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The climate of climate change: Impoliteness as a hallmark of homophily in YouTube comment threads on Greta Thunberg's environmental activism

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates impoliteness and value homophily ('thinking alike') in the context of YouTube-based ideological discussions beneath the videos critical towards the Swedish environmental activist – Greta Thunberg. Drawing on the idea of rapport management , the study finds a remarkable scale of homophily as the postings follow recurrent patterns of face and sociality rights attacks echoing the same point of view. Consequently, while impoliteness has been recognized as widespread in social media for reasons such as anonymity and social detachment, this paper offers an insight into how the phenomenon contributes to the process of consolidation and homogenization of views through social comparison. As the study concludes, impoliteness in ideological discussions on YouTube may serve as the glue to *ad hoc* social contact between like-minded individuals –ultimately leading to social identification in relevant groups and formation of homophilous online communities.

1. Introduction

As of February 2021, YouTube is probably the biggest online video platform worldwide, attracting two billion monthly unique users globally (youtube.com/about). While the content posted to the platform is primarily entertainment oriented, in the past years the role of YouTube in dissemination of public and institutional genres, such as political speeches, has grown significantly (Boyd, 2014; Johansson, 2017). However, even though the rise of the social web has spawned linguistic research into multiple digital contexts, ranging from social media and discussion boards, through recent investigations of online academic discourse (Kuteeva and Mauranen, 2018), YouTube commentary has not received as much attention. According to Johansson (2017), even though commenting is one of the technical affordances of YouTube, the common perception of the platform is that communication and/or interaction between people are secondary to other activities (e.g., media viewing). Perhaps for this reason, only 2.3% of the users decided to respond to the most viewed video (more than 22 million times at the time of that study) by the Swedish video gamer, PewDiePie (109 million subscribers as of February 2021).

However, the comment threads have been argued to make a substantive semantic content of YouTube pages as the users increasingly treat the platform as "a resource for deeper participatory engagement with media cultures" (Benson, 2017:29). Two somewhat distinct features of YouTube, however, are its volatile participation rules –as everyone may freely contribute to the ongoing discussion by simply taking or leaving the floor (Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014; Dynel, 2014),

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and its deindividuated context, where the participants remain anonymous and thus construct their identities only in terms of a relevant social category (i.e., a social or collective identity; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010). This is quite different from the process of forming social bonds within a homogenous online community, whose members regularly interact and identify themselves (and others) based on the pre-established norms and community values (e.g., discussion forum, personal blog; Graham, 2015). The question therefore arises about the staple of the participatory engagement purported to exist on YouTube, which is what the present paper intends to address.

The idea that underlies the study has been formulated by Cass Sunstein (2001:51):

> (…) there is a natural tendency to make choices, with respect to entertaining and news, that do not disturb our preexisting view of the world.

Therefore, given the deindividuation of the communicative environment of YouTube, the resulting loose community bonds, and yet the growing role of the platform in shaping the public opinion in areas as vital as education, health, politics or environment (Johansson, 2017), it can be argued that one incentive to engage in the discussions may be an *ad hoc* socio-cultural comparison in search of validation of one's own value views (Festinger, 1954).[1] Importantly, social comparison concerns not only individuals, but underlies also group definition and identification (Reicher et al., 1995). This fact has implications for the discursive settings where the participants' personal identity is backgrounded, and the prominent facet of communication is their social identity, shaped in the process of (dis)affiliation with certain groups (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010). It is in this particular context that the notion of 'value homophily' becomes relevant.

Homophily has been defined as a "tendency to interact more with similar others than with disparate others" (Abreu and Jeon, 2019), which leads to reinforcement and homogenization of the individual's (pre)existing beliefs and rejection of conflicting views (Dubois and Blank, 2018). As people tend to defend and bolster the interests and esteem of both their personal self-concept and the social groups they belong in (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), value homophily naturally leads to affiliation with some groups and disaffiliation from others. Group membership is particularly pertinent in discussions of ideological and political issues (where homophily has been indicated to breed extreme views; Sunstein, 2009). Thus, in line with the argument that people actively devise ways for explicitly conveying who is/is not part of the group (Tomasello, 2008), it is suggested here that a common denominator of homophily in the context of deindividuated ideologically charged discussions is impoliteness. The question of validation of one's own views and ensuing dismissal of others is intrinsic to the existing research into ideological (dis)affiliation in YouTube polylogues, focusing on impoliteness realization/assessment (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2011), communicative strategies for group (dis)alignment (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al., 2013), and conflict development (Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014). The present paper, however, intends to zoom in specifically on the wrap and weft of the strategies deployed for the purpose of amplification and reinforcement of people's (pre)existing beliefs, in order to obtain more comprehensive grasping of how value homophily manifests in discourse and how it ties to certain identity claims.

To this end, an analysis of the multiparticipant discussion threads (polylogues) beneath ten YouTube videos critical towards Greta Thunberg's appearance at the United Nations Climate Action Summit in September 2019 in New York[2] will be carried out. Thunberg is a Swedish teenager, who became the face of the youth climate movement, after she had launched the international School Strike for Climate in 2018. Included in the Forbes list of The World's 100 Most Powerful Women (2019), and having been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize (2019 and 2020),[3] yet —also known for her emotional and uncompromising stance, Thunberg has been a recurrent target of online hate speech, common trolling, and cyberbullying.[4] However, given the scale of the negative reactions following her public appearances, including unfavorable comments by influential world politicians (e.g., the then US president Donald Trump) and official media outlets (e.g., Sky News Australia), it may be argued that what has informed the currents of criticism and aggression towards the activist, is the nature of the message she intends to convey —more than her age or (purported) lack of experience. Climate change has been one of the most vigorously debated topics in both the mass media and social media in the past decades, involving serious normative controversies in terms of beliefs and values, and pervasive ideological cleavages (Chinn et al., 2020)[5]. It can be therefore assumed that the context under study will be conductive to (re)interpretation of arguments and (re)validation of sources and authorities (Edwards, 2013), all of which fosters both homophily and impoliteness.

Nevertheless, apart from the ideological leaning that Greta Thunberg may be associated with in the public eye, another reason why online discussions of her activism are an interesting context to study impoliteness, is the nowadays elusive paradigm of a public figure that she clearly epitomizes, as the hitherto public sphere has morphed into an increasingly private one. According to recent findings in behavioral psychology (Meloy and Amman, 2016), social media forge perceptions of the

[1] The reinforcing factor here is the highly algorithmic nature of YouTube —both the platform's official statistics and some independent research show that between 70 and 90% of the users watch the content recommended by an algorithm.

[2] Retrieved on 20.03.2020: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/video/2019/sep/23/greta-thunberg-to-world-leaders-how-dare-you-you-have-stolen-my-dreams-and-my-childhood-video.

[3] Source: Wikipedia.

[4] Retrieved on 10.04.2020: https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/10/02/climate-change-activist-greta-thunberg-targeted-online-trolls/3843196002/.

