

Face-Threatening Acts and Mitigation Strategies in the Context of Physical Discomfort: A Pragmatic Analysis of the YouTube Talk Show *Hot Ones*

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ABSTRACT

Face management plays an important role in interview interaction, especially when speakers need to maintain their public image in challenging situations. Previous studies have examined Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and politeness strategies in different interview settings. However, little attention has been paid to how FTAs and mitigation strategies develop as speakers experience increasing physical discomfort. The YouTube talk show *Hot Ones* provides a unique setting in which guests answer interview questions while eating increasingly spicy food. This study examines the types of FTAs and the mitigation strategies used by the host and guests in three *Hot Ones* episodes featuring Ariana Grande, MrBeast, and Jennie. Using qualitative discourse analysis based on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, the study analysed 37 FTAs. The findings show that positive-face threats were much more common (33 cases) than negative-face threats (4 cases). Positive politeness was the most frequently used mitigation strategy, followed by off-record, negative politeness, and bald-on-record. Although all bald-on-record strategies occurred during the final stage of the challenge, positive politeness remained the dominant strategy throughout the interviews. The findings also show that physical discomfort forms part of the interactional context in which speakers negotiate face, but it does not determine their pragmatic choices. This study extends research on face management by showing how embodied experience and digitally mediated interaction shape face negotiation in entertainment interviews.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Face-Threatening Acts, Politeness Strategies, Face Management, Digital Interview Discourse

ABSTRAK

Manajemen muka memainkan peran penting dalam interaksi wawancara, terutama ketika penutur perlu mempertahankan citra publik mereka dalam situasi yang menantang. Penelitian sebelumnya telah mengkaji Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) dan strategi kesantunan dalam berbagai konteks wawancara. Namun, masih sedikit penelitian yang membahas bagaimana FTAs dan strategi mitigasi berkembang ketika penutur mengalami peningkatan ketidaknyamanan fisik. Acara bincang-bincang (*talk show*) YouTube *Hot Ones* menyediakan konteks yang unik, di mana para tamu menjawab pertanyaan wawancara sambil mengonsumsi makanan yang semakin pedas. Penelitian ini mengkaji jenis-jenis FTAs serta strategi mitigasi yang digunakan oleh pembawa acara dan para tamu dalam tiga episode *Hot Ones* yang menampilkan Ariana Grande, MrBeast, dan Jennie. Dengan menggunakan analisis wacana kualitatif berdasarkan teori kesantunan Brown dan Levinson, penelitian ini menganalisis 37 FTAs. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ancaman

terhadap muka positif jauh lebih dominan (33 kasus) dibandingkan ancaman terhadap muka negatif (negative face) (4 kasus). Kesantunan positif merupakan strategi mitigasi yang paling sering digunakan, diikuti oleh off-record, kesantunan negatif, dan *bald-on-record*. Meskipun seluruh strategi *bald-on-record* muncul pada tahap akhir tantangan, kesantunan positif tetap menjadi strategi yang paling dominan sepanjang wawancara. Hasil penelitian juga menunjukkan bahwa ketidaknyamanan fisik merupakan bagian dari konteks interaksional tempat penutur menegosiasikan muka, tetapi tidak menentukan pilihan pragmatik mereka. Penelitian ini memperluas kajian tentang manajemen muka dengan menunjukkan bagaimana pengalaman tubuh dan interaksi yang dimediasi secara digital membentuk negosiasi muka dalam wawancara hiburan.

Kata kunci: Pragmatik, *Face-Threatening Acts*, strategi kesantunan, manajemen muka, wacana wawancara digital.

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INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics examines how context shapes meaning in communication (Yule, 1996). Beyond conveying information, language also helps build and maintain social relationships. A central concept in pragmatics is *face*, which refers to an individual's public self-image (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Rather than being fixed, face is continuously negotiated through interaction and shaped by the communicative context (Sifianou, 2021; Virtanen, 2022). This perspective is particularly relevant to interview discourse, where speakers must not only provide information but also maintain a favourable public image before both their interlocutors and a wider audience. In digitally mediated interactions, face negotiation becomes more complex because speakers must maintain interpersonal relationships while presenting themselves to an online audience (Scott, 2022). Understanding how face is negotiated in these contexts is therefore essential for explaining how speakers balance interpersonal relationships with public self-presentation in contemporary digital interview discourse.

