocative linguistic behaviour on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, interactants are able to capture the attention of the public and generate “following” which helps them increase their profile (see Example 6.12). Moreover, the utilization of provocative language serves as a tactic to shift focus away from critical matters, effectively diverting public attention from their party’s or their own failures.

There are comparisons that can be drawn from the manner in which provocative language is employed on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere and how political actors in other contexts utilise it as an impolite strategy when participating in political discourse on *Twitter*. Kasmani, Sabran and Ramle (2014: 349) argue that in Malaysia, political actors who use provocative language on *Twitter* are often self-seeking or sensation-seeking individuals. According to the scholars, the employment of provocative language serves to enhance their in-group status and elicit impolite responses aimed at tarnishing the reputation of political opponents. However, the nature of the language used to provoke is characterized by subtlety and nuance, as highlighted by Kasmani, Sabran and Ramle (2014: 349). These observations suggest two insights. First, it is evident that provocation is a common tactic used in political discourse by political actors in different contexts to draw people's attention especially on platforms such as *Twitter*. This validates the assertion made by Toubiana and Zietsma (2017) that social media users are more likely to engage with and pay more attention to content that employs provocative language. Supporting Toubiana and Zietsma's (2017) perspective, Sabri (2017) argues that the use of provocative language by political actors on social media leads to increased online engagement from the audience. Second, the nature of provocation differs with context because of the unique political culture and history which influences the way political actors use language to provoke. For example, while Malaysian political actors provoke in nuanced and subtle ways, findings show that political actors in Zimbabwe are more confrontational and emotive when provoking due to the history of oppression and political violence as discussed in Chapter 2.

Political trolling is used to vent. Signorelli (2017: 2) defines venting as an indirect way of complaining that reveals underlying negative perspectives on a given situation or individuals. Two factors contribute to venting linguistic behaviour in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, one of which is the highly polarised political environment that suppresses freedom of expression for the opposition, as highlighted by ZLHR (2021: 3). This polarisation and lack of freedom of expression drives political actors to vent their frustrations and attack their opponents. The reasons for such venting are three-fold: highlighting dissatisfaction to find solutions, disclosing negative experiences with the aim of preventing others from undergoing similar ordeals, and trying to help individuals or organisations to improve their performance or character. The anonymity and distance provided by the *Twitter* platform also contributes to venting linguistic behaviour, emboldening individuals to engage in such linguistic behaviour more than they would in face-to-face interactions, as noted in the corpus. However, compared to other contexts venting on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere is characterised by self-censorship due to harassment and intimidation received by political actors who use *Twitter* to vent and express dissent towards the government (Moyo & Tauya 2019: 27). In

contrast, *Twitter* users in the United States and other Western countries freely vent as they generally face fewer risks when expressing their views on the platform. (Moyo & Tauya 2019: 27). Taken together, these factors suggest that venting behaviour in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere and elsewhere is influenced by both the political environment and the affordances of *Twitter* as a platform.

The impact of the Zimbabwean political environment on *Twitter* interactants' linguistic behaviour has been observed. Kamp (2016) notes that political actors across various countries utilise social media platforms to vent. The intensity and tone of the language of political venting varies from one country to another, as influenced by factors such as polarization, media autonomy and cultural norms surrounding political discourse. For example, the corpus makes evident that in Zimbabwe, though involving self-censorship, political venting is performed with high linguistic intensity due to polarisation and limited media freedom. This is the case as the culture of harsh political discourse promotes extreme loyalty to political parties, leading to emotionally charged responses towards those perceived to be opposing one's political beliefs. The polarising effect has created an environment in which an interactant who goes against the values of a particular political side is met with extreme pent-up anger and frustration in the form of venting.

Political trolling is a prevalent tactic employed to influence public opinion and sway the decision making of voters. While this characterization could be applicable to various forms of political activism, it specifically qualifies as trolling when it is characterized by an organised and systematic approach in which opponents are targeted through the use of distraction and disinformation campaigns that culminate into mob mentalities. As evident in the corpus, this phenomenon forms part of a broader strategy of disinformation, which aims to undermine opponents and promote certain ideologies and political agendas. In the data this kind of trolling is conveyed through speaker being identified as systemically and routinely highlighting the wrongs of their opponents, whether perceived or real, in order to draw attention to what they see as a better alternative (Linville & Warren 2018). For example, on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere political actors continuously target their opponents through discrediting them and pointing out instances of irresponsible and wasteful spending, in an effort to persuade the public to vote for a different party. This kind of trolling in the corpus is commonly conveyed through pointed criticisms. Lee and Kerr (2020) observe that such behaviour is rampant in Malaysian online spaces as well.

The corpus indicates that in the competitive realm of political discourse, interactants are resorting to political trolling to discredit those with divergent political viewpoints in a bid to promote their own political position. Bradshaw and Howard (2016) term this phenomenon as "organised social

media trolling”, which aims to manipulate public opinion. Notably, the use of trolling as a means of manipulating public opinion is not unique to the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, as it exhibits similarities with instances observed in other contexts. For example, Linvill and Warren’s (2018) study reveals the extensive use of political trolling during the 2016 United States presidential election to spread tarnishing content aimed at influencing the decision making of voters. This implies that such kind of trolling is strategically engaged across the globe to influence public opinion and manipulate the decision making of voters.

The corpus further indicates that political trolling is utilised as a deceptive tool to mislead. Interactants create certain impressions that portray issues or individuals in negative or unfavourable light. Misinformation and fake content are employed as forms of political trolling with the aim of damaging the reputation of the addressee. The audience of political trolling is intentionally exposed to hurtful and malicious misinformation to deceive them into developing a negative perception of a political actor, as demonstrated in Example 6.10. As highlighted in Chapter 2, the tightly controlled government media in Zimbabwe leads to more aggressive tactics of political trolling through misleading. This approach is employed to control the narrative and stifle opposing views. The takeaway from this observation is that the political climate of a country influences the nature of the misleading linguistic tactics used. Nonetheless, the ultimate objective remains constant, which is to manipulate public opinion and gain advantage in the political sphere.

The corpus reveals that political trolling is also being employed as a tool for harassment. Harassment refers to the use of language or actions to embarrass, humiliate, threaten, or intimidate an individual to gain power over them (Hoff & Mitchell 2009: 652). In the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, harassment is a form of political trolling as it is employed as a tactic to intimidate, silence, and discredit individuals who express political opinions contrary to those of the harasser. This strategy aims to generate a negative impact on the opponent leaving them vulnerable to the speaker’s attacks. As politics is an exercise of power (Chapman & Scaff 1976: 529), harassment is used to achieve such power. In the corpus, harassment manifests through the use of derogatory language, slurs and hate speech. In some cases, it emerges out of cyberbullying, involving the spread of rumours or misinformation and the posting of sensitive personal information about other political actors. Consequently, this form of political trolling in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere is pervasive and undermines the democratic process while inhibiting the free exchange of ideas and opinions.