[5] While this study tackles specifically the US context, it can be assumed that similar problems occur also elsewhere.

relationship between the public figure and the public as intimate and give an illusion of proximity —as the participation of ordinary people in media production and culture increases. While this factor has certainly figured in the social media scrutiny of Donald Trump's hairdo, Thunberg embodies the problematic split between the private and the public spheres even more so. Based on the young age, family background, and her own emphasis of political impartiality[6] —on the one hand, and her involvement in public affairs —on the other, the activist is likely to be perceived by the public as a messenger of an unclear conspiracy, yet —easy to discredit as a "next-door girl".

In order to account for this potentially vague dichotomy, the current study adopts the extension to the traditional notion of face as an 'identity or self-image' (Goffman, 1955), and Brown and Levinson's (1987) division between positive and negative face, proposed by Spencer-Oatey (e.g., 2008) as the model of 'relational management'. This model establishes a relevant distinction between self-value (face) and social value —the latter concerned with a person's sense of public worth and his/her value in terms of social relationships. However, while it can be assumed that in the current data, impoliteness against both face and social value of Greta Thunberg will be identified, the analysis intends to deploy the tenets of Spencer-Oatey's model in line with Garcés-Conejos Blitvich's (2010) argument that in the deindividuated context of intergroup communication, attacks towards face should be perceived as addressed to an individual as a member of a relevant group, and so to collective rather than individual face. Consequently, impoliteness will be viewed here in terms of the resonance between the participants' efforts to reinforce and (re)affirm (pre)existing ideological beliefs and their social identity claims.

To sum up: the goal of the paper is to analyze the relationship between value homophily and expression of impoliteness towards Greta Thunberg's environmental activism in YouTube discussion threads. The overarching question to ask, however, is whether the current data do exhibit a homophilous profile. This problem can be addressed by an investigation of two more detailed research questions:

RQ1: (i) Does impoliteness in the data contribute to (re)affirmation of the same point of view? (ii) If yes, in what way, specifically?

i. Hypothesis: The critical stance of the videos will attract like-minded individuals with a preference for opinion reinforcement and group boundaries demarcation upon the encounter of dissenting views (Kies, 2010). In the context under study, impoliteness will be deployed for that purpose; yet, given Thunberg's public role, her sociality rights may be attacked more frequently.
ii. Hypothesis: Since the notion of self-value (i.e., face) pertains to the familiar standards of physical appearance (e.g., 'ugly') or social categories (e.g., 'peasant'), these aspects may be conveniently targeted via explicit impoliteness (e.g., insult; Culpeper, 2011, section 2.3). Sociality rights attacks, however, as pertaining directly to social relationships and thus epitomizing the poster's (dis)affiliation with certain views, may yield more conceptual variability or even creativity (e.g., intertextuality in (9) below; see section 1.2 for the description of Spencer-Oatey's model).

RQ2: (i) To what extent are the views conveyed in the top posts accepted by other participants? (ii) Is there any difference between the level of acceptance of different types of impoliteness as targeting face or sociality rights?

iii. Hypothesis: Responses to the top posts will be mainly echoing the same point of view, yet the scale of acceptance of specific impoliteness categories may differ. Attacks towards face may lead to more disagreement, for they are less relevant to Thunberg's social role and/or break the norms of civility in public discourse, which underlie common assessments of impoliteness (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2011).

Finally, while the investigation of the role of impoliteness in manifestation of value homophily, and thus in the process of formation of like-minded online communities, is the main contribution of the current paper, the study offers corpus-informed, quantitative (including an automatic technique for word clustering retreival; section 3.1 below) and qualitative perspectives on how this process unfolds in discourse. As argued in the recent literature, combining different methods and approaches (corpus analysis in particular) is a necessary step towards understanding the nuanced and complex nature of impoliteness (Haugh and Culpeper, 2018).

In the following, a discussion of homophily in the context of research into impoliteness in intergroup communication on YouTube can be found in section 1.1; section 1.2 introduces Spencer-Oatey's model of rapport management and its adaptation for the studies of impoliteness by Culpeper (2011). Section 2 outlines the data collection procedure, section 3 presents the findings, while sections 4 and 5 offer close-up qualitative interpretations and general conclusions.

1.1. Previous studies: impoliteness on YouTube and value homophily

Discussions in internet fora, such as YouTube comment threads, have been argued to be instances of public discourse, which should be governed by the rules of civility (Sellers, 2004). However, even though the rules of civility have been found to underlie the participants' assessments of (im)politeness in YouTube-based interactions (e.g., Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2011; Lange,

[6] For instance, Thunberg's Tweeter posts from December 2019.

2014), according to a British broadcaster (cited in Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014:24), the platform is the host to "some of the most confrontational and ill-formed comments on the internet". Interestingly, as Boyd (2014) points out, aggressive verbal behavior on YouTube is not only often ignored but, in fact, commonly perceived as a factor positively contributing to the scale of the users' participation.

While factors underlying impoliteness on the internet are many (e.g., anonymity,[7] depersonalization of the interlocutors, physical distance; Moor et al., 2010; Boyd, 2014; Graham and Hardaker, 2017), the phenomenon has been described as significantly contributing to creation of identities, bond formation, and group membership demarcation online (e.g., Angouri and Tseliga, 2010; Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014; Graham and Hardaker, 2017; Kleinke and Bös, 2015). The latter figures particularly in ideologically charged discussions between opposing groups, where impoliteness is commonly deployed to aid social comparison and facilitate (dis)affiliation with relevant values and beliefs (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al., 2013; Kleinke and Bös, 2015). Many of these phenomena have been explored in the context of YouTube polylogues. In the study of the 2008 US presidential elections-related discussions, impoliteness has been demonstrated to serve the purpose of making the attributes of the out-group undesirable thus allowing the desirable social positioning of self and others (e.g., 'Those who oppose Obama are racists'; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010). Interestingly, the paper found that verbal attacks tend to follow specific recurrent patterns (e.g., usually begin with attacks towards the candidates), which is a relevant entry point to the discussion of homophily on the platform. A related study, focusing specifically on the question of establishing and reinforcing social identification with groups (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al., 2013), demonstrated that affiliation and cohesiveness are more commonly achieved via positive politeness strategies establishing common ground between the participants, while disaffiliation involves positive face damage to the out-group members (e.g., stigmatizing description). The particularly relevant angle of this paper is the micro-level analysis of social identity construction in the instances of impolite language use, based on van Dijk's (1998) 'ideological square', which captures the binary strategies of positive in-group and negative out-group description (e.g., emphasize our good properties *vs.* emphasize their bad properties). As the authors conclude, while categorizing oneself as a member of a group hinges upon a positive presentation of the in-group, disaffiliation relies on unfavorable presentation of the out-group; however, these two are not discrete categories, for affiliation with one group results in contemporaneous disaffiliation with another (e.g., Obama supporter is a non-supporter of another candidate). As indicated also in other studies, a common strategy for (dis)affiliation with relevant groups in YouTube polylogues is impoliteness, for not only opposing but also supporting the same ideological position tends to be stated aggressively (Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2011).

