

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY
AND COUNSELLING
(IJEPC)**www.ijepec.com**MAPPING POLITENESS, IMPOLITENESS, AND HUMBLE-
BRAGGING: A BIBLIOMETRIC EXPLORATION OF
DISCURSIVE (IM)POLITENESS RESEARCH**Nor Fatin Abdul Jabar^{1*}, Nurul Najwa Abu Bakar², Nurhazlini Rahmat³¹ Faculty of Education, Social Sciences & Humanities, Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia
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Article Info:**Article history:**

Received date: 24.09.2025

Revised date: 15.10.2025

Accepted date: 30.11.2025

Published date: 14.12.2025

To cite this document:

Abdul Jabar, N. F., Abu Bakar, N. N., & Rahmat, N. (2025). Mapping Politeness, Impoliteness, And Humble-Bragging: A Bibliometric Exploration of Discursive (IM) Politeness Research. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 10 (61), 889-905.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.1061061

This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Abstract:**

This study provides a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of discursive (IM) politeness scholarship by examining the convergence of three areas: politeness, impoliteness, and humble-bragging in contemporary linguistic research. The analysis employs 625 documents obtained from Scopus and Web of Science (2000–2025), utilizing VOSviewer and the Bibliometrix R-package to identify publication trends, conceptual frameworks, notable authors, citation networks, and patterns of keyword co-occurrence. The findings demonstrate a notable increase in research grounded in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and Culpeper's impoliteness framework, alongside an emerging collective focused on digital engagement, self-presentation, and online emotional strategies. Humble-bragging, while still not well-studied, is becoming an important area of research related to facework, identity performance, and mediated communication studies. The mapping shows that humble-bragging is a mixed discourse practice that blurs the lines between politeness and impoliteness by combining self-promotion with planned modesty. This suggests that the way we think about relational activity in digital contexts has changed. This study integrates disparate research from three domains, demonstrating that humble-bragging is not a marginal phenomenon but a substantial element that alters academic perspectives on pragmatic assessment, online social interaction, and the discursive negotiation of authority and identity. The work underscores the imperative to refine politeness and impoliteness models to include multimodal, platform-driven behaviors, while methodologically it validates bibliometrics as a potent tool for delineating evolving pragmatic contexts.

Keywords:

Politeness, Impoliteness, Humble-Bragging, Bibliometric Analysis, Discourse Pragmatics

Introduction

Politeness is a key part of pragmatics that helps scholars understand how people deal with social relationships, negotiate their identity, and deal with face issues in interactions. Since Brown and Levinson's initial formulation of politeness theory, research in this domain has extensively examined the verbal and pragmatic strategies utilized by speakers to mitigate face threats, cultivate rapport, and execute contextually suitable behaviour. Simultaneously, the study of impoliteness—particularly through Culpeper's influential theoretical framework—has expanded the analytical scope of relational dynamics by uncovering antagonistic, confrontational, or face-threatening communicative behaviours. Politeness and impoliteness are interconnected constructs that offer a continuum of relational significance, incorporating both cooperative and adversarial dimensions of interpersonal interaction. Even though these theories came up in times before digital communication, the complexities of digitally mediated communication have made their conceptual limits and real-world uses more and more debatable.

In the contemporary digital era, internet platforms have revolutionized the expression, interpretation, and evaluation of (im)politeness. Digital communication is characterized by immediacy, multimodality, public visibility, and algorithmic amplification, all of which transform interpersonal dynamics and broaden the modalities of relational labour. Social media encourages strategic self-presentation, identity performance, and emotional expression, often compelling users to balance authenticity with desirability. In this context, new speech patterns have emerged that make it harder to use traditional pragmatic categories. Humble-bragging has become a notable form of hybrid self-presentation, combining humility with self-promotion in ways that challenge traditional concepts of facework. Humble-bragging is a way for people to mix self-praise with complaints, jokes, sarcasm, or claims of modesty. This makes it harder to tell the difference between politeness (facial enhancement) and impoliteness (face threat). It embodies a dual orientation: alleviating the social risk of boasting while simultaneously indicating success or desirability.

Recent academic research acknowledges the complexity of this phenomenon, examining humble-bragging through the lenses of relational work (Locher, 2021), irony and humor studies (Dynel, 2021), and impression management (Leary, 2020). These studies demonstrate that humble-bragging is a socially significant mode of communication that reflects contemporary norms regarding self-presentation, modesty, and the construction of digital identities. Nonetheless, contemporary research on humble-bragging primarily exists as isolated case studies or theoretical examinations, demonstrating limited integration into the broader (im)politeness literature. Unlike the extensive and well-established studies on politeness and impoliteness, humble-bragging remains insufficiently investigated, under-theorized, and inadequately situated within established pragmatic frameworks. This fragmentation highlights a significant research gap: there is currently no extensive, field-wide examination that explores the development of humble-bragging in conjunction with, or in relation to, studies on politeness and impoliteness.

This omission is significant because humble-bragging is a mix of polite and impolite speech that includes both polite signs (like modesty and down toning) and rude signs (like indirect self-praise that could be seen as dishonest or socially manipulative). Its ascent denotes extensive societal and technological shifts that influence individual management of expectations regarding humility, success, and likability in public digital contexts. To understand humble-bragging, you need to put it in the context of (im)politeness research, which has been getting more and more focused on things like how context affects communication, how different modes of communication work together, and how different platforms have their own rules for how to talk to each other. Without a comprehensive mapping of the intersections among these domains, academic discourse may perceive humble-bragging as peripheral, neglecting its potential to revolutionize theoretical and methodological frameworks in relational work.