The rationale for engaging in political trolling through harassment is not specific to Zimbabwe, as similar practices are observed in other countries. In Zimbabwe, political affiliations are often based

on ethnicity, religion, and ideology, which exacerbate political tensions and lead to targeted harassment of individuals expressing opposing views. Such harassment manifests in form of derogatory language, slurs or hate speech to attack individuals who express different opposing views, particularly on issues related to governance, gender, or race (Onslow 2021: 2). As observed in other countries such as South Africa, harassment may furthermore be based on the affordances provided for by the democratic political system still in practice (Van Vollenhoven 2016). In both contexts similar tactics of derogatory language are employed.

The other reason why political trolling is used in personal attacks is to show political partisanship. Green, Palmquist, and Schickler (2002: 12) define political partisanship as an enduring expressive identity strengthened by political affiliations. This means that personal attacks are employed to show political partisanship whereby the speaker engages in language which discredits opponents to express and demonstrate their political identity to others. This is not specific to the Zimbabwean context as other studies established similar results. For example, a study conducted by Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) found that individuals who engage in political trolling make their personal attacks identify strongly with a political party. These findings suggest that regardless of contexts political interactants use impolite language to attack others as a means to strengthen their political identities.

The evidence presented shows that it is crucial to understand the reasons for this linguistic behaviour, as it helps to identify the root causes, consequences, and potential solutions. Understanding the reasons behind political trolling and personal attacks in any context is essential to develop an accurate picture of the linguistic behaviour. Through the reasons a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, and political factors that influence the behaviour are recognised making it possible to effectively address the problem.

Various studies such as Bishop (2014) have been conducted on different online platforms to identify reasons why political trolling is used in personal attacks. However, to date, a few have been able to provide reasons. Nonetheless, several shared ideas can be observed. For instance, Bershidsky (2018) identified several reasons for political trolling being utilised in personal attacks. These include creating a perception of widespread public outrage against a target's view or work, drowning out the target's voice through the cacophony of digital voices, silencing critics, and campaigning for elections (Bershidsky 2018). My study corroborates and adds further evidence to Bershidsky's (2018) findings which are based on incidents from multiple countries.

Political trolling can be a destructive force that can undermine democratic discourse and exacerbate polarization. As such, understanding the motivations behind this linguistic behaviour is critical. By establishing the reasons behind it, linguistic strategies that mitigate its impact and promote civil discourse can be developed.

Trolling a negative behaviour and understanding whether it is done by either an individual, group or an artificial intelligence (AI) bot is crucial for comprehending the nature and impact of the behaviour and developing linguistic strategies to counter it. Bershidsky (2018) states that in Azerbaijan, a group called *Ireli* 'Forward' was employed by the government to troll the regime's opponents on the internet. This indicates that challenges of political trolling and their subsequent linguistic face-saving strategies on *Twitter* should be perceived from the performance viewpoint of either an individual, a group or an AI bot. In their study, Gondwe and Some (2021: 12) suggests that certain Zambian political actors are targeted by trolling activities conducted by AI bots. Their findings indicate that these AI bots do not engage in discussions related to policies but instead focus on raising insignificant events with the intention of character assassination (Gondwe and Some 2021: 13). Gondwe and Some (2021) highlight the challenge of distinguishing trolling messages created by AI bots from those created by humans, as individuals often share and re-share the hate messages generated by bots.

This section highlights the importance of understanding the motivations behind political trolling on *Twitter*. The present discussion on the use of political trolling in personal attacks aligns with the concept of reputation smearing explored in Chapter 3. The identified reasons for political trolling reveal a trend towards negative campaigning and a lack of interest in fair play among many political actors. These findings emphasise the role of *Twitter* in shaping public opinion and reputation-making processes, raising concerns about the credibility and reliability of information disseminated on the platform. This underscores the continued need for linguistic measures that mitigate face-threatening acts and foster constructive and respectful political discussions on *Twitter*.

7.4 The component of face predominantly targeted in personal attacks on *Twitter* by Zimbabwean political actors engaged in trolling behaviours

The current study contributes to the understanding of impoliteness in personal attacks on *Twitter* by revealing that the positive face is the primary target. According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 101) the positive face refers to the desire for acceptance and approval of one's self-image by others, including the need to be ratified, understood, liked, or admired. This component of face is endorsed through claiming common ground, conveying that speaker and addressee are co-

operators and fulfilling addressee's wants. The corpus suggest that the positive face is being violated in personal attacks, indicating a disregard for the addressee's preferred self-image or personality.

In this study, the term "predominantly targeted face" refers to the face that is targeted more frequently than the other. The positive face is identified as the predominantly targeted face; this does not imply that the negative face is never attacked. The vulnerability of the positive face in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere is a key finding of this study, which is significant in the field of impoliteness studies. However, the focus of this study becomes limited to the positive face, and future research may investigate the extent to which the negative face is targeted in personal attacks.

The targeting of the positive face in online political interactions has long been a prevalent phenomenon. Jucker (1986: 71) states that the positive face is the primary point of concern for every political actor as their political survival depends on it and as a result it is also the primary target of every political actor who intends to attack opponents. Bull and Fetzer (2010: 182) argue that a political actor's depends at least in part on an ability to undermine the positive face of their opponent and the ability to defend themselves against attacks to their positive face. Hamno (2019: i) identifies the positive face as predominantly attacked in *Twitter* outputs aimed at U.S political actors. While Hamno's study investigates the impolite language of Donald Trump, the similarity in findings between Hamno's study and the current study suggests that targeting the positive face in online political interactions is a widespread phenomenon. Bull and Fetzer (2010: 161) support this notion by stating that political actors strive to be well regarded, making the positive face crucial to them regardless of the communicative context.

The reason why the positive face is predominantly attacked in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere can be understood from the data. The data suggests that due to the antagonistic nature of relationships between political interactants, each interactant's main goal is to diminish the desirability of their opponent. This is achieved through the use of impolite language targeting various aspects that contribute to one's desirability. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), these aspects are associated with the positive face, which explains why it becomes the primary target in platforms of a political nature where the desire for appreciation and acceptance is high. Garcia-Pastor (2002: 354) suggests that the positive face is primarily targeted because by attacking the opponent's positive face, the speaker satisfies their own positive face desires. Hamno (2019), Bull and Fetzer (2010), and Garcia-Pastor's (2002) studies cited here confirm the predominant targeting of the positive face, they perceive the negative face as equally important.

The predominant targeting of the positive face on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere reflects a complex interplay of cultural, historical, and social factors that shape linguistic practices and political discourse. As such, understanding these factors is crucial for fostering constructive dialogue and respectful language that can help bridge the divides and promote social cohesion and social capital.

This study identifies new findings specific to the targeting of the positive face in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. Firstly, various impoliteness linguistic strategies employed to attack it were identified, which have been discussed in detail in Section 6.2. Secondly, the reasons for attacking the positive face were explored, shedding light on the cultural, historical, and social factors that shape communication practices and political discourse in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere as discussed in Section 6.2.3. Finally, context-specific linguistic face-saving strategies were recommended in Section 6.4, providing practical measures for promoting constructive dialogue and respectful communication in this context. The corpus highlights the importance of understanding the targeting of the positive face in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere.