These considerations bring us back to the notion of homophily, defined as a natural propensity to seek interactions and connect with others of similar social status (e.g., religion, education, income, occupation) or values (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, and aspirations; McPherson et al., 2001). As the increasing body of literature on the praxeology of human behavior online indicates, despite the undeniable advantages of the internet for one's personal growth, the digital media ecosystem commonly contributes to the development of 'echo chambers', i.e., like-minded communities where one's (pre)existing beliefs are reinforced and amplified, whereas exposure to attitude-challenging content becomes limited[8] (e.g., Edwards, 2013 on fora; Garimella et al., 2018 on Twitter; Grömping, 2014 on Facebook). While the question whether YouTube is an echo chamber in the technical understanding of the term (a task that comprises large-scale statistical measuring of the substance and patterning of social networks of the users) is beyond the current scope, the study assumes that the mainstay of social comparison between the groups on the platform are (pre)existing values, attitudes and beliefs shared among the involved participants. This assumption has been inspired by recent findings in sociology suggesting that the individuals more prone to homophilic behavior usually support conservative ideologies (e.g., Boutyline and Willer, 2016, on Twitter); however, in the context under study, the perpetuating factor will be the 'top-down' ideological framing of the videos (recall Hypothesis (i)). That often results in a homophilous profile of the ensuing interactions, validating both the users' and the creators' point of view, and contributing to development and consolidation of like-minded groups (Kies, 2010).

Nevertheless, the only previous research focusing specifically on value homophily in social media seems Gu at al.'s (2014) analysis of the Yahoo! Finance message boards, which has found that investors are more likely to respond to the threads that echo their own opinions – despite the potential benefits of interaction with different views. While certainly relevant, the study establishes the presence of homophily through an automatic opinion extraction technique based on the lexical distinction between positive and negative polarities (i.e., sentiment analysis; Benamara et al., 2016). As demonstrated in section 3.1 below, automatic techniques that rely on the lexical component do enable quick and effective text profiling (e.g., by theme); however, their obvious limitation is the lack of attention to actual language use, and failure to account for implied meanings, which is what an analysis of impoliteness in discourse requires (e.g., Culpeper, 2016).

1.2. Impoliteness and Spencer-Oatey's model of rapport management

Spencer-Oatey's (2008) model of rapport management was proposed in response to Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of face, framed as two basic needs in social interaction: the need to be accepted (positive face) and the need to not be imposed

[7] However, linking YouTube channels to Google accounts has led to many users identifying themselves by their real names (Benson, 2017).

[8] However, as Barbera (2015) or Dubois and Blank (2018) argue, given people's multiple media access, only a small percentage of the population are likely to find themselves in an echo chamber.

upon (negative face). This seminal approach has been criticized for its focus on the individual freedom and autonomy, and a conspicuous disregard of social identity concerns (e.g., group membership). In contrast, in Spencer-Oatey's (2002) view, social context is the *sine qua non* for analyzing face needs, which should not be confined to individual but comprise also potential needs of the group(s) that individuals may identify themselves with. Similar concept of collective (group) face has been pursued in the aforementioned analyses of (im)politeness on YouTube (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich's, 2010; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al., 2013).

Spencer-Oatey's (2002; 2008) model deals with Brown and Levinson's (1987) focus on individual face through its epistemologically most appealing feature —the explicit distinction between 'face', perceived as three related categories of self-image and self-value, and 'sociality rights', captured in two categories of 'personal/social entitlements', which arise from expectation or/and from the social convention that has developed in a specific context. Despite its partial overlap with the classic distinctions between positive and negative face (e.g., positive face overlaps with quality face; Culpeper, 2016; see Table 1 below), the approach has been argued to better account for the vague orientation of politeness strategies, which frequently combine in interaction —the issue that applies also to impoliteness. As demonstrated in the literature, the distinctions between different impoliteness strategies, entrenched in Brown and Levinson's traditional divide (hence: bald on-record, positive, negative and off-record impoliteness, and an additional category of withhold politeness; Culpeper, 1996), become vague as the specific 'output strategies' (e.g., scorn) tend to target both positive and negative face (according to Culpeper (2016), scorn is the opposite of Brown and Levinson's deference, and so it may be regarded as negative impoliteness).

Table 1
Spencer-Oatey's (2002; 2008) model of rapport management and Culpeper's (2011) summary questions on face and sociality rights concerns.

Face Defined as "a social value a person effectively claims for himself [sic] by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (2008:13)	**Quality face**: concerns the value we claim for ourselves in terms of personal qualities, competence, abilities, appearance. (2002:540) **Relational face**: related to self in relationship with others. Concerns the relations which we claim for ourselves to have with a significant other or others. (Culpeper, 2011:30) **Social identity face**: concerns the value we effectively claim for ourselves in terms of social or group roles. Related to public worth. (2002:540)	**Summary question on face concerns:** Does the interaction evoke an understanding that something counters a positive attribute (or attributes) which a participant claims not only to have but to be assumed by other participant(s) as having? (2011:27)
Sociality rights Defined as "the fundamental social entitlements that a person effectively claims for him/herself in his/her interactions with others" (2008:13)	**Equity rights**: concerns the belief that we are not exploited, disadvantaged, unfairly ordered, controlled or imposed upon. (2008:16) **Association rights**: concerns the belief that we are entitled to social involvement with others in keeping with the type of relationship we have with them. (2008:16)	**Summary question on sociality rights concerns:** Does the interaction evoke an understanding that something counters a state of affairs which a participant considers to be considerate and fair? (2011:39)

As a result, Spencer-Oatey's ideas have been reconceptualized and utilized for more refined analyses of impoliteness in natural language data (Culpeper, 2005, 2011, 2016). As shown in Table 1, the original model has been complemented by two 'summary questions' developed specifically for the study of impoliteness (see Culpeper, 2011 for a full account), which may be applied to evaluate whether face and/or sociality rights are compromised in an interaction. These elaborations underlie the coding of the current dataset (see section 2.3). While space precludes a full outline of the model, Table 1 provides a detailed overview, including the categories of face and sociality rights mentioned above. Following Culpeper (2011), these categories are referred to as specific types/categories of impoliteness (e.g., equity rights impoliteness) in the following.

On a final note, following Culpeper (2011), the term 'impoliteness' is treated here as a 'blanket term' that covers semantic fields of other, related concepts, such as: offensive language, verbal aggression, rudeness and, to some extent, hate speech. While conceptualizations of the latter phenomenon vary, it is generally accepted that hate speech must "target an individual or group on the basis of so-called 'protected characteristics', such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation etc." (Baider et al., 2020:172). The current analysis does not focus on hate speech *per se*; however, the idea that hate speech often intersects with impoliteness has been adopted for interpretation in some cases (cf. Kienpointner, 2018, section 4).