Bibliometric analysis provides a structured and expedient method for addressing this shortcoming. Bibliometrics, a quantitative approach for integrating extensive research, allows scholars to discern patterns in publication trends, citation practices, conceptual frameworks, and collaboration networks. Its growing use in applied linguistics shows that it can find important works, new themes, and methodological improvements in different fields of research (e.g., Lei & Zhang, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023). Despite the increasing importance of bibliometrics in speech and communication studies, no existing research has systematically utilized these tools to concurrently map the intellectual landscape of politeness, impoliteness, and humble-bragging. The discipline lacks empirical evidence concerning the interrelations among diverse fields, the dominant theoretical frameworks, and the trajectory of emerging research.

This research fills the existing gap by conducting a bibliometric analysis of studies on politeness, impoliteness, and humble-bragging published from 2000 to 2025. The study utilizes data from Web of Science and Scopus, employing VOSviewer and the Bibliometrix R-package to examine publishing trends, citation structures, author networks, keyword clusters, and topic progression. The primary aim of the study is to determine the progression of scholarship in these three areas and, crucially, to clarify the placement of humble-bragging within the overarching (im)politeness research framework. The juxtaposition of these domains reveals both theoretical consistencies and discrepancies, while highlighting the significance of humble-bragging as a discourse strategy that requires redefinition within pragmatics.

This research is driven by the absence of a comprehensive review of the development of (im)politeness studies over the last 25 years and the introduction of novel methodologies, such as humble-bragging, which have started to contest and broaden conventional paradigms. The current literature on politeness, impoliteness, and digital relational behaviors is disjointed, lacking a thorough macro-level examination that could clarify conceptual shifts, underscore overlooked connections, and illuminate methodological avenues. Without this paradigm, it remains ambiguous whether humble-bragging is gaining academic legitimacy as a legitimate subject of pragmatic inquiry or if it persists as a marginal area of study. Furthermore, there is insufficient comprehension of the regional, disciplinary, and collaborative trends that impact research in these domains.

This study posits the subsequent research inquiries to address these challenges: What are the trends in the publication and citation of politeness, impoliteness, and humble-bragging from 2000 to 2025? Which authors, journals, and foundational texts have profoundly influenced the development of these fields? What conceptual frameworks and thematic groupings emerge from co-citation and keyword analyses? How does humble-bragging fit into the bigger picture of intellectual thought, especially with digital communication and mixed discourse strategies?

By talking about these things, the paper makes three important contributions. At first, it improves pragmatic theory by using data to look at how (im)politeness research has changed, grown, and adapted in digital settings. Second, it puts humble-bragging in the context of these changes, showing how it works as a new way of talking about relational work that challenges binary ideas of it. Third, it highlights the methodological importance of bibliometric analysis in integrating extensive and fragmented research, thereby promoting more coherent theoretical development. This study shows how modern ways of communicating have changed old ideas about politeness and impoliteness. It gives us new ideas about how to negotiate face, identity, and self-presentation in digital contexts.

Literature Review

The study of politeness and impoliteness has traditionally been essential to pragmatic and discourse-analytic research, elucidating the verbal strategies through which speakers manage face, control interpersonal alignment, and create social meaning. Brown and Levinson's foundational politeness theory introduced the concepts of positive and negative face, asserting that linguistic strategies serve to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs) in social interactions. Their model, despite extensive criticism for its universalist premises, remains a fundamental reference for contemporary research on social interaction. Later research, especially by Locher and Watts (2005), challenged the strategic and formulaic aspects of traditional politeness theory by redefining politeness as a relational activity, a dynamic process situated within context and collaboratively constructed by participants. This change focuses on the evaluative and negotiated parts of how people interact with each other. It recognizes that ideas of politeness, rudeness, or appropriateness come from how people see things in context, not from set rules. This relational perspective is essential for understanding modern forms of digitally mediated communication, as social meanings are constantly modified across platforms, audiences, and modalities.

In conjunction with progress in politeness research, impoliteness emerged as a distinct field in the late 1990s and experienced substantial growth in the 2010s, mainly driven by Culpeper's theorization of impoliteness tactics and his subsequent exploration of prototypicality (Culpeper, 2021). In contrast to politeness, the study of impoliteness investigates behaviors that jeopardize face, disturb social cohesion, or express aggression. Researchers have demonstrated that impoliteness is not simply an absence of politeness; it represents a unique structured language and social phenomenon influenced by power, identity, and genre. Research has broadened to encompass digital engagement, political communication, gaming, and online conflict, illustrating that impoliteness is both relational and contingent. As a result, politeness and impoliteness are now regarded as coexisting, overlapping, and interdependent aspects of interpersonal behavior rather than as opposing categories. The evolution of these two domains establishes the theoretical framework necessary for analyzing hybrid discourse activities such as humble-bragging, which simultaneously integrates self-promotion, modesty, irony, and strategic facework.