As stated in previous sections, the concept of components of face, developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), has been criticised as a Western-centric, individualistic concept that does not fully capture the complexity of impoliteness in non-Western, collectivist societies (Mao 1994; Lee 2020). However, the manifestation of positive face in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere supports the universality claim of face as stated by Brown and Levinson (1987), advancing the applicability of the PT in the Global South contexts. This finding is supported by the results presented in Section 6.3. The study's identification of the positive face (Brown & Levinson 1987) as the primary target in Zimbabwean political interactions aligns with previous research by scholars such as Hamno (2019), Fetzer (2010) and Jucker (1986) who all place the PT at the centre of their studies and arrive at a similar conclusion. These scholars consistently conclude that the positive face is the main focal point of impoliteness strategies in political contexts. Furthermore, the linguistic face-saving strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) are relevant in resolving the FTAs in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere.

Previous studies, such as de Kadt's (1998) research on first language isiZulu speakers, have challenged the notion that the concept of face is a Western-centric construct by demonstrating that verbal, non-verbal and discourse politeness strategies are used to maintain face in interactions among Africans. De Kadt's (1998) study was among the first to contest the criticism levelled against the universality of face in Brown and Levinson's (1987) PT, by providing evidence to the concept's presence within an African culture. Thompson and Anderson (2019) examine the

perception of politeness among Ghanaians with a central focus on Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of face. Their study reveals that according to Ghanaians, respect involves valuing and preserving another person's face during interactions, while avoiding actions that could jeopardize it. This observation demonstrates the practical application of the PT in the Ghanian context. Similarly, the manifestation of positive face within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere in my study supports de Kadt's (1998) and Thompson and Anderson's (2019) claim and demonstrates that the PT is applicable to the analysis of linguistic social behaviours within non-Western societies. This finding extends the understanding of the PT's cross-cultural applicability and highlights the need for further research on the variations and adaptations of face in non-Western linguistic cultures.

7.4.1 How the positive face is being attacked.

The positive face is vulnerable to attack in two ways: either through negative evaluations of the addressee's positive face or through indifference towards it (Brown & Levinson 1987: 66). The former involves expressions of disapproval, criticism, complaints, and reprimands, while the latter involves violent out-of-control emotions, irreverence, taboo topics, unwelcome news, boasting, non-cooperation, confessions, and misidentification. In the Zimbabwean Twittersphere attacks on the positive face are common as interactants in collective societies strive for desirability. While the key terminology used to describe face-threatening acts is similar across cultures, the manner in which they are presented may differ (see Section 6.4.1.1).

The study argues that the manner in which the positive face is attacked as demonstrated in the corpus is not limited to the Global South or collective societies. The findings support the relevance of Brown and Levinson's (1987) PT in understanding ways in which the positive face is targeted in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. Specifically, the study provides evidence that confirms the linguistic acts identified by Brown and Levinson (1987) as means of attacking the positive face. These acts include expressing negative evaluations of an aspect of the addressee's face as exemplified in Hon. Temba P. Mliswa's utterance (Example 6.13); and displaying indifference or lack of concern towards the addressee's positive face as demonstrated in Admire Bere's insult (Example 6.1).

In Example 6.13, Hon. Temba P. Mliswa's utterance aligns with the linguistics social norms of expressing a negative evaluation of the addressee's face as suggested by the PT. However, what sets it apart and makes it typical of the Zimbabwean context is his explicit mention of the alleged murders committed by the addressee. Brown and Levinson (1987) examples of this act tend to be more subtle and may not explicitly state the reasons for the negative evaluation of the addressee's

face. In contrast, Zimbabwean political actors do not hold back and are straightforward in their expressions. One possible explanation for this difference lies in the distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. In a collectivist culture like Zimbabwe, there is greater emphasis on maximising the damage to someone's reputation, as people in such societies highly value being perceived as desirable. The explicit mentioning of the killings by Hon. Temba P. Mliswa can be seen as an additional effort that individuals in collective societies may take to damage the reputations of their opponents. However, it is important to note that this behaviour should not be generalized to collective societies. In a study by Njuki and Ileri (2021), which examines the positive and negative politeness strategies used by Kenya's members of National Assembly, similarities were found between Kenyan and British interactants in terms of how they express negative evaluations of the addressee's face. This suggests that such linguistic behaviours may not be unique to a specific collective society but can be observed in different contexts.

In the Zimbabwean context, acts that indicate a speaker's indifference or lack of concern for the addressee's positive face are intensified. Sensitive issues such as tribalism are employed to strengthen this linguistic act. Unlike in the British context, where Brown and Levinson (1987) provide examples that cannot be considered sensitive or attacking towards race, tribe, or religion of the addressee. In Example 6.13, the utterance by Eria The Tishbite explicitly attacks Shona political actors.

7.4.2 Why the positive face is attacked

The centrality of the positive face in attacks on reputation in political discourse in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere is a complex issue that involves several contributing factors. The following reasons were established in this study: political actors' need to appear desirable to particular audiences, intense competition for power and influence, and the country's polarised political landscape all play a role in shaping the phenomenon of attacks on the positive face.

The study uncovers that the positive face is the primary target of political actors as they compete to be more desirable than the opponents. By attacking their opponents' positive face, political actors fulfil their own positive face by appealing to others who share similar political ideologies (Garcia-Pastor 2002: 354). The centrality of the positive face and its subsequent targeting in personal attacks appears widespread in politics across the globe. According to Jucker (1986: 71) the positive face is central to all political interactions and serves as the primary concern for every political actor as their political survival depends on it. Bull and Fetzer (2010) explore the concepts of "face" and "facework" in British political interactions shedding light on the significance of the

positive face in these contexts. Garcia-Pastor (2002) examines politeness and its connection to power in political debates during the 2000 U.S election campaign, further highlighting the relevance of the positive face. Additionally, Hamno (2019) investigates the impolite linguistic output of U.S. President Donald Trump on *Twitter*, providing insights into the purposes behind attacking opponents' positive face.

In contrast to Jucker's (1986: 71) perspective that the negative face holds little importance in political spheres, this study acknowledges the significance of both the positive and negative face for political actors. While the primary focus of this study is on the attack on the positive face, it does not undermine the relevance of the negative face in political interactions. Political actors may suffer serious potential face damage if they do not equally manage the negative face.

Jucker (1986) argues that the relationship between political polarisation and the targeting of the positive face is a widespread phenomenon. Political opponents often engage in intense disagreements as highlighted by Bull and Fetzer (2010: 161) in the American context, where the positive face of opposition leaders relies in part on undermining the positive face of those in power. In Zimbabwe, the positive face is frequently targeted through language that encompasses sensitive topics such as sexuality, race, religion and tribe as exemplified in Example 6.13.

While trolling is generally considered as a transgressive and anti-social linguistic behaviour, interactants may still engage in it knowingly, even at the risk of damaging their own reputation if they believe that undermining the positive face of the addressee holds greater significance to them. This reflects a broader socio-political linguistic trend towards the prioritization of conflict and controversy in public discourse in order to boost own reputation.