2. Method

2.1. Data collection

The corpus data comprise a four-month period (September–December 2019), following the search 'Greta Thunberg UN speech'; based on a negative word/implication in the clip title, and including at least 500 posts in the comment section. Ten

videos[9] were collected as a result, including seven independent creators, and three clips by the Sky News Australia Chanel. Thus, no differentiation has been made between established media and smaller creators, and so all posts are considered available data on YouTube. Perhaps surprisingly, only the ten videos analyzed in the following did match the search customization at the time of the data retrieval, albeit more specific filters (e.g., 'Thunberg hysterical UN speech'), could have generated more hits. This strategy was, however, not deployed, to avoid a bias in search results. As of January 2020, there was a total of 33770 posts in the collected material (average ratio: 3752 posts per video). The data were harvested automatically and anonymized in line with common ethical principles of Association of Internet Researchers (Franzke et al., 2020).

2.2. Word cluster analysis

In order to identify potentially homophilous traits in the studied corpus (RQ1(i)), the first step was an automatized cluster analysis (e.g., Feldman and Sanger, 2007) carried out on the whole volume of the harvested data (483070 words). To this end, the word2vec model (Mikolov et al., 2013) was implemented, which is a computational technique of deriving semantic and/or contextual associations between words, based on their distributions in an unannotated corpus. As a result, the data can be represented as points in an optimized space (as opposed to the large input), where the distance between those points correlates with their semantic or contextual proximity (e.g., 'France—Paris' or 'king-man'; Mikolov et al., 2013).

The analytical procedure started with the selection of the tested word, which in this case was 'Greta', and a subsequent choice of the measured distance, which was set at the top 50 words strongly associated with 'Greta' in the corpus. A list of 100 words was excluded prior to the analysis (e.g., grammatical words, acronyms, usernames etc.). The output is discussed in section 3.1 below.

2.3. Top posts

In order to address RQ1 ((i) and (ii)), the first step was to retrieve a random sample of 500 top posts (50 per video) —in this study understood as comments that initiate the discussions with responses, in order to identify impoliteness categories in the corpus. Each of the collected top posts was posted by a different user.

The starting point of the analysis was assigning the posts to the categories of impoliteness, based on Spencer-Oatey's (2008) and Culpeper's (2011; Table 1) framework. Perhaps not unexpectedly, some postings involve two (and in rare cases — three) impoliteness categories, so that the answer to Culpeper's summary questions could be affirmative for both. For instance, (1) below, expresses both a derogatory comment on Thunberg's personal qualities ('new age brat') and infringement upon her association rights in the preceding sentence. In such cases, double labelling was allowed for:

(1) I am totally turned off by her virtue signaling. New age brat.

A single label was used for utterances like (2) below, where the infringement of the equity rights (belittling, ridicule, unfair treatment; Culpeper, 2011) can be argued to be the main intention of the poster, as the phrase 'temper tantrum', imbricated under its scope, does not determine this intention:[10]

(2) Why doesnt Greta go to China and throw her temper tantrums...ya know why, because the Chinese Government would laugh hilariously as she was led to prison.[11]

Subsequently, the top posts were coded according to the model of bottom-up impoliteness formulae (Culpeper, 2011, 2016). The identified instances of impoliteness include both explicit formulae (e.g., insults, unpalatable questions, dismissals) and non-conventionalized implicational impoliteness (e.g., sarcasm, mimicry (pseudo)aphorism; Culpeper, 2011). Table A1 in Appendix 1 provides current data examples of each formula assigned to Spencer-Oatey's (2008) categories.

2.4. Reactions to the top posts

In order to address RQ2 and asses the scale of (dis)agreement with the point of view of the top posts, a next step was to select a random top post from each of the five impoliteness categories per each of the ten videos (i.e., a total of 50 top posts thus grouped into five categories) and qualitatively analyze the context of the ensuing discussion threads (a total of 2171 posts) for the reaction types they convey — crudely — a reaction of agreement or disagreement with the level of impoliteness and the opinion expressed. Since one of the underlying assumptions of Spencer-Oatey's (2008) model is that the concept of face should be at least broadly shared by all people, the present study conceives of impoliteness as a 'social practice', which the participants will be able to recognize and assess accordingly (Kádár and Haugh, 2013).

[9] See the reference list.

[10] The phrase certainly contributes to the impolite coloring to the whole utterance; however, for feasibility of the quantitative analysis, decision was made to keep to a manageable number of categories.

[11] The orthography and typography of the original posts are preserved.

As the post-by-post progression of the discussions in massive polylogues is often hard to follow, only the threads with up to 100 replies have been considered. Further, discarded content includes links to other videos and sites, emojis, or responses to an unclear addressee. A category quantified in the samples yet not entirely germane to the current analytical purposes, are exchanges on loosely related topics (e.g., global warming) with no impoliteness involved, coded as neutral (n). Finally, the two relevant categories of responses, have been coded as agreement (a) or disagreement (d) with the view expressed in the top post. The major problem with the distinction between agreement and disagreement is that both can be conveyed not only by an explicit indication but also by implicit echoing of the preceding argument (see Table 2 below). Moreover, although certain lexical means/rhetorical strategies may primarily relate to either agreement or disagreement, most of them can be used for both – the observation confirmed also in a study of (dis)agreement in online communication by Baym (1996). For instance, while repetition of the prior speaker's utterance has been argued to be typically related to agreement (e.g., Brown and Levinson, 1987; Tannen, 1990), as the current corpus example below illustrates, it can felicitously preface disagreement as well:

(3) User1: She is paid by Soros and the left!
User2: Yeah, she is paid by Soros and the left…Bullcrap!

Consequently, since the present analysis is not concerned with different realizations and pragmatic functions of (dis)agreement in discourse,[12] and the categories established in the literature are not unambiguous, the data have been coded based on a crude distinction between explicit and implicit realizations of the two notions, and the potentially related cues/strategies identified earlier by Baym (1996). The general guidelines on disambiguation of (dis)agreement are illustrated in Table 2 below:

Table 2
Categories of agreement and disagreement.

Potential strategy	Agreement	Disagreement
Explicit		
explicit indication	*Indeed!*	*Disagree.*
affirming/contradicting the prior message	*Well said, bro!*	*This is a lie!*
acknowledging/rejecting the other's perspective	*I see your point.*	*What are talking about?*
Implicit		
elaborations/reasoning	*A: She's a puppet!* *B: That's how her greedy parents make money!*	A: *She's a puppet!* B: *She's just a confused girl with Asperger's!*
Ambiguous		
apologies/framing as non-offensive/repetitions	*I'm sorry, I must have misunderstood your point, you're right.*	*I'm sorry, this is bullshit!*

On the left-hand side of Table 2 are Baym's (1996) strategies used to create (dis)agreement. As to the explicit category, while the identified elements often unambiguously mark either agreement or disagreement, each of them may felicitously preface a partial (dis)agreement, as illustrated in (4):

(4) User1: She is just a girl who is passionate about things! Even if her Asperger's makes her look obsessed…
User2: Yes, she's an Asperger teen, usually they obsessed about themes. But she's been weaponized by their parents along with the left, the new religion of the west.