Because social interaction often involves actions that threaten a person's public self-image, speakers use various strategies to manage these threats. Brown and Levinson (1987) define these actions as Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs), which may threaten either the speaker's or the hearer's positive or negative face. FTAs may arise from criticism, disagreement, sarcasm, or other utterances that disrupt interpersonal harmony. Rather than avoiding FTAs altogether, speakers often use mitigation strategies to reduce their interpersonal impact while maintaining effective communication. Mitigation refers to linguistic strategies that soften the force of an utterance and make it more socially acceptable (Nsaif & Al-Jadiri, 2021). Recent studies suggest that both the realization of FTAs and the choice

of mitigation strategies are influenced not only by speakers' intentions but also by the communicative context, institutional roles, and digitally mediated interaction (Lamata, 2026; Rahardi, 2025). Together, these studies highlight the importance of examining FTAs alongside the mitigation strategies speakers use to negotiate face in interview discourse.

To reduce the interpersonal impact of Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs), speakers use politeness strategies to maintain interpersonal relationships. Brown and Levinson (1987) identify four politeness strategies: positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, and bald-on-record. The choice of strategy depends on factors such as social distance, power relations, communicative goals, and the degree of imposition. Recent studies show that the use of these strategies varies across institutional settings, media environments, and digital communication contexts (Banat et al., 2024; Lamata, 2026; Tang, 2025). Together, these studies suggest that politeness strategies should be examined alongside FTAs because both help explain how speakers negotiate face in interview interaction.

However, face negotiation in interview interaction cannot be understood through spoken language alone. It also requires attention to embodied interaction. Research on embodied interaction shows that bodily actions and physical experiences are integral to communication (Hofstetter & Keevallik, 2020). Similarly, Weatherall et al. (2021) argue that displays of pain emerge through both verbal expressions and bodily conduct as interaction unfolds. These findings suggest that physical discomfort is not simply a background condition but part of the interactional context in which speakers produce and respond to face-threatening utterances. This perspective is particularly relevant to *Hot Ones*, where guests answer interview questions while eating increasingly spicy food and managing both

physical discomfort and public self-presentation.

Beyond its embodied dimension, *Hot Ones* also provides a digitally mediated setting for examining face negotiation. Digital pragmatics examines how meaning is negotiated in digitally mediated interaction (Scott, 2022). Although the host and guests interact face-to-face, the interview is simultaneously produced and distributed to a global audience through YouTube. As a result, participants communicate not only with each other but also with a potentially unlimited online audience. This combination of face-to-face interaction and digital distribution makes *Hot Ones* a distinctive setting for examining face negotiation in contemporary interview discourse.

Previous studies consistently show that face negotiation and politeness strategies play important roles in interview and talk-show discourse. Speakers use politeness strategies to maintain interpersonal relationships, construct favourable public images, and sustain cooperative interaction (Ekanaafi & Afifah, 2026; Ramadhanti & Andriani, 2024; Surjowati & Kusnowati, 2024). Other studies show that pragmatic choices are shaped by communicative goals, institutional settings, and interactional pressure (Handayani & Purwaningrum, 2026; Yakimova, 2025). However, these studies focus mainly on conventional interview settings and pay little attention to how face negotiation develops when speakers experience increasing physical discomfort during interaction.

Despite recent advances in research on face negotiation, little attention has been paid to how Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and mitigation strategies develop as speakers experience increasing physical discomfort. Previous studies have mainly examined face negotiation in relation to interpersonal relationships, institutional roles, public image,

and cultural expectations, whereas physical discomfort has rarely been considered part of the interactional context. In this study, physical discomfort is treated not as a direct cause of pragmatic behaviour but as the interactional context in which FTAs and mitigation strategies emerge. Accordingly, this study examines how these patterns develop across different stages of increasing physical discomfort in the YouTube talk show *Hot Ones*.