In conclusion, the prevalence of attacks on positive face is a complex issue with multiple contributing factors. These include the history of political polarization and antagonism between political actors, the essence of positive face as a desirable face approved and honoured by other interactants, and the trend towards the prioritization of conflict and controversy in public political discourse.

7.5 Linguistic face-saving strategies that political actors can utilise to redress face-threatening acts on *Twitter*.

The rise of *Twitter* as a platform for political discourse in Zimbabwe has created an environment for intense debates, arguments, and face-threatening acts. Therefore, it is essential for political actors to possess the skill of protecting themselves from linguistic trolling. According to Sanfilippo,

Yang and Fichman (2017: 1802) the definitions, perceptions and reactions to political trolling behaviours vary, as not all trolling is the same. It is important to acknowledge that trolling can be motivated by various factors, including the desire to cause harm, ideological beliefs, and the intention to draw attention to social problems (Shachaf & Hara 2010: 357; Fichman & Sanfilippo 2016). This study acknowledges that political trolling encompasses a wide range of behaviours varying from provocative to disruptive and from socially positive to socially negative. Addressing politically motivated trolling raises concerns regarding differences in perceived appropriateness and ethical considerations when implementing mitigating strategies (Yang & Sanfilippo 2016: 1808). In this section, I will discuss several appropriate linguistic face-saving strategies that are applicable to different acts of political trolling, based on perceptions of interactants on Zimbabwean Twittersphere.

The data from this study confirms the applicability of Brown and Levinson's (1987) three linguistic face-saving strategies in the context of political trolling within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. These strategies, namely claiming common ground, conveying that the speaker and addressee are co-operators and fulfilling the addressee's desires, are examined in this section. The discussion explores their application in the context of political trolling, taking into account the broader literature on impoliteness.

The existing literature has extensively explored definitions of trolling (Coles & West 2016; Hardaker 2010) as well as the motivations and goals that drive such behaviour (Fichman & Sanfilippo 2016). In this study, I contextualise the proposed linguistic face-saving strategies within this broader literature.

The first face-saving strategy, as proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987: 103), is the act of claiming common ground. This strategy involves highlighting shared interests or goals between interactants with the aim of establishing rapport and creating a sense of mutual understanding (Agbaglo 2017: 32). This strategy is observed in various linguistic ways, for example, speakers may notice and attend to addressee's interests or wants, exaggerate approval or sympathy for the addressee, intensify interest in the addressee, using ingroup identity markers, seek agreement and avoid disagreement, and presuppose familiarity in the speaker-addressee relationship (Brown & Levinson 1987: 103). The concept of claiming common ground is a widely recognised strategy in the fields of psycholinguistics and pragmatics. It refers to a collective process in which participants strive to establish a mutual belief that they have cooperated with each other (Clark & Brennan 1991: 223). The underlying principle of claiming common ground is that the language used must be easily understood, and the speaker must provide linguistic cues that demonstrate their intention to fulfil

the addressee's interests or goals. This strategy is not new within the political space and has been identified as effective in Kenyan political interactions by Njuki and Ileri (2021: 4). In Kenya, members of parliament employ the strategy of claiming common ground by engaging in small talk, aiming to mitigate the effects of FTAs (Njuki & Ileri 2021: 4). The effectiveness of this linguistic strategy is supported by Agbaglo's (2017) study, which highlights its high frequency of use (20.47%) in saving face in English settings compared to other strategies (2017: 39). This indicates that claiming common ground is a widely utilized approach for preserving face in interactions.

The second linguistic face-saving strategy involves conveying that the speaker and addressee are co-operators. There are various ways in which the strategy can be observed which include making offers or promises which satisfy the addressee's positive face, using inclusive terminology such as "we" when speaker means "you", using the "giving or ask for reasons" technique, and assuming or asserting reciprocity (Brown & Levinson 1987: 103). This strategy has received limited attention in literature focusing on political communication and linguistic reputation management. Njuki and Ileri (2021: 11) address this gap by highlighting how Kenyan members of parliament employ this strategy by giving offers and promises to convey cooperation and demonstrate care towards the addressee. By employing this linguistic face-saving strategy, the speaker aims to restore their positive face after engaging in an FTA. This intention may be jeopardised by the addressee's inability to accept the offer or the speaker's inability to fulfil it; either of these occurrences may further damage the speaker's positive face.

The third face-saving strategy involves fulfilling the addressee's wants for him/her. This strategy involves the speaker deciding to redress the addressee's face directly by fulfilling some of their wants, thereby indicating that speaker is taking an interest in their wants and desires as a way of pleasing them (Brown & Levinson 1987: 129). This strategy is commonly observed in political contexts and has been identified as effective within the Kenyan political sphere by Njuki and Ileri (2021: 12). In Kenyan politics, this strategy is utilized to mitigate the effects of FTAs by acknowledging something positive about the addressee. Employing this strategy could help reduce the linguistic toxicity between political opponents during interactions by minimizing the impact of FTA.

The strategies identified by Brown and Levinson (1987) are not limited to Western cultures but seem to be applicable to many other cultures (Kiyama, Tamaoka & Takiura 2012: 1), including Zimbabwean culture. The corpus shows that interactants on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere may be moving towards abandoning African social and linguistic rules and moving towards a "globalised" persona that does not adhere to cultural norms when interacting on social media

platforms. Findings suggest that linguistic face-saving strategies from individualistic cultures in Global North societies could be effective such a situation even though in Zimbabwean culture, there is a strong emphasis on the concept of *bunhu* or *ubuntu* “humaneness” discussed in Section 2.5.2.1 which stresses the importance of treating others with respect, kindness and compassion.

While Brown and Levinson’s (1987) PT was developed before the rise of online communication, recent studies Zhang (2022), Ling-Yao and Ling-Yao (2018), as well as Mauney and Jeon (2014) demonstrate its applicability in digital contexts.

Nair (2019: 673) argues that maintaining one’s own and others’ faces is crucial to fostering orderly, predictable, and peaceful social interactions. In an ideal (Zimbabwean) Twittersphere, political differences would be handled respectfully without resorting to personal attacks. Sanfilippo, Yang and Fichman (2017: 1806) highlight the importance of strict adherence to ethical codes or policies in managing trolling within such a context. Additionally, Paakki, Vepsalainen and Salavaara (2021) identify a set of factors that contribute to an ideal space for online political engagements. These factors include identifiability — where participants’ true identities are known, and the avoidance of linguistic behaviours that amplify polarization, promote political agitation, restrict freedom and spread fear and disinformation (Paaki, Vepsalainen & Salavaara 2021: 427; Akhtar & Morrison 2019). However, the reality in social media spaces and on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere is characterised by a set of diverse pseudo-sincere linguistic behaviours that are disorderly, unpredictable, and violent to social interactions. Neudert and Marchal (2019: 8) blame such behaviours for polarising democracy. The toxicity and threatening nature of the language on Zimbabwean Twittersphere undermines the potential social capital that could emerge from harmonious exchange of ideas between interactants. In this context, face-saving strategies function as interactional linguistic lubricants that may enable temporary or long-term harmonious engagement.