While the first sentence by User2 expresses agreement with the previous post (via explicit 'yes' and repetition –note how this differs from the sarcastic stance of User2 in (3) above), in the second sentence, the user disagrees. This post could potentially be interpreted in line with Brown and Levinson's (1987) rule of avoiding disagreement by 'appearing to agree'; however, what is suggested here is that in the deindividuated settings of intergroup communication, the agreement in (4) may serve as a deliberate strategy to reinforce User2's contrasting opinion (emphasized by the concessive 'but'). Consequently, such posts were coded as disagreement (14 instances identified).[13]

The next category in Table 2 is implicit (dis)agreement, which is not related to any particular linguistic cues, and so the utterances may either support or counter a specific point of view by expanding on the preceding argument (often via elaboration, as seen in the second sentence by User2 in (4) above). In contrast, the category 'ambiguous (dis)agreement' is bound to specific phrases/rhetorical strategies, which can be used for both purposes (like the repetition in the first sentence by User2 in (4)). To sum up, while this list may not be exhaustive from the point of view of all intricacies of (dis)agreement construal in discourse, it is sufficient for the categorization of the current data.

Nevertheless, in order to reduce this risk of too arbitrary classifications, an additional category, labelled 'conflict' (c), has been established. In this study, conflict is defined as exchanges of multiple postings[14] which follow disagreement, usually

[12] Therefore, no specific categorizations of the posts will be included in the discussion.
[13] No instance of partial disagreement, where the user firsts disagrees and then agrees, has been found.
[14] In the literature sometimes referred to as 'flamewar' (Perelmutter, 2013).

after just one or two turns (see (6) below). Although broadly related, these exchanges usually involve departures from the core theme of the top post. Consequently, while disagreement is intrinsic to conflict (Locher, 2004), and could therefore be argued to underlie conflict progression, the current study distinguishes between the two for the simple reason that the assessment of the poster's positioning towards the view expressed in top post may not always be reliable in the context of multi-participant discussions pervaded by insults, provocations, and vaguely relevant content:

(5) You obviously were born stupid, in a barn, under the manure pile...

What (5) suggests is that the primary purpose of conflict, as defined above, is controlling/winning the interaction ('ping pong' communication; Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2017) rather than verification of the user's beliefs. For this reason, the current study aims to depart from this type of interpersonal confrontations between the participants as much as possible.[15]

One final remark concerns the specific method of coding the internal structure of the discussion threads, which was chosen with respect to the goal of: (i) reducing the number of potential categories; (ii) arriving at a broad picture of the reaction types in the data. Consequently, instances of objection towards disagreement with the top post were labelled as (a), i.e., agreement with the top post, while objection to an (a) response to the top post, was coded as (d). This is illustrated in (6) below, where User1's criticism of the top post (d) is met by an objection by User2 (coded as (a)):

(6) Her parents are making money off of her. (top post)
User1: You MUST be a TRUMP fan. He LIES a lot every days as well. Greta's parents are amazing and (…) are already financially successful and born thus have zero reason to exploit their one daughter. (…) (d)
User2: @user1 What absolute rubbish. (a)

Lastly, in order to determine whether there is a significant relationship between the rates of 'agreement', 'disagreement', conflict', and the category of impoliteness in line with Spencer-Oatey's (2008) model, a two-factor (category x video) analysis of variance (ANOVA) has been carried out. While the effect of 'video' factor *per se* is outside the current scope, the variation between the investigated videos is an intrinsic component of the study design. It was therefore included for the validity of the statistical analysis (see section 3.3 below).

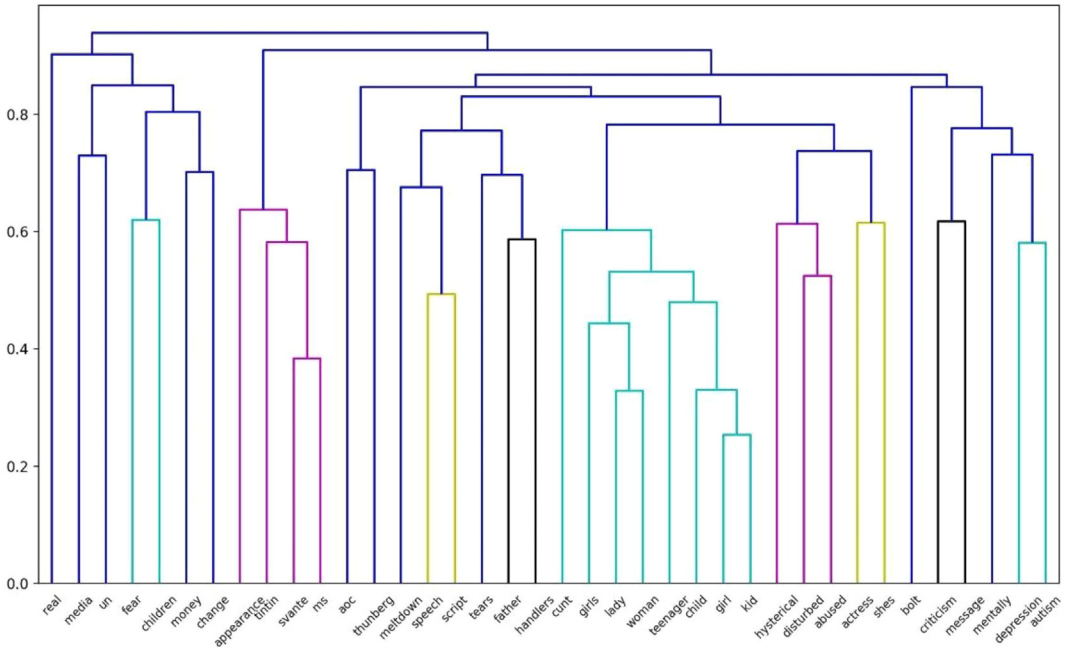

Fig. 1. Words associated with the item 'Greta' in the current data.

[15] Further, from the statistical point of view, counting multiple postings by the same participants as separate instances of 'agreement' or 'disagreement', would be skewing the picture.

3. Results

3.1. Word cluster analysis

The branching diagram below (Fig. 1) represents the associations between the word 'Greta' and the top 50 words in the current corpus, thus yielding a general thematic profile of the data (RQ1(i)). The height of the branches indicates the relationships between the associated words: the lower the height, the smaller the contextual distance.