To address this research gap, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of Face-Threatening Acts occur in the selected episodes of the YouTube talk show *Hot Ones*?
2. How do the host and guests use mitigation strategies to manage Face-Threatening Acts across different stages of increasing physical discomfort?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed qualitative pragmatic discourse analysis to examine Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and mitigation strategies in the YouTube talk show *Hot Ones*. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study examined utterances within their interactional context, including participants' responses to increasing physical discomfort during the spicy-food challenge (Creswell, 2009). Physical discomfort was treated as part of the interactional context in which FTAs and mitigation strategies were produced and negotiated rather than as an independent variable. The overall research procedure is presented in Figure 1.

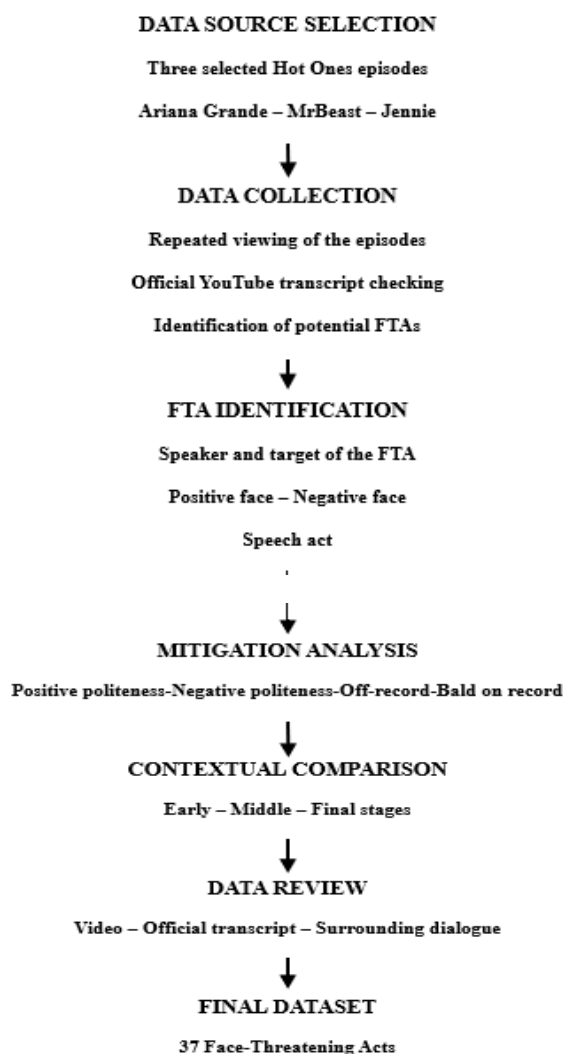


Figure 1. Research Procedure for FTA and Mitigation Strategy Analysis

Data Source

The data consisted of three purposively selected episodes of the YouTube talk show *Hot Ones*:

1. *Ariana Grande Hits a High Note While Eating Spicy Wings* featuring Ariana Grande (23:19).
2. *MrBeast Faces His Scariest Challenge Yet* featuring MrBeast (19:39).
3. *Jennie Cries for Help While Eating Spicy Wings* featuring Jennie (22:49).

The episodes were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: the prominence of the featured guests, their broad

international audiences, and the consistency of the interview format. Rather than representing all *Hot Ones* episodes, these cases provided comparable examples of public interview interaction involving well-established public figures. All three episodes have similar durations and follow the same one-on-one interview format, in which a single guest interacts with the host throughout the spicy-food challenge. This consistency provides comparable interactional settings for examining FTAs and mitigation strategies across different stages of the interview.

Data Collection

The data were collected through documentation (Creswell, 2009). Each episode was viewed repeatedly to identify potential Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and to understand their interactional context. The identified utterances were checked against the official YouTube transcripts to ensure transcription accuracy. The video recordings were also examined to interpret the surrounding interaction, non-verbal responses, and participants' reactions during the spicy-food challenge.

Potential FTAs were identified by determining whether an utterance threatened the speaker's or the hearer's positive or negative face based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework. Each utterance was interpreted within its interactional context to avoid decontextualized analysis. Utterances without sufficient contextual evidence of a face threat were excluded from the dataset.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using pragmatic discourse analysis, with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory serving as the primary analytical framework. Discourse analysis examines language in use by emphasizing the relationship between

language, context, and social interaction (Cutting, 2002). Each identified utterance was analyzed by identifying the speaker and hearer, determining the speech act performed, classifying the type of face threatened, and identifying the mitigation strategy employed. Throughout the analysis, each utterance was interpreted within its interactional context, including participants' responses to increasing physical discomfort.