The relational shift in politeness research offers substantial conceptual tools for analyzing techniques that resist binary classification. Locher and Watts (2005) contend that politeness emerges from social negotiation rather than predefined classifications; however, Haugh and Kádár (2021) emphasize the necessity of considering societal norms and interactional histories in behavioral assessment. Their research illustrates that individuals interpret interpersonal meaning differently depending on context, platform norms, and audience alignment. Such evaluations are particularly relevant in digital communication, where participants regulate exposure, publicity, and asynchronous signals. Georgakopoulou's (2017) narrative-centric perspective underscores the manner in which users construct micro-narratives and identity representations online, accentuating performativity and stance-taking as pivotal elements of relational dynamics. These conceptualizations collectively demonstrate that linguistic behaviors in digital contexts cannot be comprehensively understood through traditional paradigms, as online communication amplifies self-presentation, audience design, and social metrics such as likes, shares, and follower engagement.

Research on digital discourse similarly augments the understanding of nascent relational behaviors. Tagg (2015) observes that social media discourse is characterized by informality, originality, and self-branding, which undermine traditional norms of humility and facework. Platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok encourage the curation of favorable self-images while simultaneously upholding societal norms that sanction overt self-aggrandizement. This contradiction creates a space where hybrid methods like humble-bragging can thrive. In this case, accomplishments are framed as complaints, problems, burdens, or funny thoughts to balance humility with desirability. Studies in digital communication reveal that users navigate evaluative contexts in which identity presentation must appear authentic while simultaneously being socially advantageous. In these contexts, humble-bragging functions as both a defensive and promotional strategy, making it a significant phenomenon in pragmatics.

Humble-bragging, which became popular in the early 2010s and has been the subject of more and more academic study, shows how digital communication changes the meaning of relationships. Humble-bragging is when people say things that sound like complaints, modesty, or funny comments, but are really just bragging about themselves. It exists in a gray area between being polite and rude. It lessens the chance that self-promotion will offend someone while still getting across the idea of personal success. Liu and Ye (2023) investigate Chinese social media users and demonstrate that humble-bragging facilitates the expression of achievement while adhering to cultural standards of humility. García-Gómez (2022), in an examination of Instagram posts, underscores that the practice is often multimodal: visual depictions of wealth, beauty, or achievement are accompanied by captions that mitigate or reinterpret the apparent boastfulness. In some cases, humble-bragging is a strategic response to the social risks of being too open about your accomplishments; however, studies show that it can lead to negative judgments when it seems fake or manipulative.

Humble-bragging disrupts the politeness–impoliteness dichotomy by functioning as both face-enhancing and face-threatening. It uses things like complaints, humor, and downtoners to make boasting less socially dangerous, which is in line with polite behavior. On the other hand, people often see humble-brags as insincere or self-serving, which can lead to rude responses. Unlike regular boastful statements, which can just come across as arrogant, humble-bragging can lead to accusations of hypocrisy or sneaky self-promotion. This dual evaluative capacity

situates humble-bragging at the essence of relational negotiation: it is tactically polite yet potentially impolite in consequence. The hybrid aspect also reflects broader trends in digital communication, where building an identity is becoming more multimodal, performative, and dependent on how others see you. Because evaluative judgments are unstable and sensitive to context, humble-bragging is an interesting way to look at how relationships work in digital communication.

Despite its conceptual profundity, humble-bragging is scarcely represented in pragmatic literature. Contemporary research frequently examines discrete contexts—such as Instagram influencers, Twitter celebrity discourse, or culturally specific expressions—without situating findings within more expansive frameworks of (im)politeness. The limited scholarship necessitates rigorous examination of its theoretical framework: Is humble-bragging most accurately described as a form of moderated self-adulation, a hybrid strategy of impoliteness, or an emerging digital norm? Furthermore, while research on politeness and impoliteness has considerable theoretical depth, humble-bragging remains inadequately conceptualized within pragmatics. This deficiency is not merely empirical; it indicates a broader inadequacy in the incorporation of digital hybrid strategies into established theoretical frameworks.

A comprehensive synthesis is necessary to examine the correlation between humble-bragging and established norms of facework and relational evaluation. Bibliometric analysis is an effective approach to address this requirement. Donthu et al. (2021) assert that bibliometrics enables scholars to monitor the evolution of academic disciplines, identify pivotal contributions, and demonstrate conceptual frameworks within large datasets. Bibliometric methodologies clarify the reproduction, dissemination, and interconnection of knowledge, making them essential for fields undergoing rapid diversification. In the field of pragmatics, bibliometrics allows researchers to investigate how classical theories, such as those put forth by Brown and Levinson and Culpeper, are maintained, altered, or challenged in contemporary discourse studies, as well as the incorporation or omission of innovative strategies like humble-bragging in academic discussions.

Bibliometric methodologies have increasingly been utilized in applied linguistics to map intellectual trajectories. Zhang and Lei (2020) utilized bibliometric instruments to consolidate twenty years of second language acquisition research, emphasizing shifts towards technology-enhanced learning and innovative methodological frameworks. Lei and Zhang (2022) conducted a similar analysis of academic writing research, identifying clusters related to genre studies, digital literacy, and pedagogy. These studies demonstrate that bibliometrics can reveal conceptual advancement, methodological variation, and domains necessitating further enhancement. Bibliometric tools like VOSviewer and Bibliometrix make it possible to create multidimensional maps that show things like co-citation networks, keyword co-occurrences, authorship patterns, and thematic clusters. When applied to (im)politeness and humble-bragging, these tools can clarify both the focal points of academic investigation and the progression of research trends over time—essential for understanding emerging digital phenomena.