Apart from the associations pertaining to the broad context of the videos (such as: *UN* and *media* to the left in the diagram), the word 'Greta' is linked to disorders ('autism'; 'depression'), derogatory evaluative terms ('hysterical', 'disturbed'), and age assessments ('kid'; 'girl'). Perhaps less unexpectedly, these notions occur at the same height of the branches, which means they are strongly associated to each other. However, a more remarkable set of clusters can be found in the middle-left part of the diagram, starting with the word "Thunberg", and comprising associations such as: 'father/handlers' and 'script/speech'. Not only are these notions obviously related to the activist in the data (via the word 'Greta'), but the proximity between, for instance, 'father' and 'handlers', reflects the overall stance of the postings. Utterances purporting the agentive role of Thunberg's father as her 'handler' are, indeed, quite common. The same concerns the claims of Thunberg's having read her UN speech off a 'script'. While the above analysis does not account for the context of actual communicative situations that generate the identified associations, this output is certainly informative about the thematic profile of the high volume of the current data and suggests that certain beliefs are commonly shared among the participants.

3.2. Top posts analysis

Fig. 2 below illustrates the proportions of impoliteness categories in the current sample of 500 top posts, as well as the summary of distributions of the most frequent impoliteness formulae/triggers identified:

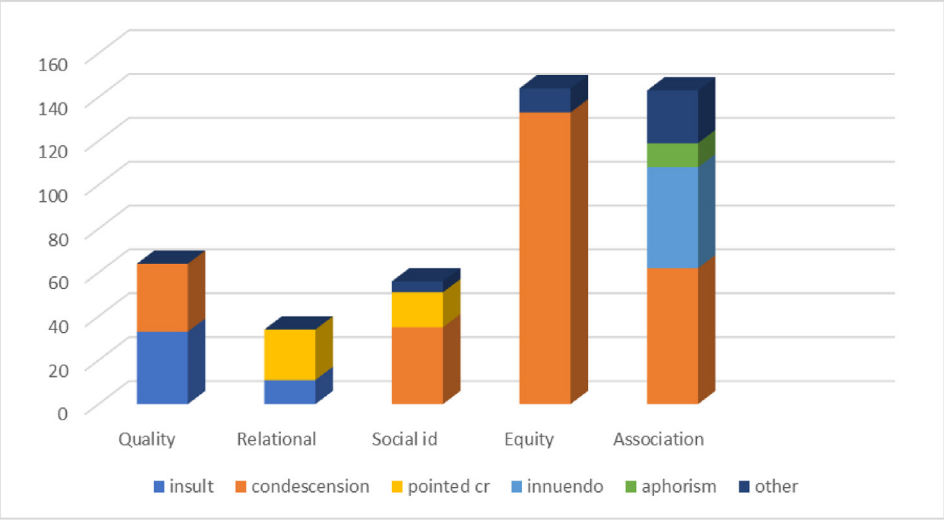

Fig. 2. Bottom-up impoliteness formulae in the five categories of impoliteness.

As predicted in Hypothesis (i), attacks on sociality rights are more frequent (≥70%) than those on face (≥29%) ($t = 1{,}9647$; $p < 0.001$) in the corpus. The most targeted aspect of Greta Thunberg's persona is equity rights (185/500 = 37%), followed by association rights (168/500 = 33%). The least common attacks target relational face (33/500 = 7%), preceded by social identity (51/500 = 10%), and quality face (63/500 = 13%). However, about 20% of the posts were coded for two categories, and ≥77% of the second labels concern quality face. This means that while the overall interest in the activist's social role prevails in the data, the posters may embed face related commentaries under the scope of other arguments.

As to the bottom-up formulae, as predicted, there seem to be differences in how impoliteness is realized in face *vs.* sociality rights categories. Explicit impoliteness predominates in all face categories, amounting to ≥80% quality face attacks (as either a sole or one of several triggers) and ≥70% of relational face attacks. These findings only partly confirm Hypothesis (ii), since equity rights turn out to be targeted mostly via condescension (expressed as contempt and patronizing in ≥49% and ≥36% of cases), which is an explicit formula (Culpeper, 2016). However, a substantial proportion of association rights impoliteness has been found to be expressed via implicit means (≥27% innuendo and ≥12% aphorism). Overall, these findings are in line with previous research which, while using earlier models of impoliteness categorization (Culpeper, 1996), found a general preference for explicit ('on-record') impoliteness in YouTube discussion threads (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010; Lorenzo-Dus

et al., 2011). More in-depth inquiries could investigate potential correlations between impoliteness formulae, impoliteness categories, and their more specific causes.

3.3. Reactions to the top posts

As Hypothesis (iii) (RQ2) assumed, a majority of the ideas expressed in the top posts have been accepted by the users. The degree of agreement differs somewhat between the categories and spans between ≈43% (for association rights) and ≈55% (for quality face) (Fig. 3). However, the results of a two-factor (category x video) analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated no effect of the impoliteness category on the frequencies of 'agreement', 'disagreement', and 'conflict', yet a significant effect of the video was found. This effect is particularly strong for 'conflict' (F-ratio = 2.55, p-value < 0.01) and suggests that some videos will generate more conflicts. The picture remains the same if the impoliteness category is replaced by the two hypercategories of face and sociality rights.

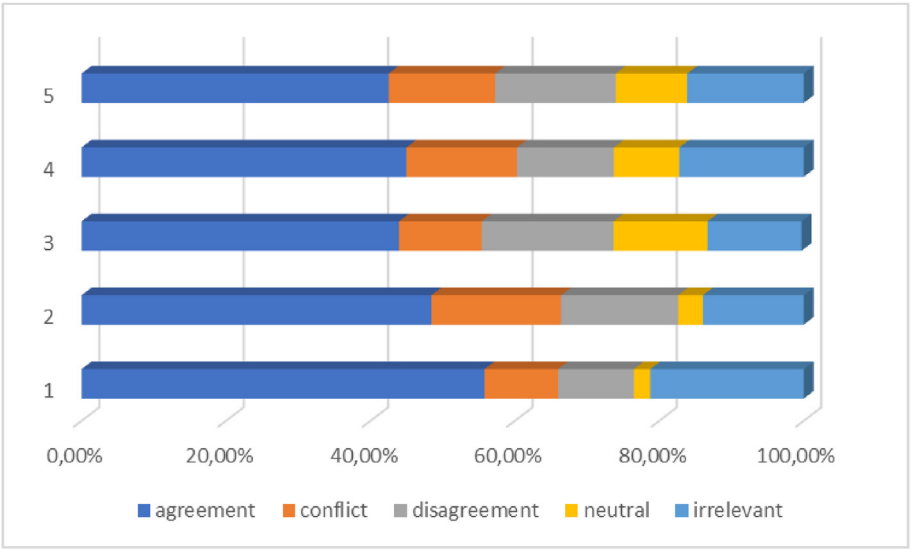

Fig. 3. Reactions to the top posts.

These results are evocative of the homogeneity of reactions to the top posts and point to a homophilous profile of the discussion threads; however, while a higher rate of 'agreement' than 'disagreement' in the corpus was anticipated, Hypothesis (iii) was only partly confirmed, as all attacks turned out to be accepted almost equally often —regardless of the type of impoliteness involved. In this respect, the least surprising results are those for 'conflict', which indicate a much smaller effect of the impoliteness category than expected by pure chance and confirm that 'conflict' is not fully representative of the scale of value homophily. As argued in section 2.4 above, conflicts are often populated by the same individuals (as also seen in the current data)[16] and involve 'ping-pong' exchanges or common trolling (i.e., deliberate provocations; profanities; Hardaker, 2010). They may therefore be less predictable as to impoliteness category; however, the general implication of the obtained significant effect of the video is that the scale of value homophily will also relate to questions such as the strategies the creators deploy to appeal to the audience (e.g., prosody; imagery), or even their outreach. Bigger outreach may potentially attract more diverse audiences, and thus yield more polarized discussions, and more anti-social behavior.