The analytical coding procedure is summarized in Table 1. Each utterance was first interpreted within its interactional context before being classified according to the analytical framework to ensure consistent coding.

Table 1. Analytical Coding Framework for Identifying Face-Threatening Acts and Mitigation Strategies

Step	Analytical Procedure	Analytical Focus
1	Identify potential Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)	Identify utterances that potentially threaten the speaker's or hearer's face.
2	Examine the interactional context	Examine the surrounding dialogue, participants' responses, and situational context to determine whether the utterance functions as an FTA.
3	Determine the speaker, hearer, and speech act	Determine the speaker, hearer, and the speech act performed.
4	Classify the type of face threatened	Classify the utterance as threatening either positive face or negative face based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework.
5	Classify the mitigation strategy	Classify the strategy as positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, or bald-on-record.
6	Categorize the interaction stage	Categorize each utterance into the early (Levels 1–3), middle (Levels 4–6), or final stage (Levels 7–10) of the spicy-food challenge.
7	Interpret the findings	Interpret patterns of FTAs and mitigation strategies by considering the interactional

Step	Analytical Procedure	Analytical Focus
		context and participants' responses to increasing physical discomfort.

To examine how FTAs and mitigation strategies developed throughout the interview, the data were grouped into three interactional stages based on their position in the spicy-food challenge: **early, middle, and final**. The challenge consists of ten sauce levels with progressively increasing spiciness. The early stage included Levels 1–3 and the opening segment, the middle stage included Levels 4–6, and the final stage included Levels 7–10 and the closing segment. Each utterance was assigned to a stage based on contextual notes indicating the sauce level at which it occurred. This classification enabled comparisons of FTAs and mitigation strategies across different stages of the interview without treating physical discomfort as a separately measured variable.

To ensure consistent interpretation, all coding decisions were reviewed against the video recordings, official YouTube transcripts, and the surrounding dialogue. Utterances that allowed more than one interpretation were re-examined within their interactional context before the final coding decision was made. Each review considered the speaker and hearer, the speech act performed, the type of face threatened, and the mitigation strategy employed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Types of Face-Threatening Acts

The analysis identified 37 Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) across the three selected *Hot Ones* episodes, including seven in the Ariana Grande episode, 15 in the MrBeast episode, and 15 in the Jennie episode. The findings are presented according to the research questions. The first

section reports the types of FTAs identified in the interviews, whereas the second examines the mitigation strategies used by the host and guests. Patterns of FTAs and mitigation strategies are also compared across the early, middle, and final stages of the spicy-food challenge.

Table 2. Distribution of Face-Threatening Acts by Face Type and Target

Type of Face Threat	Target	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Positive face	Guest's own positive face	26	70.3
	Host's positive face	7	18.9
Negative face	Guest's negative face	4	10.8
Total		37	100.0

As shown in Table 2, positive-face threats accounted for 33 of the 37 FTAs (89.2%), whereas negative-face threats accounted for only four cases (10.8%). Most positive-face threats were self-directed (26 cases, 70.3%), while seven cases (18.9%) targeted the host's positive face. Overall, self-directed positive-face threats occurred much more frequently than threats directed toward the host or the guest's negative face.

This distribution indicates that participants were more likely to negotiate their own public image than engage in direct interpersonal confrontation. Expressions of fear, vulnerability, and loss of composure appeared more frequently than utterances that imposed on or challenged other participants.

The following sections present representative examples of positive- and negative-face threats identified in the data.

Threats to Positive Face

Positive-face threats were the most frequent type of FTA identified in the data. Most were self-directed, indicating that guests were more

likely to threaten their own public image than engage in direct conflict with the host. These threats typically occurred when guests openly expressed fear, uncertainty, or physical weakness during the spicy-food challenge.

Ariana's statement, *"I'm shriveling and weak and honest,"* illustrates this pattern. By describing herself as "weak," she publicly presents herself in a way that conflicts with the confident public image she normally projects. This self-disclosure functions as a threat to her positive face because it openly acknowledges vulnerability before both the host and the online audience.