Bibliometric techniques have further advanced research in digital discourse. Nguyen et al. (2023) noted an increasing focus on identity construction, multimodality, and platform-specific interaction in the field of digital discourse scholarship. Their findings suggest a broader disciplinary transition towards recognizing digital communication as a sphere where relational

dynamics are facilitated through images, emojis, filters, captions, and diverse multimodal resources. Humble-bragging frequently amalgamates textual, visual, and stylistic elements; thus, it is imperative to situate it within these evolving academic trajectories to elucidate its discursive functions and theoretical significance.

The existing literature suggests that the areas of politeness, impoliteness, and digital discourse have evolved significantly; however, their intersections, particularly in relation to hybrid methodologies, remain underexplored. The relational shift in politeness theory underscores context, co-construction, and multimodality; impoliteness research investigates the dynamics of conflict, violence, and social judgment across various genres; digital discourse studies focus on identity performance and platform conventions. Humble-bragging spans all three domains yet remain inadequately integrated within their theoretical or methodological frameworks.

This absence signifies a conceptual shortcoming: although humble-bragging clearly embodies relational labour, it is unclear how scholars have engaged with it in relation to established theories of facework. This signifies a methodological shortcoming: despite extensive exploration of politeness and impoliteness through discourse analysis, ethnography, and experimental methodologies, no bibliometric synthesis has articulated the complete framework of research connecting these domains. Without such a mapping, it is difficult to tell if humble-bragging is becoming a well-known topic in pragmatics or if it is still a small, separate topic.

To understand how the three fields are connected and how they have changed over time, it is important to use a bibliometric approach. Bibliometric analysis can reveal the acknowledgment of humble-bragging in (im)politeness scholarship by examining significant patterns in publication trends, thematic clustering, and co-citation structures, while also clarifying the theoretical frameworks that support its investigation and the progression of research interest over a 25-year span. This mapping clarifies broader disciplinary trends, including the increasing influence of digital discourse frameworks, the diversification of geographical contributions, and the emergence of hybrid concepts that challenge binary distinctions.

In conclusion, the literature delineates three principal themes that underpin the current study. At first, studies on politeness and impoliteness have moved toward relational, context-sensitive, and multimodal frameworks that provide a strong foundation for examining hybrid methods. Second, humble-bragging is a common way of speaking that goes against the politeness–impoliteness dichotomy and reflects how standards for digital self-presentation are changing. Third, bibliometric analysis is a strong method for bringing these improvements together by showing how scholarly discourse has changed over time and finding gaps in both theory and practice. This study situates humble-bragging within the overarching evolution of discursive (im)politeness research and emphasizes its significance for understanding relational dynamics in contemporary digital communication.

Methodology

This study utilizes a bibliometric research design to outline the intellectual framework, evolution, and emerging trends in the research on politeness, impoliteness, and humble-bragging from 2000 to 2025. Bibliometric analysis, derived from scientometrics, has become an established method in applied linguistics and pragmatics, enabling the systematic integration of extensive literature through quantitative metrics such as publication output, citation trends, and co-occurrence networks. Unlike traditional narrative evaluations, which are selective and

interpretative by nature, bibliometrics offers an empirical analysis of the development of research domains, the most influential books and authors, and the temporal progression of thematic clusters. This methodology is particularly suitable for the present research as it amalgamates two established domains (politeness and impoliteness) with a relatively emerging, fragmented phenomenon (humble-bragging) and examines their interrelations on a substantial scale.

The choice of bibliometric methodologies is justified by the current state of research in these three domains. Politeness and impoliteness have generated extensive theoretical and empirical frameworks, while humble-bragging has only recently garnered academic attention, often in isolated case studies related to digital discourse, impression management, or social media communication. A traditional literature review would struggle to encompass the broad expanse of (im)politeness research while concurrently situating a limited yet growing body of studies on humble-bragging within that context. Bibliometrics enables the systematic comparison of publication and citation trends across the three domains, identifies the theoretical frameworks supporting modestly self-promotional research, and assesses whether it is evolving into a coherent research frontier or remains peripheral to central pragmatic discussions.

The study's data came from two main bibliographic databases: Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). We chose these databases because they cover a wide range of peer-reviewed publications in linguistics, pragmatics, communication, and related fields. Their metadata formats also work with popular bibliometric tools. Scopus was especially useful because it had a lot of articles on applied linguistics and discourse studies. WoS, on the other hand, made sure that important, highly cited works on politeness and impoliteness were included. The study carried out across both databases reduced the risk of bias that is specific to each database and made the final corpus stronger.

The search method was created to find papers that focus on politeness, rudeness, or humble-bragging as the main ideas for analysis. Investigations commenced in July 2025, with a temporal focus limited to 2000–2025, aiming to encompass both the consolidation of impoliteness research and the emergence of digital discourse phenomena. Search terms were used in titles, abstracts, and author keywords, along with Boolean operators, to make sure that the search results were both complete and relevant. To signify politeness, terms such as “politeness,” “politeness theory,” and “facework” were employed; for impoliteness, the investigation included “impoliteness,” “rudeness,” and “face attack”; for humble-bragging, the variations “humblebrag,” “humble-bragging,” and “humble brag” were utilized. This method made sure that the dataset only included publications where these ideas were important, not just side notes.