4. General discussion of results

The aim of this paper was to analyze the substance of verbal attacks in ideologically charged intergroup discussions beneath the YouTube videos critical towards Greta Thunberg's environmental activism with a focus on: (1) the potential contribution of impoliteness to reinforcement and consolidation of alike views (homophily); (2) the scale of acceptance of the views expressed at the onset of a sample discussion thread.

[16] The question seldom discussed in the literature is an intrinsic characteristic and a caveat to the significant effects in this type of data, which is the potential influence of the multiple responses by the same individual. Across the current corpus, 12–17% of the users responded to the top post more than once —a mean overall response ratio is 1.89 and, importantly, 2.87 in 'conflict'.

According to the first hypothesis, the postings were expected to exhibit a homophilous profile enacted through specific types of impoliteness. Given Thunberg's role in the public sphere, it was assumed that sociality rights would be targeted more frequently than face. The quantitative corpus analysis confirmed this to be the case; however, the identified prevalence of infringement of sociality rights is quite a remarkable finding, for it suggests that what has propelled impoliteness identified in the data, is the climate change related beliefs —more than any other potentially vital factor (e.g., Thunberg's age). As a result, Thunberg's persona often gets backgrounded in the context of the participants' discursive efforts to gauge the validity of their own views:

(7) i, like other ex-lefties, used to admire scandanavia but came to realise that it's probably one of the most culturally screwed up places on the planet

In fact, it could be argued that such utterances are a specific realization of infringement of association rights —approximately 18% of the posts in this category have been conveyed via this type of overt attacks at collective face (cf. Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010). As we see, these postings only implicitly target Greta Thunberg — in (7), the attack is circumscribed by an implicated connection between her activism and the cultural demise of Scandinavia —as assessed via the offensive negative presentation of the region. This interpretation is in line with Kleinke and Bös's (2015) account on social identity construction based on a desirable comparison between the in-group 'within' and the out-group 'outside the forum'.[17] An important aspect of (7) is the overt enactment of the user's own experience ('ex-leftie') indexed via the personal pronoun 'I'. This strategy adds to credibility of the presented view and encodes explicit reinforcement of the individual self-esteem —juxtaposed with the negative other-presentation (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al., 2013; Van Dijk, 2006). As a consequence, the user explicitly affiliates with the desired group and disaffiliates from others.

Similar motivations seem to underlie utterances that are meant to portray the out-group as the exact source of problems/difficulties for the ingroup/society and thus a threat worthy of eradication (also branded as hate speech; Kienpointner, 2018). In those cases, like in (7) above, Greta Thunberg is an only implicated representative of the ideological leaning the poster wishes to distance herself from:

(8) Mass extinction of liberals=good thing.

As observed in previous studies, this type of abusive language is more 'visible' to other users and tends to attract groups of supporters who, governed by the potent need of signaling ingroup identity and distancing themselves from the outgroup, often deploy more impolite language than the first poster (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2017). In the current data, the discussion threads initiated by such postings often comprise collaborative denigration and scapegoating intended to reaffirm and validate the views held against a common "enemy". A recurring denominator of such exchanges is strongly emotional hateful speech, which may be an effective means to uphold cherish beliefs and, certainly, attract more attention.

What these observations suggest is that both impoliteness and (re)affirmation of the same point of view can be seen as a discursive process through which the participants negotiate not only the means to cause offense (Lachenicht, 1980) but also the substance of offensive acts. A notable example of how homophily can be discursively co-constructed is the use of (pseudo) aphorism, a form of intertextual strategy (Fairclough, 2003), well-suited to convey impolite beliefs (Culpeper, 2005). In the current data, aphorisms are not only recognized as alike views by other participants, but may even be reciprocated by another relevant aphorism —deployed to amplify the shared values:

(9) User1: "The urge to save humanity is almost always a false front for the urge to rule it." H. L. Mencken (top post)
User2: "The state must declare the child to be the most precious treasure of the people. As long as the government is perceived as working for the benefit of the children, the people will happily endure almost any curtailment of liberty and almost any deprivation." Adolf Hitler (a)

What the exchange in (9) conveys is a textual reference that can be disambiguated as germane to the climate change ideology via Levinson's (2000) M-heuristics. This reference shapes the narrative of User1's reality and the retelling of this narrative by User2[18] —both echoing the same idea and serving the purpose of ideological (dis)affiliation with relevant out-group(s). It is interesting how the crux of the shared belief is co-constructed via indexing comparable features of negative out-group presentation (Van Dijk, 2006): 'urge to rule' or 'curtailment of liberty'.

While the findings discussed in the context of (7)–(9) above intersect with those on the high proportion of implicated impoliteness in the category of association rights, needless to say, value homophily is most commonly realized via explicit means. This concerns also equity rights impoliteness, often expressed explicitly (cf. Hypothesis (ii)) yet commonly involving a specific implicated formula, which is mimicry ($\approx$12% of the top posts). This finding confirms Culpeper's (2005) hypothesis that mimicry is best explained as equity rights impoliteness, as it involves a judgement from the position of power (in this case, the power imbalance in online environment):

(10) Believe me, Greta, we ALL wish you were in school, on the other side of the ocean. LOL. How dare you!

Mimicry has been discussed in prior studies as ironic echoing of behavior rather than content of utterances (e.g., emulation of accent; Culpeper, 2011). Thus, in (10), impoliteness is realized primarily via explicit means: the ridiculing initialism 'LOL'

[17] In contrast, one example of impoliteness towards an outgroup 'within the forum' in the current data is: *LOL All the triggered liberals in the comment section actually believe a kid over scientist*!

[18] This post could be treated as agreement via elaboration, see section 2.4 above.

and the dismissal (20% of posts in this category) in the first sentence (in fact, intertextually related to Thunberg's own utterance).[19] The remaining content (*How dare you!*), however, is an act of ironic imitating of behavior —in this case related to the phenomenon of 'virality', which is key to circulation of (collective) attitudes in the cyberspace (Vladimirou and House, 2018). In the current data, virality lends itself to both impoliteness and homophily as both the content and the stance of Thunberg's utterances transfigure into a socially recognized code for expression of mockery, sarcasm, and other forms of distancing the poster(s) from relevant views. In this respect, the quantifier 'we all' in (10), is a vital example of ideological positioning grounded in the engagement and empowerment of ordinary people afforded by social media (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al., 2013; Vladimirou and House, 2018).