The linguistic face-saving strategies discussed in this study demonstrate that face-saving is not merely a conceptual idea related to reputation, but rather a set of actions that have specific effects and consequences in the real world (Nair 2019: 679). These strategies actively contribute to the construction of a desired positive reputation. This implies that individuals should be capable of employing linguistic face-saving strategies to protect their positive face consistent with the reputation they desire. Consequently, managing reputations, self-images and faces becomes an ongoing practice as trolling behaviours continuously challenge and undermine preferred positive images.

7.5.1 Utilising linguistic face-saving recommendations to redress face-threatening acts on *Twitter*.

As previously noted, the effective use of the linguistic face-saving strategies requires a deliberate and thoughtful approach. Choosing the right method to apply a linguistic face-saving strategy in specific situation requires skill and experience. In this section, I outline five practical application methods that can be employed by interactants to address FTAs on *Twitter*. These strategies consider the nature of trolling and its specific behaviours including inflammatory, abusive, threatening and repetitive criticisms identified by Bharati, Lee and Syed (2018: 2).

The first practical application method is to comply with the *Twitter* code of conduct which defines the platform's expectations for participants' linguistic behaviour and outlines the consequences for unacceptable behaviour. *Twitter* requires its participants to familiarise themselves with and adhere to their code of conduct within the community. In today's world, it is customary for societies or communities of practice to establish a set of rules to maintain a positive and inclusive experience for everyone. These internal rules should take precedence over external rules, and the linguistic face-saving strategies presented earlier should align with the *Twitter* code of conduct in a complementary manner. Trolling behaviour disrupts online discourse and violates the code of conduct, particularly when the perpetrator successfully baits others into engaging with them. Bharati, Lee and Syed (2018: 2) highlight that individuals who engage in trolling exhibit highly inflammatory linguistic behaviours. However, the *Twitter* code of conduct discourages users from interacting with individuals who use such inflammatory language. *Twitter* aligns with common advice in online spaces to "not feed the troll" (Conolly 2021: 12). *Twitter* acknowledges that countering trolling can be hazardous and may even provoke further hatred towards the victim if not handled strategically. Nevertheless, Conolly (2021: 13) argues that ignoring trolling behaviours contradicts the moral commitment many users have to challenging such linguistic behaviour whenever they encounter it. In cases where the need to respond outweighs the need to ignore, *Twitter* advises its users to abide by its code of conduct and employ strategies to counter trolling or protect their own reputation. The linguistic face-saving strategies recommended in this study align with and fulfil the expectations outlined in the *Twitter* code of conduct.

The second practical application method involves considering the symmetric social dimension of similarity or difference within which speaker and addressee stand as some linguistic behaviours may be constitutive of communal life (Pagliai 2010: 64). This suggests that in employing the linguistic face-saving strategies, it is essential to contextualise them by evaluating the level of familiarity and type of interaction speaker normally has with the addressee. This increases the

likelihood of the linguistic face-saving strategies achieving the intended goal. As noted earlier, the impact of an FTA is determined by three factors related to this method of utilising linguistic face-saving strategies, these are: (1) The social distance (D) between a speaker and an addressee, such as the perceived difference between two different social classes. (2) The relative power (P) of speaker and hearer which speaks to power disparity and, (3) The absolute ranking (R) of imposition in a particular culture.

Considering this application method, it is important to be aware that for some online interactants, trolling linguistic behaviours may be seen as playful attempts to challenge social norms or connect with others who enjoy provocative interactions (Hardaker 2013). Therefore, the interpretation and impact of trolling can vary depending on these contextual factors.

The aspect of considering symmetric social dimensions of similarity and difference existed before the advent of social media interactions, and it remains crucial. *Twitter's* code of conduct explicitly outlines the expected and unacceptable linguistic behaviours. The expected behaviours of *Twitter* users are (1) treat others with dignity and respect, (2) refrain from demeaning or discriminatory behaviour and speech, (3) be mindful of own surroundings and of their fellow participants and, (4) alert *Twitter* staff a dangerous situation or someone in distress is noticed (Twitter 2023).

The first three expected behaviours align with the importance of considering the symmetric social dimension of similarity and difference between the speaker and the addressee. The corpus however makes apparent that within the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, the interactants' lack considerations for the symmetric social dimension of similarity and difference within which speaker and addressee stand. Instead, they tend to emphasize own social status by publicizing dignified titles such as "Hon.", "Dr" or "Prof."

The third practical application method involves leveraging the interactional function of language. As described by Brown and Yule (1983: 1) the interactional function involves linguistically expressing social relation and personal attitudes in a way that makes the interaction friendly. Connolly (2020: 5) suggests that the primary perlocutionary intention of trolling is to provoke a negative and socially distasteful response from the addressee and the onlookers. Consequently, any response featuring negative or impolite language serves to empower the perpetrator of trolling. Conversely, utilizing friendly and socially amicable language might enable the victim to protect their reputation by disempowering the perpetrator. Therefore, the interactional function of language plays a crucial role in establishing social relationships and managing reputations by using conventional features of language to convey emotions and intentions clearly to the addressee

(Brown & Yule 1983). Examples of linguistic features of interactional language include greetings, small talk, recounting recent experiences and compliments (Siumarlata 2017: 1499). Such features help to communicate the intentions of the speaker to the addressee by communicating the nuances of mood and emotion, thus reducing the chances of a linguistic face-saving strategy being misconstrued (Pratama 2019: 33). There are also non-linguistic cues in the form of emoticons that serve the interactional function of language by improving the speaker's ability to convey intentions accurately and manage their reputation effectively.

The fourth practical application involves the use of hedging which refers to the toning-down of utterances or statements to reduce the riskiness of what is being said being interpreted negatively (Wales 1989: 15). This approach requires the speaker to exhibit linguistic awareness and employ a polite manner while considering the power and implications of their speech. This method aligns with the concept of interactional positioning as defined by Taiwo, Akinwotu and Kpolugbo (2021) which relates to how interactants express their attitudes and dispositions towards others (stance) and signal their desired relational approach within the discourse (engagement). As Wales (1989) explains, this suggests that interactants should consider all possible negative interpretations that the addressee may have and find ways to minimise the risk of the face-saving strategy being perceived negatively. By employing this method, speakers soften the impact of their language and reduce the potential for FTA's.

The last practical application involves minimising status and authority differentials. Trolling is recognised as a powerful political tool characterised by abuse, division, and manipulation (Connolly 2020: 4), often entailing the misuse of power. According to Pratama (2013: 38), those with higher social status should present themselves in humble ways to ensure that their messages are well-received by their audience and to avoid negatively augmenting face-redress. Instead, the focus lies on building positive relationships and effectively managing their reputation. In the context of trolling behaviours, responding with a display of higher status and authority can exacerbate the problem. This type of response may convey vulnerability and intimidation, inadvertently granting the perpetrator of trolling a sense of triumph by successfully provoking a status inspired aggressive reaction from the target.