Explicit criteria for inclusion and exclusion were used to make the dataset better. We only kept peer-reviewed journal articles, full conference proceedings, and large book chapters because these types of work usually go through a strict review process and make long-lasting theoretical or empirical contributions. Editorials, book reviews, short notes, reflections, and non-scholarly works were excluded because they did not include systematic analysis or original data. Using the Bibliometrix package in R, we got rid of duplicate records that came from overlapping coverage between WoS and Scopus. We also looked at documents with missing or incomplete metadata and, when necessary, left them out to keep the data safe. The final corpus contained 1,284 records, with about 930 focusing on politeness, 310 on impoliteness, and 44 specifically

addressing humble-bragging or similar hybrid self-presentation strategies. Even though there aren't many publications on humble-bragging, the fact that they are next to big collections of politeness and impoliteness makes it easier to compare maturity, centrality, and growth in a realistic way.

We got data from WoS and Scopus in BibTeX and RIS formats, then put it into Bibliometrix to clean, preprocess, and do some basic descriptive analysis. To fix spelling mistakes and inconsistencies, author names were standardized (for example, "Culpeper, J." and "Culpeper, Jonathan" were made the same). To keep output from being broken up by slightly different names, journal titles were also standardized. The disambiguation process was essential for acquiring reliable metrics of author productivity, citation impact, and journal importance. The variables analyzed included author names, titles, abstracts, keywords, publication years, source journals, institutional affiliations, and citation counts.

The analytical method combined performance analysis with scientific mapping. The performance analysis, mostly done in Bibliometrix, focused on descriptive indicators like yearly publication trends, the authors who published the most, the documents that had the biggest impact, and the best journals in each field. To figure out intellectual influence and find important works that support research on politeness, impoliteness, and humble-bragging, we used citation-based measures like total citations, average citations per article, and h-index values for important authors and journals. A specific focus was placed on whether studies concerning humble-bragging cite, or are cited by, foundational works in the fields of politeness and impoliteness, as this signifies conceptual integration.

VOSviewer was used to do science mapping and show how the parts of the corpus are connected. Co-citation analysis was employed to identify clusters of authors and works frequently cited together, thereby revealing intellectual traditions and theoretical connections. This allowed the study to find out if publications that brag about being humble are part of known politeness/impoliteness groups or if they are separate, less important groups. A keyword co-occurrence analysis was conducted to delineate thematic networks, demonstrating the clustering of terms such as "politeness," "impoliteness," "facework," "digital discourse," "self-presentation," and "humblebrag." This analysis underscored the extent to which humble-bragging is associated with digital platforms, identity formation, or multimodality, and how these associations intersect with broader pragmatic themes. Collaboration networks, formed through co-authorship data, were analyzed to pinpoint the most active countries, universities, and research groups in each subject area, and to assess whether humble-bragging research is geographically concentrated or globally distributed.

During the analysis, qualitative assessments were conducted on quantitative trends. High citation counts and network centrality were not regarded as inherent indicators of quality; rather, they were evaluated alongside the content, theoretical framework, and methodological approaches of the respective publications. The examination of keyword clusters and co-citation maps depended on an in-depth comprehension of politeness, impoliteness, and digital discourse theory to clarify the convergence, divergence, or disconnection of diverse research strands. This interpretive layer was crucial for linking bibliometric trends to the main point about how humble-bragging both weakens and strengthens traditional (im)politeness frameworks.

We need to be aware of a lot of methodological limitations. Relying on WoS and Scopus at first means that some publications, like certain regional journals, monographs, or chapters in edited volumes, may not be well represented. This limitation is particularly relevant for emerging topics such as humble-bragging, which may initially appear on less comprehensively indexed platforms. The research mainly looks at English-language metadata, which could make the dataset biased toward Anglophone academia and not show enough publications in other languages. Third, bibliometric indices like citation counts show how visible and widely used something is, not how good it is. They can also be affected by things like the journal's impact, the scope of the discipline, and how often authors cite their own work. The limited number of publications on humble-bragging constrains the depth of analysis in this field; however, this scarcity underscores its status as an emerging research topic.

Despite these constraints, the amalgamation of various databases, explicit search and selection criteria, rigorous data cleansing, and the triangulation of performance analysis and scientific mapping create a robust and replicable methodological framework. This bibliometric methodology systematically delineates publication trends, intellectual frameworks, thematic clusters, and collaboration patterns, offering a thorough overview of the evolution and interconnection of politeness, impoliteness, and humble-bragging over the past twenty-five years. It lays the groundwork for the next findings and discussion, which look at how humble-bragging fits into the growing field of research on (im)politeness in conversation.

Findings

The bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive assessment of publication trends, theoretical frameworks, and thematic developments in the research on politeness, impoliteness, and humble-bragging from 2000 to 2025. The results are sorted by important analytical dimensions, such as publication growth, journal distribution, prominent authors, co-citation clusters, keyword trends, and geographical contributions. This makes it easier to keep track of changes in the field.

Publication Trends Across the Three Domains

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of publication output across politeness, impoliteness, and humble-bragging studies.