A similar pattern appears later in the interview when MrBeast says that he thinks he is going to throw up and needs to go to the toilet. Unlike Ariana's earlier admission of weakness, MrBeast's statement reflects a visible loss of physical control during the challenge. In both cases, the guests openly reveal physical vulnerability while continuing the interview.

A similar pattern appears in the final stage of Comparing these examples shows that self-directed positive-face threats occurred at different stages of the interview. Ariana acknowledged her weakness before the challenge reached its most intense stage, whereas MrBeast expressed a loss of physical control near the end of the interview. As the challenge progressed, self-directed face threats became increasingly associated with participants' visible physical reactions.

The remaining seven positive-face threats were directed toward the host. These threats occurred when guests expressed negative evaluations of the spicy-food challenge or its sauces. Rather than reflecting interpersonal conflict, the utterances conveyed dissatisfaction with the challenge while the interview continued in a cooperative manner.

Ariana's evaluation of a later sauce as "*terrible*" and "*disgusting*" provides one example. Although the comment was made while she was experiencing physical discomfort, the face threat resulted from her explicit criticism of the sauce. Similarly, Jennie's question, "*Has anyone died here?*" indirectly expressed a negative evaluation of the challenge by implying that it was excessively difficult or unsafe. Together, these examples show that positive-face threats directed toward the host emerged through participants' evaluations of the challenge rather than through direct personal criticism.

Threats to Negative Face

Negative-face threats formed the smallest category, accounting for only four cases (10.8%), all of which occurred in the MrBeast episode. These threats appeared when the host asked MrBeast to perform additional tasks while participating in the spicy-food challenge. Rather than arising from physical discomfort itself, the threats were associated with requests that placed additional demands on the guest.

One example occurs when Sean asks MrBeast to evaluate a thumbnail during the interview. The request requires him to shift his attention to another task while continuing the interview and coping with the effects of the spicy-food challenge. A similar pattern appears when Sean later asks MrBeast to perform a mental calculation. In both cases, the additional request placed further demands on the guest while he was already responding to the challenge.

No negative-face threats were identified in the Ariana Grande or Jennie episodes. Although all three guests experienced increasing physical discomfort, negative-face threats occurred only when the interview included additional requests from the host. Overall, these findings show that negative-face threats were relatively uncommon and were associated with

additional interactional demands rather than with physical discomfort alone.

Mitigation Strategies

The second research question examines how the identified Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) were mitigated by the host and guests throughout the interviews. Four mitigation strategies were identified: positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, and bald-on-record. Each FTA was assigned one primary mitigation strategy based on its dominant pragmatic function. Responses such as reassurance, agreement, humor, and encouragement were treated as part of the broader process of face management rather than as separate mitigation strategies.

Table 3. Distribution of Mitigation Across Three episodes

Mitigation Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Positive politeness	20	54.1%
Negative politeness	5	13.5%
Off-record	8	21.6%
Bald on record	4	10.8%
Total	37	100%

As shown in Table 3, positive politeness was the most frequently used mitigation strategy, accounting for 20 of the 37 cases (54.1%). Off-record strategies occurred eight times (21.6%), followed by negative politeness with five cases (13.5%) and bald-on-record with four cases (10.8%).

These results indicate that participants generally preferred strategies that maintained rapport while managing face-threatening situations. Direct strategies occurred less frequently than strategies that reduced interpersonal tension.

Table 4. Distribution of Mitigation Strategies Across Interview Stages

Interview Stages	Positive Politeness	Negative Politeness	Off-record	Bald on record	Total
Early	5	1	2	0	8
Middle	2	1	3	0	6
Final	13	3	3	4	23
Total	20	5	8	4	37

As shown in Table 4, positive politeness remained the most frequent mitigation strategy across all stages of the interview. By contrast, all bald-on-record strategies occurred only during the final stage of the spicy-food challenge.

Overall, the distribution shows that different mitigation strategies continued to be used throughout the interview. Although direct expressions became more frequent in the final stage, supportive strategies remained the dominant pattern across the interaction.

