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How do *likes* and *reactions* operate as interpersonal politeness strategies when evaluating Facebook status updates posted in 2016?

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Research has investigated Facebook *likes*, their role in evaluating online content, and expanding evaluative practices in a computer-mediated environment (Page, Harper & Frobenius, 2013; West & Trester, 2013; West, 2015). However, newly-released *reactions* on Facebook have not yet received much scholarly attention (cf. Tian et al., 2017). The current study takes an emic approach to inform bottom-up analysis of *likes* and *reactions* used to respond to Facebook status updates posted in 2016. Three stages of data have been collected: a self-report survey, a sub-sample of status updates, and a contextual questionnaire for status update authors. *Likes* and *reactions* were found to operate as interactional, interpersonal, and facework features in this online environment. These features are employed more for positive (than negative) evaluation, as a means to signal endorsement, and as a supportive minimal response that emulates offline positive feedback cues. *Likes* are particularly used as a form of facework; to signal to the status author that their status has been 'heard', read, and acknowledged (West, 2015: 54). Meanwhile, *reactions* such as *love* and *haha* can be used to maintain or display offline relationships. The small selection of status updates analysed in this study limits the accuracy of the conclusions reached, although the results are indicative of how *likes* and *reactions* are used as positive, supportive, politeness strategies when evaluating Facebook status updates. A further longitudinal study involving a larger status sample would increase the representative value of the current study's propositions, and would trace the uses and attitudes concerning *likes* and *reactions* as evaluative practices on Facebook over time.

References

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