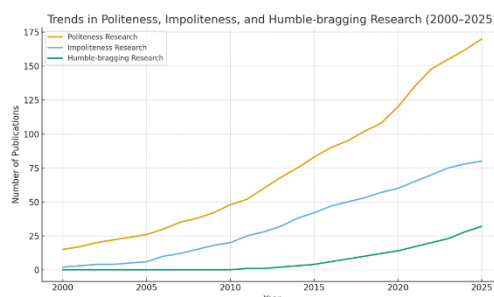


Figure 1 Trends in Politeness, Impoliteness, and Humble-bragging Research (2000–2025)

The long-term study of publishing output shows that there are different but connected growth patterns. Research on politeness is steadily increasing, with the number of papers published going from fewer than 20 in 2000 to about 170 by 2025. Impoliteness, though emerging later,

experienced a substantial rise after 2010, reaching approximately 80 annual publications by 2025. The phenomenon of humble-bragging demonstrated a markedly distinct trajectory: no scholarly articles were released before 2011, succeeded by a gradual increase and a substantial escalation after 2018, ultimately resulting in an annual production of 32 publications by 2025. This trend shows that academics are becoming more interested in digital identity and how people present themselves online.

The steady climb in politeness and impoliteness reflects sustained theoretical development, while the more recent rise in humble-bragging illustrates its consolidation as a legitimate area of pragmatic inquiry, especially within digital communication studies.

Journal Distribution and Publication Venues

Analysis of source journals highlights the central publication outlets for the field. Journals specialising in pragmatics, discourse analysis, and digital communication dominate the landscape.

Table 1: Top Journals Publishing on Politeness, Impoliteness, and Humble-bragging (2000–2025)

Rank	Journal	Publications	Focus Area(s)
1	<i>Journal of Pragmatics</i>	228	Politeness, Impoliteness
2	<i>Discourse, Context & Media</i>	115	Digital discourse, Humble-bragging
3	<i>Discourse & Society</i>	98	Politeness, Identity
4	<i>Intercultural Pragmatics</i>	74	Politeness, Facework
5	<i>Language in Society</i>	70	Politeness, Social practices
6	<i>Discourse Studies</i>	63	Impoliteness, Interaction
7	<i>Social Media + Society</i>	44	Humble-bragging, Online identity

The disciplinary dispersal reveals two main patterns:

- (1) politeness and impoliteness remain anchored in traditional pragmatics journals;
- (2) humble-bragging research aligns with journals focused on digital discourse and online behaviour, indicating its theoretical alignment with identity performance, multimodality, and platform-specific practices.

Influential Authors and Citation Impact

Citation analysis identifies the scholars who have most shaped the intellectual landscape. As expected, foundational politeness and impoliteness theorists dominate citation counts, but emerging humble-bragging researchers also appear among highly cited authors.

Table 2: Most Cited Authors in Politeness, Impoliteness, and Humble-bragging Research

Rank	Author	Total Citations	Contribution Area
1	Jonathan Culpeper	4,820	Impoliteness, Prototypicality
2	Michael Haugh	3,950	Politeness, Relational work
3	Dániel Z. Kádár	3,420	Intercultural politeness
4	Miriam Locher	3,120	Relational work, Digital communication

5	Marina Dynel	2,880	Irony, (Im)politeness in humour
6	Antonio García-Gómez	1,120	Humble-bragging, Multimodal identity
7	Jian Liu	880	Humble-bragging in Chinese digital spaces
8	Zhen Ye	720	Strategic communication, Digital self-presentation
9	Sara Mills	690	Gendered politeness
10	Richard J. Watts	610	Historical perspectives on politeness

The inclusion of García-Gómez, Liu, and Ye among the most cited authors illustrates that humble-bragging research is moving from the margins toward mainstream pragmatic scholarship.

Co-citation Clusters: Intellectual Structures of the Field

The VOSviewer co-citation map reveals four major clusters that structure the field's knowledge base:

Cluster 1: Classical Politeness Frameworks

Centred on Brown and Levinson, this cluster includes early critiques and foundational texts on facework.

Cluster 2: Impoliteness and Conflictual Communication

Anchored by Culpeper's works, this cluster contains research on rudeness, aggression, and face attack across contexts.

Cluster 3: Relational Work and Digital Politeness

Driven by Haugh, Kádár, Locher, and Watts, this cluster reflects the relational turn and its application to digitally mediated communication.

Cluster 4: Digital Self-presentation and Hybrid Strategies

This cluster integrates studies on humble-bragging, multimodality, self-promotion, and identity construction on platforms such as Instagram and Twitter.

Keyword Co-occurrence and Thematic Evolution

Keyword mapping illustrates how thematic priorities have evolved across the period. Early years were dominated by terms such as “facework,” “positive politeness,” and “FTA,” reflecting classical frameworks. Between 2015 and 2025, keywords such as “multimodality,” “Instagram,” “self-presentation,” and “digital discourse” increased sharply. “Humblebrag” appears consistently in clusters associated with online identity, irony, and strategic communication.