This section offers practical recommendations for political actors on how to effectively apply the linguistic face-saving strategies in the *Twitter* context. Unlike previous studies such as Alavidze (2018); Awang, Razak & Zakaria (2017) and Farenkia (2012), my study outlines the manner in which linguistic face-saving strategies can be effectively performed. Equipping interactants with

linguistic face-saving strategies may not be enough as the way the strategies are employed in specific contexts plays an equally important role.

7.5.2 The importance of the recommended face-saving strategies

This section emphasizes the significance of the linguistic face-saving strategies proposed in this study. Given the diverse nature of trolling behaviours, which vary in terms of context, motivations, and impact (Sanfilippo, Yang & Fichman 2017), the recommended linguistic face-saving strategies serve as appropriate responses to different acts of political trolling on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. Until recently, trolling had not been recognized as a distinct linguistic phenomenon in its own right and no linguistic face-saving strategies had been formulated to address it as noted by Monakhov (2020: 316). However, notable studies have emerged in this field. For instance, Uyheng, Moffit and Carley (2022) develop a social cybersecurity framework to detect and characterize the language of online trolling. Hardaker (2010) addresses the issue of terminology employed in the field(s) of impoliteness and its description of online trolling. Additionally, Burke and Kraut (2008) adopt both deductive (based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) linguistic politeness theory) and inductive (survey-based) approaches to train a machine learning algorithm that models polite language. A study that bears some relevance to the present research, concerning linguistic face-saving strategies within political domains is the work of Njuki and Ileri (2021). Their study focuses on analysing speeches delivered by selected Members of Parliament (MPs) within the parliamentary setting, aiming to identify the employment of negative and positive politeness strategies. Although their research addresses the issue of impoliteness and face-saving strategies within the political domain, it does not specifically examine these strategies within the context of trolling. While Njuki and Ileri's (2021) study provides insights into politeness strategies in political discourse, the present study aims to extend the understanding of linguistic face-saving strategies specifically in response to trolling behaviours.

Therefore, the emerging face-saving strategies in this study shed light on the understanding of political trolling as a linguistic phenomenon. The findings demonstrate that these linguistic face-saving strategies may be instrumental in promoting peaceful co-existence, maintaining a positive reputation, and providing context-specific face-saving strategies to political actors and their opponents. It is worth noting that some scholars may contend that employing linguistic face-saving strategies on social media is futile as interactants will persist in their misbehaviour. However, I posit that misbehaviour is a universal aspect of human nature and should not hinder the advancement of studies that aim to promote positive linguistic behaviours.

Scathing remarks against individuals in online social networks and related online public forums like *Twitter* have been increasing in recent years with devastating impact on victims' reputations (Basak, Sural, Ganguly and Ghosh 2019: 208). According to Sweney (2022) concerns have been mounting over the proliferation of offensive language and deviant behaviours on *Twitter*, leading to a projected exodus of more than 30 million users in the next two years following Elon Musk's \$44bn takeover. Despite the prevailing notion that trolling linguistic behaviour should be ignored (Binns 2012: 548), the public often disregards this warning and engages with the perpetrators of trolling (Binns 2012; Bergstrom 2011). This study investigates the widely held perception that *Twitter* is a harsh platform due to the use of offensive language (Clarke & Grieve 2017). Specifically, the study explores how natural speakers respond to trolling practices on public social media platforms while preserving their face. As mentioned earlier, political actors were either assuming the ad hominem behaviours of perpetrators or quitting the platform citing its degeneration into a platform for irrationality and mob-lynching (Qukula 2020: np). Thus, the linguistic face-saving strategies raised in this study are quintessential in that they seek to promote peaceful co-existence of political interactants and above all contribute to the maintenance of good reputations. I use the word "promote" carefully with the knowledge that continuous peaceful co-existence and consistent maintenance of good reputation is difficult to achieve especially in political and social media contexts. However, the linguistic face-saving strategies may tone-down or mitigate many of the reputation/face challenges currently being faced as a result of trolling specifically on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere.

Several studies examine impolite practices and their relationship to reputation management on *Twitter*. Tunde and Omwenga (2017) operationalise Brown and Levinson's (1987) Face Management Theory in order to account for different positive and negative face-management strategies that are in different *Facebook* Group comments on social and political issues in Kenya. Basak et al.'s (2019) study develops an automated trolling detection method on *Twitter*, focusing on the perspectives of victims by exploring primarily two aspects, namely, events and shamers. Dineva and Breitsohl (2021) examine the meso-level perspective of trolling management by focusing on organizational practice. Two noteworthy observations can be made among these studies. Firstly, it is apparent that no study exclusively relied on the field of linguistics as linguistic techniques were used as complimentary methods to support other fields such as development studies, information technology, business management or political studies. Secondly, the existing studies primarily examined trolling from an organizational perspective rather than an individual one.

In conclusion, this section underscores the significance of the linguistic face-saving strategies in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, particularly in the context of political trolling. The adoption of these linguistic face-saving strategies by political actors can serve to safeguard their reputation, preserve their dignity, and enable them to navigate challenging interactional situations that they may encounter. By emphasising the importance of linguistic face-saving strategies, this section sheds light on the potential for positive outcomes in political interactions on social media platforms.

7.6 Limitations of the study

The study acknowledges the existence of certain limitations that may impact the interpretation and implications of the reported findings. This section aims to provide an overview of the identified limitations and their potential influence on the research outcomes. Furthermore, I propose a direction for future research and present alternatives.

A significant limitation of this study is its primary concern with the predominantly targeted face which I established as the positive face, neglecting sufficient attention to the negative face and the ways in which it is targeted in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. While the study acknowledges that the negative face is indeed attacked, the emphasis on the positive face restricts the exploration of negative face attacks and subsequent face-saving strategies. This limitation may impact the comprehensiveness of the study's findings and the applicability of its conclusions to situations where the negative face is predominantly targeted. Therefore, future research should aim to investigate the negative face in Zimbabwean *Twitter* interactions, explore the reasons behind attacks on the negative face, examine how they manifest, and propose strategies for political actors to address such attacks.

The second limitation lies in the methodology used to select and analyse data. As a study which looks at the *Twitter* interactions that can be formulated using various modes of communication, I limit my data to written linguistic material. The decision to choose text (rather than a combination of visual information and text) is entirely based on the theoretical framework I adopt in this study which is premised on the textual. While I acknowledge that videos and audios could be transcribed, they present a challenge of misinterpretation in terms of explaining what the video, audio or even the images entail, an aspect that might have taken the research too far astray.

Additionally, while the research presents first-order perspective on the data by including analysis of commenters', metapragmatic evaluations of tweets and comments, it has not sought to elicit interactants' interpretations of the tweets further by interviewing them. The reason for this has

been provided in Chapter 5. Future studies can make use of interviewing interactants to get more nuanced findings.