The latter phenomena certainly underlie the acts of face related impoliteness, which often resemble the joy of cyberbulling —aggression intended to harm and distress, engendered by power imbalance between the concerned individuals (Whittaker and Kowalski, 2014). This problem is prominent in the acts of cyber aggression against public figures, as those often take place without the awareness of their objects (Whittaker and Kowalski, 2014; Ouvrein et al., 2018). A potential focus of attacks in the current data did surface in the automated analysis reported on in section 3.1, which found associations with Thunberg's mental state ('hysterical'), family relations ('handlers'), and social identity ('actress'). Further, as predicted in Hypothesis (ii), the discussion threads ensuing face-aggravating postings often comprise overt impoliteness formulae (section 3.2); they may also unfold as "collaborative playful targeting against a public figure" ('ludic impoliteness'; Vladimirou and House, 2018:3), as in (11) below:

(11) User1: LOL, they must have given her a crash course in drama[i] (top post)
User2: She is an actress[i] look her up on IMDB (a).
User3: No … she just didn't take her meds[i] (a).

The views shared among the participants of this exchange are signaled via indexing (underlined) what is (un)desirable and (ab)normal regarding a person's value, which ultimately leads to the change of the sequence trajectory from playful to negative sarcasm ('the underlying serious', Vladimirou and House, 2018) in User3's post. This post is an interesting example of the aforementioned problematic distinction between agreement and disagreement —while on the surface the user expresses disagreement with the top post and reciprocates by elaboration, his/her sarcastic stance affirms the same general view on the activist's value. As Vladimirou and House (2018) argue, such acts of interconnectedness and interactivity among the participants lead to (dis)affiliation and forge online communities of shared values. What (11) therefore suggests is that impoliteness primarily targeting the self-image (i.e., face in terms of Spencer-Oatey's model), may as well serve a more general purpose of delegitimization of entire out-group(s). This conclusion is in line with previous studies into YouTube polylogues, which identified similar patterns of creating a sense of 'us' vs. 'them' via attacks on other users'/related targets' positive self-image and construction of the negative image of the out-group by maximizing its 'defects' (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2011; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al., 2013). This is spelled out in (12) below, where the criticism towards Thunberg gets explicitly carried over to the whole group:

(12) She's miserable. Most leftists look miserable since most lack the grace of gratitude in their lives.

These considerations bring us to the second research question addressed in the current study, which is the level of acceptance of the point of view/impoliteness expressed in the top posts — assumed to pertain to value homophily. As indicated in section 3.3, while the majority of the top posts turned out to be accepted by other users, Hypothesis (iii), that infringements of face will be accepted less often than those of sociality rights, was not confirmed. This hypothesis was based on the public role of Greta Thunberg, presumed to be more socially relevant, and hence linked to more 'justifiable' impoliteness (in fact, according to Spencer-Oatey (2002), attacks on sociality rights cause 'annoyance' rather than face loss). A related factor hypothesized to play a role was the rule of civility in public discourse (Sellers, 2004) — as indicated in the study of YouTube polylogues, the participants' assessments of impoliteness relate principally to this rule (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2011). However, as seen in (11) above, the aforementioned merger between Thunberg's private and public personae, may render the underlying purpose of the attacks on face quite ambiguous even for the involved participants, who see the activist simply as a representative of conflicting values. Lastly, as new participants join and are eager to strengthen the stance of the previous posts, the rules of civility are more likely to be breached (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2017).

Finally, another potential reason for the prevalence of acceptance of impoliteness in the current data, not explicitly addressed in this study, may be the common denominator of ideologically charged discussions, which is 'collective emotion' (Durkheim (1912) 1995). Collective emotion involves attitudes and feelings that stem from people's identification with values, beliefs, and ideas shared within groups/societies. According to recent findings in psychology, conservative ideological leanings pertain to a higher degree of negative emotionality — particularly fear, which often triggers aggression, and boosts people's motivation to defend and/or bolster their (pre)existing beliefs —both on the personal level and on the level of the social group they belong to (Yang et al., 2018). Further, since fear commonly underlies the motivation to seek distance, and is believed to be innate to hate (Sternberg and Sternberg, 2008; recall (8) above), research has found it to function as a powerful driving force of group identity formation —in the deindividuated environment of online interactions — commonly realized through aggressive uninhibited speech (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2017). It can therefore be concluded that the degree of

[19] Part of Thunberg's 2019 UN appearance.

approval of impoliteness identified in the current data, reflects the role of the phenomenon as a potent proxy of collective emotion and related value homophily –regardless of the actual category of impoliteness involved.

5. Summary and conclusions

This paper has investigated impoliteness in the context of YouTube discussion threads concerning Greta Thunberg's environmental activism from the perspective of value homophily –defined as the psychological preponderance to seek validation of one's views through social comparison (Festinger, 1954). The analysis has found the comment threads to exhibit a largely homophilous profile –validating the ideological position of the video, reiterating alike beliefs, and approving of the conveyed values. The general hypothesis that (re)affirmation of the user's (pre)existing beliefs may be a vital incentive to actively contribute to the discursive content on the platform, and a gratifying tangent point between the participants, seems therefore to be the case.

Further, the idea that impoliteness is a vehicle of the *ad hoc* social comparison between groups, has also been confirmed. The adopted model of rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2008) has proved useful identifying and assessing the categories of impoliteness in the data, which were assumed to reflect certain value positions. The most important finding of this part of the analysis is the prevalence of attacks toward Greta Thunberg's social worth, as opposed to face related impoliteness – interestingly, each type turned out to be realized via quite different bottom-up formulae. What this finding suggests is that the users share not only certain views, but perhaps also the view on how to convey them.

The presence of value homophily in the data was further confirmed in the investigation of the degree of acceptance of the point of view and impoliteness in the discussion threads. The analysis indicated a general prevalence of endorsement– importantly – regardless of the impoliteness category involved. As argued above, this finding pertains to the intricacies of ideological (dis)affiliation in online intergroup interactions, where validation of the same values may outweigh the rules of civility in public discourse. Finally, potentially significant effects have been identified between the scale of agreement/disagreement/conflict and the video, which is likely related to the scope of diversity of the involved audiences. A more robust picture of this factor could be captured in a large-scale investigation of the ideological composition of the users' personal networks.

To sum up, having combined qualitative and quantitative methodologies, this study contributes to the body of much-needed corpus research into impoliteness. While the findings confirm the general idea that "sharing negative –as compared to positive –attitude about a third party is promoting closeness between people" (Bosson et al., 2006:135), the linguistic analysis offered above provides a glimpse into how specifically the phenomenon of impoliteness partakes in the process of validation and consolidation of one's (pre)existing beliefs –a vital component of ideological (dis)affiliation with (out)groups. As the study concludes, impoliteness facilitates the expression of a socially recognized point of view and thus may be a vital factor in the development of like-minded online communities. Given the generative role of social media in information dissemination and opinion formation, both the concept of value homophily and the related role of impoliteness require further research attention.

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Declaration of competing interest

None.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.03.003.

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