Positive Politeness

Positive politeness was the most frequently used mitigation strategy, accounting for more than half of all identified cases. This strategy appeared throughout the interview and was commonly used to maintain rapport during face-threatening situations.

One example occurs when Ariana says that she *"did not feel confident at all."* Sean responds by reassuring her that guests who feel that way often perform well on the show. Rather than focusing on her self-doubt, he encourages her and helps maintain a supportive interaction.

A similar pattern appears when Jennie expresses fear and discomfort during the challenge. Sean responds with humor and encouragement instead of emphasizing her physical struggle. In both examples, reassurance and encouragement helped maintain a positive interaction despite the guests' expressions of vulnerability.

Negative Politeness

Negative politeness occurred five times and was mainly realized through apologies, hedging, and acknowledgements of imposition.

One example occurs when Ariana says, *"Excuse me,"* after an involuntary burp. Her apology acknowledges the possible social disruption caused by her physical reaction. Sean then reassures her by describing the show as a *"safe space,"* allowing the interaction to continue comfortably.

Another example appears when Sean asks MrBeast to evaluate a thumbnail by introducing the request with the expression *"if you'll humor me."* The expression softens the request before asking MrBeast to complete an additional task during the spicy-food challenge.

Together, these examples show that negative politeness was primarily used to reduce interpersonal pressure while maintaining cooperation between the host and guests.

Off-record

Off-record strategies were identified in eight cases, making them the second most frequently used mitigation strategy. These strategies were characterized by indirect expressions that allowed participants to convey criticism or discomfort without stating it explicitly.

One example occurs when Jennie asks, *"Has anyone died here?"* Rather than directly describing the challenge as excessively difficult or unsafe, she expresses her evaluation through a rhetorical question. The indirect wording communicates concern while leaving the intended meaning open to interpretation.

A similar pattern appears in several interactions where participants expressed discomfort through humor or exaggerated remarks instead of making direct complaints. These indirect expressions allowed participants to communicate negative evaluations while maintaining the light-hearted

atmosphere of the interview. Overall, the findings show that off-record strategies enabled participants to express criticism and discomfort without disrupting the ongoing interaction.

Bald-on-record

Bald-on-record strategies occurred in four cases, all of which appeared during the final stage of the spicy-food challenge. Compared with the other mitigation strategies, this was the least frequently used strategy.

One example occurs when MrBeast says that he thinks he is going to throw up. Rather than softening or reformulating his statement, he expresses his physical condition directly. Another example appears when Ariana describes one of the sauces as "*terrible*" and "*disgusting*." Unlike indirect evaluations, these utterances communicate participants' reactions explicitly.

Although bald-on-record strategies became more visible during the final stage of the challenge, they represented only a small proportion of the overall data. The findings indicate that participants continued to rely primarily on supportive mitigation strategies even when they experienced greater physical discomfort.

Discussion

The findings show that physical discomfort forms part of the interactional context in which face is negotiated. Although participants experienced increasing physical discomfort throughout the spicy-food challenge, they did not respond with a single pattern of Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) or mitigation strategies. Instead, different types of FTAs and politeness strategies appeared across the interviews, depending on the interactional situation. This pattern supports the view that face is continuously negotiated through interaction instead of being determined by a single contextual factor (Brown & Levinson,

1987; Lamata, 2026; Rahardi, 2025; Sifianou, 2021; Virtanen, 2022). The findings therefore suggest that physical discomfort shapes the context of interaction, while speakers continue to negotiate face according to the communicative demands of each situation.

The predominance of self-directed positive-face threats provides a different perspective from previous studies on interview discourse. Brown and Levinson (1987) describe positive face as a person's desire to gain approval from others. In the present study, however, guests most often threatened their own positive face by openly expressing fear, uncertainty, embarrassment, and physical weakness. These expressions were not intended to challenge the interviewer but reflected participants' responses to the spicy-food challenge while remaining engaged in the interview. This pattern is consistent with recent studies that view face as an interactional achievement that develops throughout communication (Sifianou, 2021; Virtanen, 2022). It also agrees with Bruk et al. (2022), who argue that openly expressing vulnerability increases exposure to public evaluation. Unlike institutional or political interviews, where FTAs are commonly associated with confrontation or challenging questions (Yakimova, 2025), the present findings show that voluntary self-disclosure became the main source of positive-face threats in a digital entertainment interview.