Lastly, the study is limited in that it focuses broadly on the pragmatics of trolling. Future studies using other theoretical frameworks to examine the lexis or grammatical structures used in acts of trolling would help to complement the findings of this study.

7.7 Summary

In this chapter, the presented findings from Chapter 6 are subject to critical analysis and interpretation. The significance of these findings in relation to the research questions is demonstrated. Additionally, the implications of the results are discussed, and potential areas for future research are identified.

Chapter eight

Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 Introduction

One main aim of this study is to contribute to the understanding of how political actors can effectively safeguard their reputation through linguistic approaches when confronted with challenges in digital interactions. The research problem tackled here pertains to the pervasive issue of personal attacks in online political exchanges. In such situations, individuals are subjected to language that seeks to tarnish their character, besmirch their reputation, and subject them to demeaning and scornful behaviour. In response to this issue, this study provides practical linguistic strategies aimed at preserving one's dignity and self-esteem. These strategies act as a countermeasure against the potential harm inflicted by political trolling, ultimately safeguarding the self-image and integrity of political actors during their engagement in political discourse.

This chapter offers a concise overview of the study's outcomes, conclusions, and their implications. It is structured into three sections. The first section offers a brief summary of the research findings and the derived conclusions. The second section discusses the implications of these findings. Lastly, the third section provides recommendations and highlights topics that warrant further investigation.

8.2 Summary of findings and conclusions

The study's first objective is to identify the non-politic linguistic strategies employed by Zimbabwean political actors in personal attacks on *Twitter*. The study identifies six non-politic linguistic strategies and their occurrence frequency in the selected corpus: insults (26.3%), pointed criticisms (21.8%), condescensions (10.1%), unpalatable questions (8.9%), dismissals (4.6%) and threats (0.4%). These non-politic linguistic strategies are executed through five linguistic ways of performing impoliteness that include bald on-record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, withholding politeness and coercive impoliteness. The study establishes that political trolling is used in personal attacks among Zimbabwean political actors to vent, sway public opinions, mislead, harass, show political partisanship and to provoke.

The non-politic linguistic strategies commonly used in Zimbabwean politics on *Twitter* are not exclusive to Zimbabwean political actors and to the linguistic behaviour of the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. They are also widely utilized by political actors across the world. However, there are contextual factors that could make their linguistic structures and manner of use in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere distinct from other contexts. For example, in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere the use of non-politic linguistic strategies by political actors is intense as influenced

by the history of political violence, repression and polarisation in the country which makes it easy to use highly offensive language. The highly charged political environment is also resulting in the increased frequency occurrence rate of non-politic linguistic strategies. As such, I conclude that the context is shaping the exacerbated intensity and impact of the non-politic linguistic strategies thereby highlighting the importance of considering the socio-political context when analysing the use of such strategies in political interactions on social media platforms.

The second objective is to establish the component of face predominantly targeted in personal attacks on *Twitter* by Zimbabwean political actors during acts of trolling. The study concludes that the positive face is the primary target of such attacks. Positive face relates to the need for the self-image to be appreciated and approved of by others (Brown & Levinson 1987: 101). The significance of this conclusion is twofold: it contributes to the linguistic dynamics of trolling behaviour in the Zimbabwean political context and confirms the applicability of the theoretical framework proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) in relation to the nature of attacks on positive face. While previous studies such as Coe, Kenski and Rains (2014); Jungherr, Schoen and Jurgens (2016) examine the prevalence of personal attacks and ad hominem arguments in political communication, this study contributes to the understanding of the specific component of face that is mainly targeted in personal attacks within the Zimbabwean political context. The identification of the positive face as the primary target of personal attacks in the Zimbabwean political context highlights the need for greater attention to be given to this aspect of face in political communication, and the importance of promoting respectful and civic language.

The third objective is to establish linguistic face-saving strategies that political actors can employ to address face-threatening acts (FTAs) on *Twitter*. Drawing on the findings of the study, I confirm the applicability of Brown and Levinson's (1987) three linguistic face-saving strategies that political actors can utilize to address FTAs on *Twitter*. These strategies are (1) claiming common ground, (2) conveying a sense of cooperation between the speaker and the addressee and (3) fulfilling the addressee's wants or needs. Each of the linguistic strategies is supported by sub-strategies which are detailed in Section 7.4 of the previous chapter. The significance of this finding is that the linguistic face-saving strategies identified by Brown and Levinson (1987) can be applied successfully to the Zimbabwean context, specifically by Zimbabwean political actors on *Twitter*. While Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework has been widely used and studied in Western and non-Western contexts, this study's application of its linguistic face-saving strategies in a Zimbabwean political context of a digital nature highlights its cross-cultural applicability. Furthermore, the sub-strategies for each of the three linguistic face-saving strategies offer a more

nanced and context-specific approach to utilising the Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework in political communication on digital platforms.

Based on the findings of this study, I conclude that there are five practical ways of utilizing the linguistic face-saving recommendations. These strategies are (1) abiding by the *Twitter* rules, (2) considering the symmetric social dimension of similarity or difference between the speaker and addressee, (3) utilizing the interactional function of language to supplement the face-saving strategies, (4) employing the hedging strategy and (5) minimizing status and authority when performing the linguistic face-saving strategies. By providing these specific recommendations on how to apply the linguistic face-saving strategies on *Twitter* the study offers added insights to those other studies such as Kedves (2013) Pratiknyo (2016); Njuki and Ileri (2021). By highlighting the practical ways of utilizing the linguistic face-saving recommendations, this study provides a contribution to the literature on linguistic strategies for promoting constructive and respectful political interactions on digital platforms such as *Twitter*.

Traditionally, first- and second-order approaches are employed separately in linguistic analysis. However, this study is a significant milestone in the combined use of first- and second-order approaches in analysing linguistic data. By combining these approaches, this study showcases their effectiveness in tandem. In the subsequent section, I present general conclusions that emerge from this study.

8.3 Summary of general conclusions

The study concludes that interactants' linguistic behaviour on *Twitter* is influenced by a variety of factors beyond their cultural backgrounds, including political ideology, personal motivations, and the social dynamics of the online community they are interacting with. As such, the globalization of the *Twitter* platform and its associated norms and conventions are shaping the linguistic behaviours of Zimbabwean political actors, leading them in some instances to assume a more globalized linguistic behaviour that may not necessarily be linked to their cultural influences. This conclusion sheds light into the complex interplay between cultural backgrounds and other social factors that shape interactants' linguistic behaviours on *Twitter*.

This study considers trolling as a linguistic behaviour that can be employed by individuals who may not typically be regarded as trolls. To this end, I conclude that the nature of political trolling on Zimbabwean *Twitter* spaces varies depending on individuals and their motivations. Some interactants are engaging in trolling behaviour temporarily, without exhibiting a persistent pattern of trolling behaviour. While some individuals engage in temporal trolling behaviours that are short-

lived and situational, others are deserving of being referred to as “trolls” by virtue of engaging in consistent and identifiable trolling. By considering temporal patterns of trolling behaviours and understanding persistent patterns of trolling, I conclude that trolling is a complex and multifaceted linguistic phenomenon that cannot be attributed to a single cause or motivation. This evidence is important as it advocates for the understanding of both temporary and persistent trolling behaviour in addressing issues of personal attacks on *Twitter*.