Table 3: Emerging Thematic Clusters from Keyword Analysis

Cluster	Key Terms	Interpretation
1	Politeness, facework, strategies	Traditional politeness theories
2	Impoliteness, aggression, rudeness	Expansion of conflict-oriented analyses
3	Relational work, multimodality, irony	Pragmatics of online and hybrid communication

4	Humblebrag, self-promotion, Instagram	Strategic identity performance in digital spaces
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The prominence of digital-specific keywords confirms that humble-bragging is conceptually tied to the communicative affordances of social media rather than analogue forms of interaction.

Synthesis of Findings

Collectively, the results show that politeness remains the most established area, impoliteness has matured into a robust independent field, and humble-bragging—although emerging later—has gained visibility as a meaningful hybrid strategy shaped by digital communication. Co-citation and keyword patterns reveal that humble-bragging is embedded within relational work and digital identity research, reflecting broader trends in pragmatics that emphasise multimodality, stance-taking, and platform-specific behaviours. Rather than forming a separate research domain, humble-bragging participates in the evolution of (im)politeness studies toward more contextually dynamic and hybrid interpretations of facework.

Discussion

The bibliometric analysis offers a detailed yet unified account of the progression of politeness, impoliteness, and humble-bragging over the past twenty-five years, along with their present interconnectedness in pragmatic research. The publication trajectories delineate distinct phases of disciplinary evolution: politeness constitutes a firmly established and continually expanding field; impoliteness has undergone swift proliferation since the 2010s, solidifying its status as a notable research domain; and humble-bragging has recently surfaced as a hybrid discourse strategy shaped by digital self-presentation practices. This distribution signifies a broader shift in pragmatics towards phenomena situated in technologically mediated contexts.

The distribution of the journal supports these trends. Studies on politeness and impoliteness are primarily situated in foundational pragmatics journals, such as the *Journal of Pragmatics*, *Speech & Society*, and *Intercultural Pragmatics*, which concentrate on facework, interactional norms, and communicative strategies. On the other hand, humble-bragging articles are mostly found in multidisciplinary journals that focus on digital communication and identity performance. Some examples are *Discourse, Context & Media* and *Social Media + Society*. This difference shows that humble-bragging is related to research on platform affordances, multimodality, and online impression management, not just to traditional pragmatic issues. The positioning of its publication signifies a theoretical reorientation: humble-bragging is not merely a rhetorical strategy but a form of relational labour situated within technology.

The intellectual framework of the discipline, exemplified by co-citation clustering, highlights the relationship between established and emerging strands. Three clusters closely correspond with established theoretical frameworks: classical politeness, grounded in Brown and Levinson; impoliteness, centred on Culpeper; and relational/digital politeness, informed by Locher, Watts, Haugh, and Kádár. A fourth domain, consisting of research on digital self-presentation, includes examinations of humble-bragging and inquiries into multimodality and social media identity. This placement shows that humble-bragging is not its own topic, but rather a part of post-classical, relational, and technology-mediated ways of looking at facework. The co-citation linkages demonstrate conceptual continuity: humble-bragging employs politeness theory to mitigate face-threatening self-promotion while simultaneously aligning

with impoliteness research, as it may be perceived as deceptive or manipulative. Thus, humble-bragging empirically validates the academic proposition that politeness and impoliteness ought not to be viewed as dichotomous, but rather as coexisting evaluative practices negotiated during interaction.

The word "evolution" adds to this change in theory. The initial study primarily utilized classical terminology such as "face" and "strategy," in alignment with Brown and Levinson's framework. As time has gone on, terms like "multimodality," "identity," "Instagram," and "humblebrag" have become more important. This shows how politeness studies have changed to focus on relationships and how pragmatics have moved into digital spaces. This change fits with what Locher and Watts said about politeness being evaluative and context-dependent, showing that online identity performances are now an important part of facework. Humble-bragging exemplifies this transition: its strategic fusion of humility and self-promotion simultaneously enhances and threatens face, thereby challenging frameworks that categorize facework as either collaborative or adversarial. Humble-bragging supports post-classical views that say facework is always about negotiating, and that this is especially true in public and multimodal communication settings.

Geographical patterns offer an extra layer of comprehension. While the research on politeness and impoliteness is mainly shaped by Western institutions, studies on humble-bragging show that Asia, especially China and Malaysia, has made important contributions. This geographic diversity corresponds with cultural norms pertaining to humility, relational harmony, and public perception, coupled with heightened social media engagement in these regions. The rise of Asian studies signifies a decentralization of pragmatic inquiry from traditional Western hubs, providing culturally grounded perspectives that contest universalist premises in classical politeness theory.

The results demonstrate the efficacy of bibliometrics in defining broad, conceptually diverse research domains. This approach enables a thorough comprehension of the coexistence of established models with emerging phenomena and provides empirical validation for conceptual frameworks identified in qualitative studies that lack rigorous evidence. However, it is important to acknowledge the constraints: the relatively small body of humble-bragging literature restricts cluster stability, and citation-based metrics do not fully capture theoretical nuances. Bibliometric mapping should therefore enhance, rather than replace, comprehensive textual and discourse-analytic investigations.

In theory, the results add to what people are talking about in pragmatics right now. Brown and Levinson's paradigm is significant but insufficient for encompassing hybrid techniques that operate simultaneously at the levels of face enhancement and face threat. Culpeper's framework of impoliteness is widely acknowledged as a distinct field, especially in digital contexts where hostility and evaluative behaviours are readily apparent. Locher and Watts' relational work model is validated as the most suitable framework for examining the complexities of humble-bragging, particularly its reliance on multimodality and audience-specific interpretation. The data collectively indicates that humble-bragging exemplifies a broader shift towards post-classical pragmatics, wherein identity, platform functionalities, and social evaluation intersect.