The findings also highlight the role of embodied interaction in face negotiation. Physical discomfort alone did not produce FTAs. Instead, FTAs emerged through participants' responses to the interaction while experiencing physical discomfort. For example, Ariana acknowledged her weakness early in the interview, whereas MrBeast expressed a loss of physical control only during the final stage. Likewise, negative-face threats appeared only when the host introduced additional requests, not simply because participants experienced

greater physical discomfort. These patterns suggest that FTAs were shaped by interactional demands rather than by physical discomfort itself. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that bodily experiences become meaningful through social interaction (Hofstetter & Keevallik, 2020; Poggi, 2022; Weatherall et al., 2021). The findings therefore extend embodied approaches to pragmatics by showing how physical discomfort becomes part of the interactional context in which face is negotiated.

The analysis of mitigation strategies further demonstrates that face management remained collaborative throughout the interviews. Positive politeness was the dominant strategy across all stages of the spicy-food challenge, while bald-on-record strategies appeared only in the final stage. Even when participants experienced greater physical discomfort, supportive responses continued to occur alongside more direct expressions. This pattern is consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which proposes that speakers select politeness strategies according to contextual demands. It also agrees with previous studies showing that positive politeness helps maintain cooperation in interviews and talk shows (Ekanaafi & Afifah, 2026; Ramadhanti & Andriani, 2024; Surjowati & Kusnowati, 2024; Wahdani et al., 2023). At the same time, the use of negative politeness, off-record, and bald-on-record strategies reflects earlier findings that speakers balance interpersonal relationships, communicative goals, and mitigation in different interactional contexts (Banat et al., 2024; Cutting, 2002; Handayani & Purwaningrum, 2026; Laetitia, 2024; McAuley & Glenwright, 2025; Nsaif & Al-Jadiri, 2021; Suyono & Andriyanti, 2021). Together, these findings show that face management in *Hot Ones* was achieved collaboratively through the interaction

between the host and guests instead of relying on a single politeness strategy.

Finally, this study contributes to research on digital interview discourse by examining face negotiation in a YouTube entertainment interview. Previous studies have mainly focused on institutional or political interviews, where FTAs are often associated with confrontation, disagreement, or power relations (Handayani & Purwaningrum, 2026; Lamata, 2026; Tang, 2025; Yakimova, 2025). In contrast, the present study shows that FTAs developed through participants' voluntary expressions of vulnerability while managing increasing physical discomfort before a global online audience. These findings broaden the application of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory by demonstrating that face negotiation is influenced not only by interpersonal relationships but also by embodied experience and digitally mediated interaction. They also contribute to digital pragmatics by showing how speakers simultaneously negotiate interpersonal relationships and public self-presentation in contemporary online interview discourse (Scott, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study examined Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and mitigation strategies in three episodes of the YouTube talk show *Hot Ones*. The findings showed that positive-face threats occurred much more often than negative-face threats. Most positive-face threats were self-directed, as guests openly expressed fear, uncertainty, embarrassment, and physical weakness during the spicy-food challenge. In contrast, negative-face threats appeared only when the host asked guests to perform additional tasks. Among the four mitigation strategies, positive politeness was used most frequently throughout the interviews.

The findings also showed that physical discomfort forms part of the interactional context in which speakers negotiate face. Although participants experienced increasing physical discomfort, they did not rely on a single pattern of FTAs or mitigation strategies. Instead, they adjusted their responses according to the interaction. These findings extend Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory by showing that face negotiation is shaped by the interaction between embodied experience, public self-presentation, and digitally mediated communication. The study also contributes to digital pragmatics by showing how speakers negotiate face with both the interviewer and a global online audience.

This study has several limitations. It examined only three *Hot Ones* episodes and focused mainly on verbal interaction. Future research could analyse more episodes or compare different interview formats to determine whether similar patterns appear in other digital media settings. Future studies could also examine facial expressions, gestures, gaze, prosody, and other multimodal resources to provide a broader understanding of face negotiation in digitally mediated interaction.

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