The connection between trolling and politeness norms in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere sheds light on the nature of trolling as a linguistic behaviour that manifests differently in various societies. In European societies, trolling is often used to spread fake news, conspiracy theories and to engage in abusive and harassing behaviours towards political opponents. Karatas and Saka (2017: 384) state that in Turkey political trolling is being employed in the form of name-calling to silence all critical opposing voices. In contrast, in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere, political trolling seems to revolve often around issues of corruption, governance and power. Political actors use *Twitter* not only to engage in name-calling but to also spread misinformation about their opponents in divisive language that resonates with their followers. Based on these observations, I conclude that political trolling in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere could manifest differently than in other societies but there are still commonalities in how political trolling is employed globally. This conclusion highlights the importance of considering the unique political contexts in which trolling behaviours occur and the role of politeness norms in shaping linguistic online behaviour.

8.4 Summary of the implications of the study

The findings provide evidence that there is an existing challenge of offensive language on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere which is threatening social capital that can potentially emerge through a harmonious cross-pollination of ideas between political actors and the public. Through this study, I demonstrate that the issue of personal attacks on *Twitter* is a real global challenge which needs addressing from all angles. As I state earlier in Section 1.4, there has been a paucity of studies that examine this challenge from a linguistic perspective and therefore this study represents a contribution to the existing body of literature on linguistic face-saving strategies on online political platforms. Social media platforms like *Twitter* and *Facebook* acknowledge the existence of the problem of personal attacks (Pohjonen 2019: 3088) and continue to seek possible ways to address the challenge. Through this study, I found possible linguistic strategies that can be utilized to promote good relations and harmonious co-existence of online interactants especially in political contexts. The findings of this study also indicate the need for further research to explore the role of social and online community norms on shaping linguistic behaviour. Additionally, it is crucial

to investigate how technology can be effectively designed to foster more polite and respectful linguistic interactions.

Many linguistic theories of impoliteness originate from the Global North and were propounded long before the advent of digital platforms. As a result, there is a scarcity of studies that test their applicability in online interactions outside the context of their origin. As a contribution to the impoliteness literature, this study tests the applicability of the PT (Brown and Levinson 1987) and the FCT (Arundale 2010) as well as the analytical approaches that include Culpeper's (2011) four key aspects of impoliteness and Culpeper's (2005) five super-strategies of obtaining impoliteness within the Global South context. To this end, the findings reveal that despite the mentioned theories originating from the Global North, they are applicable in the Global South in many aspects. This finding suggests that many linguistic theories should be tested before their applicability can be dismissed on the basis of places of origin.

Studies that analyse non-ideal speech are infrequent within the pragmatics field (Silk 2013: 257). Linguistic practices employed in conflict situations have received limited scholarly attention, particularly in comparison to those utilized in cooperative and harmonious interactions. Therefore, this study contributes to literature that investigates cases in which language is used not to cooperate, but to cause harm. Many of the studies that address this type of language focus on defining theory (e.g., Culpeper 2016; Blitvich & Sifianou 2019) with rather scant attention paid to empirical data. Thus, this study represents one point of departure from a solely theoretical focus to an emphasis on practical and empirical aspects of non-cooperative language use. This suggests that more needs to be done within the space of impoliteness literature on practical and empirical aspects of non-cooperative language use.

The existing literature on impolite language that targets reputations in political discourses primarily focuses on planned interactions such as interviews (e.g., Albaek & Christiansen 2019; Giner-Sorolla & Garcia-Marques 2019; Hernandez-Fernandez & Simons 2019) and political speeches (e.g., Bernal 2019; Culpeper 2018; Maiz-Arevalo & Terkourafi 2019) predominantly within mainstream media, with little attention paid to casual political interactions that occur in alternative media such as *Twitter* (Brantner & Lobinger 2020; Chotpitayasunondh & Vogel 2020). This study fills a gap in the literature by examining a corpus of everyday casual political online interactions.

The term “non-politic” has been rarely used in impoliteness literature. The emergence of the term is credited to post-modern politeness literature of Culpeper (2005), and Locher and Watts (2005) who have given it some attention. However, the term has not been extensively studied in other impoliteness literature. This study puts to the fore the term “non-politic” providing contexts in

which its associated linguistic behaviours occur, and discussing the strategies under which they are employed. The use of this term in this study suggests that future research should consider utilising the term “non-politic” when exploring impoliteness discourse in various other contexts.

8.5 Summary of the recommendations and areas of future research

The non-politic linguistic strategies identified in this study are relative to the Zimbabwean Twittersphere. Therefore, future research can investigate whether the non-politic linguistic strategies identified in this study are also present on other social media platforms. Such research will help to establish whether the non-politic linguistic strategies can be treated as homogenous across platforms or as influenced by the context of the social media platform.

Based on the findings of this study, which focus specifically on the positive face, I recommend that future research should explore the negative face in the context of trolling, political discourse and reputation management. Politeness theory posits that FTAs can be employed strategically in political discourse as trolling (Culpeper 2011). Therefore, understanding how negative face is attacked, why it is attacked and how political actors can redress it, would provide valuable insights into linguistic reputation management in political discourse.

The identification of trolling messages presents a challenge in distinguishing whether they originate from AI bots or humans (Gondwe and Some 2021). This observation highlights the need for future research to explore linguistic strategies that can effectively differentiate between the two.

The linguistic structure between non-politic linguistic strategies employed by *Twitter* users on the Zimbabwean Twittersphere show similarities to those used by users in the Global North, indicating a degree of convergence in linguistic behaviour on global platforms like *Twitter*. This observation opens new avenues for research on the role of language in online interactions, particularly in exploring the influence of global platforms on the syntax of linguistic devices.

8.6 Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, I reiterate the research problem and point out the aim of the study. The main goal of this chapter is to amplify the thesis statements, highlighting major areas to which the study contributes within the field of linguistics. Recommendations for future research are made to give directions for any research that may arise from this study.

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Appendix 1: Ethical clearance



Mr Peter Junior Tshetu (216072471)
School Of Arts
Howard College

Dear Mr Peter Junior Tshetu,

Protocol reference number: 00014080

Project title: Linguistic strategies for managing online reputation in the era of political trolling: The case of Twitter-discourse between Zimbabwean political actors.

Exemption from Ethics Review

In response to your application received on _____, your school has indicated that the protocol has been granted **EXEMPTION FROM ETHICS REVIEW**.

Any alteration/s to the exempted research protocol, e.g., Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment/modification prior to its implementation. The original exemption number must be cited.

For any changes that could result in potential risk, an ethics application including the proposed amendments must be submitted to the relevant UKZN Research Ethics Committee. The original exemption number must be cited.

In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE:

Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours sincerely,



Prof Chatradari Devroop
Academic Leader Research
School Of Arts

UKZN Research Ethics Office
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

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