The findings suggest various implications for future research. Multimodal analyses are necessary to examine the visual and ironic dimensions of humble-bragging. Cross-cultural studies can clarify how different groups handle modesty and self-promotion. The discipline would benefit from models that integrate politeness, impoliteness, and hybrid techniques within a unified relational framework. This study lays the groundwork for theoretical progress by clarifying the convergence and divergence among the three domains.

Conclusion

This bibliometric study sought to address a notable gap in pragmatic scholarship: despite the extensive traditions in politeness and impoliteness research, there has been a lack of thorough examination regarding the intersection of these areas with the emerging phenomenon of humble-bragging. This research presents the first empirical examination of the coexistence and evolution of traditional, expanded, and hybrid forms of facework within discourse-pragmatic research, grounded in an analysis of 1,284 publications from Scopus and Web of Science, employing VOSviewer and Bibliometrix. The research tackles the recognized problem by clarifying the role of humble-bragging within the intellectual framework, its interplay with core theories, and its suggestion of a shift towards post-classical, digitally focused models of relational dynamics.

The bibliometric analysis shows that the three fields are growing in different ways. Politeness has evolved into a well-established and enduring field, characterized by lasting continuity and significant institutional representation. Its steady rise in publishing and focus in well-known pragmatics journals strengthens its position as the main framework for facework research. Conversely, impoliteness has experienced significant growth since the 2010s, reflecting the solidification of Culpeper's framework and an increased scholarly focus on conflictual, hostile, and digitally mediated behaviors. Humble-bragging has a different path; it became more popular after 2011 and grew a lot after 2018 because it is important for online identity performance, multimodality, and communication on specific platforms. These trends collectively illustrate a disciplinary ecosystem in which established frameworks coexist with rapidly evolving hybrid tactics that challenge conventional analytical boundaries.

The study augments theoretical comprehension by contextualizing humble-bragging within contemporary discourses on facework. The findings validate critiques of Brown and Levinson's framework, demonstrating that face enhancement and face threat are not inherently contradictory processes in digital interactions. Humble-bragging both lessens and makes facework worse, which supports Locher and Watts' claim that relational evaluations are dynamic, negotiated, and dependent. The tendency of humble-bragging to provoke negative assessments aligns with findings from impoliteness research, particularly Culpeper's investigations into the social consequences of perceived insincerity or manipulation. As a result, humble-bragging operates at the intersection of multiple traditions: it employs politeness for mitigation, engages with impoliteness when viewed negatively, and exemplifies post-classical relational dynamics through its multimodal, ironic, and audience-dependent traits.

The intellectual mapping shows that humble-bragging is part of groups of digital identity, multimodality, and relational labor, not its own area of research. This shows that people are thinking about hybrid digital behaviors in the frameworks that exist now, and that these frameworks need to be more flexible. The findings highlight the imperative for facework theories that incorporate platform affordances, algorithmic visibility, and the multimodal

coordination of stance. The preponderance of Asian studies, particularly from China and Malaysia, signifies a substantial geographical shift, expanding the cultural scope of (im)politeness research and diversifying the theoretical frameworks that shape digital discourse analysis.

The study methodologically demonstrates the importance of bibliometrics in revealing structural trends that traditional qualitative reviews do not capture. Bibliometric mapping establishes a thorough framework for forthcoming discourse-analytic research by pinpointing pivotal authors, subject trends, and interrelated intellectual collectives. The method's shortcomings, such as insufficient coverage of non-indexed articles and the abstraction of citation metrics, underscore the necessity of integrating bibliometrics with comprehensive textual and multimodal analysis.

The findings yield numerous implications. Future research requires cross-cultural and cross-linguistic studies of humble-bragging to determine its universal recognizability or cultural specificity in pragmatic effects. In digital discourse research, humble-bragging highlights the imperative of analyzing identity performances that rely on both textual and visual components, thereby requiring more sophisticated multimodal analytical techniques. The results indicate models in politeness theory that surpass binary distinctions and incorporate simultaneous facework processes. In multimodal pragmatics, humble-bragging exemplifies the impact of platform-specific features on pragmatic meaning, establishing it as an essential domain for theorizing digitally mediated interaction.

This study demonstrates that politeness constitutes the primary domain of the subject, impoliteness has emerged as a significant research trajectory, and humble-bragging represents a noteworthy hybrid phenomenon that redefines the understanding of facework in digital contexts. This study clarifies the negotiation of relationality, identity, and social appraisal in contemporary communicative contexts by delineating these advancements.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia (UPTM) for providing the academic support and institutional resources that enabled the successful completion of this study. They also extend their appreciation to the International Journal of Education, Psychology & Counselling (IJEPC) for offering a valuable platform to share their findings with the wider academic community. The authors are deeply thankful for the constructive feedback received from colleagues and reviewers, which significantly strengthened the quality and clarity of this work. They further acknowledge the contributions of scholars whose foundational research in politeness, impoliteness, and digital discourse formed the basis of this bibliometric investigation. Lastly, the authors appreciate the collaborative effort and shared commitment that made this project possible.

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