

# IMPOLITENESS IN TWITTER DISCOURSE: A CASE STUDY OF REPLIES TO DONALD TRUMP AND GRETA THUNBERG

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ESMAEEL ALI SALIMI

and

SEYED MOHAMMADREZA MORTAZAVI

Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran

**Abstract.** Twitter (X) is a popular social media platform that allows users to express their opinions and interact on various topics, including politics. However, Twitter can provide a space for impolite and aggressive language use, especially when the issues are controversial or polarizing. This study analyzes the replies to two controversial and similar tweets, namely Donald Trump's tweet to Greta Thunberg and Greta Thunberg's tweet to Donald Trump. Ninety-seven tweets that impolitely took issue with the original tweets were collected and coded for their moral order themes and pragmatic functions. Culpeper's (2011) impoliteness framework was consulted as a threshold to include or exclude reply tweets in the data analysis. The results show that the replies invoked moral order expectations in three overarching categories in the responses to both parties: *age-appropriate behavior, respect and manners, and concern for the common good*. As far as the pragmatic functions were concerned, *criticism of personal characteristics, criticism of supporters, criticism of relatives (to Trump only), praise of the opposing party, directing, mockery, and ideology denial (to Thunberg only)* were performed. The study discusses how users took offense through language in a highly polarized political context.

**Keywords:** moral order, pragmatic function, strategies, impoliteness, Twitter, offense

## INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms have challenged conventional ways of communicating about politics and prominent mediums in the contemporary world in the past ten years (Alizadeh Afrouzi, 2021). Twitter is one of the most widely used social media platforms for political discussions, which has enabled political actors to engage in meaningful political exchanges and mobilize the public (Jaidka, Zhou and Lelkes, 2019: 345). However, Twitter can also be a provocative and hostile environment,

where impoliteness and incivility (see Note 1) can arise (Terkouraf et al., 2018: 43). Moreover, when the audience is not physically present, anyone can read a digital artifact on social media and react to it in various ways.

One of the most controversial and influential political figures on Twitter is Donald Trump, the former president of the United States. ‘What FDR [Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32nd U.S. president] was to radio and JFK [John F. Kennedy, 35th U.S. president] to television, Trump is to Twitter’ (Online 1). Donald Trump can also confirm this statement, as he wrote in a tweet: ‘Thanks—many are saying I’m the best 140-character writer in the world’ (Trump. D. J., 2012). The media and academic attention to his Twitter account rose further after his 2016 presidential campaign. Trump has been known for his unconventional use of Twitter, which has attracted much media and academic attention (cf., e.g., Ott, 2017; Clarke and Grieve, 2019; Ross and Caldwell, 2020; Wells et al., 2020; Nordensvard and Ketola, 2021).

This paper examines how some Twitter users reacted to one of Donald Trump’s (DT) tweets mockingly addressing Greta Thunberg (GT), a 16-year-old climate activist, and another by GT mockingly addressing DT, both of which seem to have provoked some of the replies on both fronts.

On December 12, 2019, DT responded to a tweet from someone who had applauded GT for being called Time’s Person of the Year (Online 1). This happened after DT’s administration’s withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement soon after he took over the office, which sparked many criticisms. Moreover, at the United Nations summit on climate change in 2019, GT censured the world leaders for their inadequate efforts to combat global warming by saying, ‘How dare you?’ (Online 2) and calling it a ‘betrayal’ of the world’s youth. DT’s tweet reads:

- [1] So ridiculous. Greta must work on her Anger Management problem, then go to a good old-fashioned movie with a friend! Chill Greta, Chill! (Trump. D. J., 2019)

GT did not respond to DT’s tweet directly. Still, she changed her Twitter bio to read: ‘a teenager working on her anger management problem’ and ‘currently chilling and watching a good old-fashioned movie with a friend’. In the aftermath of that tweet, many Twitter users and activists reacted to it and described it as ‘pathetic, immature, bitter, and impulsive,’ etc. Further, almost a week before that, on December 5, 2019, DT’s wife and the then First Lady of the United States, Melania Trump, had criticized Stanford Law Professor Pamela Karlan for making a remark about Melania and Donald’s 13-year-old son, Barron, during her impeachment hearing testimony (Ross, 2019: paras. 1-5). She had initially tweeted:

- [2] A minor child deserves privacy and should be kept out of politics (Trump. M., 2019).

After DT’s tweet, many called Melania ‘hypocritical’ in their replies to DT’s tweet. Almost a year later, on November 5, 2020, the US presidential election was still undecided, as several states were still counting the votes. DT, trailing behind his

opponent Joe Biden, tweeted a demand to ‘STOP THE COUNT!’ (Online 3). He claimed there was ‘widespread fraud’ and ‘corruption’ in the election process (ibid.). GT seized this opportunity to throw DT’s words back at him. She tweeted:

- [3] So ridiculous. Donald must work on his Anger Management problem, then go to a good old fashioned movie with a friend! Chill Donald, Chill! (Thunberg, 2020)

She tweeted this, most possibly as a way of recycling DT’s mockery of her and turning it against him. She also used the same punctuation and capitalization as DT did in his original tweet. In some of the replies to her tweet, some took offense and called it ‘outraged,’ ‘rude,’ ‘crude,’ and ‘grumpy.’ This study approaches this topic from the perspective of pragmatics, specifically impoliteness theory and moral order analysis. It is argued that DT and GT’s tweets violated the respondents’ expectations about how they should behave on social media and treat others. The way respondents performed various instances of impoliteness to challenge DT and GT’s faces is also analyzed.

Impoliteness has been widely studied in various contexts and genres (e.g., Saz-Rubio, 2023). However, there is still a need for more empirical research on how impoliteness is perceived and responded to by different audiences and stakeholders (Haugh, Kádár, and Márquez Reiter, 2022: 118-120). In particular, there is a gap in the literature on how impoliteness is manifested and negotiated in political discourse on social media platforms such as Twitter, where politicians can directly interact with the public and vice versa. As a microblogging platform, Twitter introduces unique elements that can significantly impact impoliteness dynamics. The constraints of a 280-character limit, the rapid pace of interactions, and the potential for content to go viral within seconds all contribute to an environment where communication is often succinct, direct, and immediate. This brevity can sometimes lead to bluntness and sharpness in responses, creating an atmosphere where impoliteness may manifest differently than in more traditional, long-form communication. Furthermore, Twitter’s open and public nature means that political figures and the general public can engage in direct exchanges. This immediacy and accessibility may intensify the emotional and moral responses to political statements and actions, influencing the deployment of (im)politeness strategies.

Additionally, Twitter’s use of hashtags, mentions, and retweets provides users with tools to amplify their messages and reach broader audiences. This amplification feature can have implications for impoliteness, as it may influence the strategic choice of language and rhetoric.

Moreover, currently, little research explores how impoliteness is related to moral order judgments, i.e., how people evaluate others’ behavior based on their moral norms and values (Parvaresh and Tayebi, 2018: 105; Tayebi, 2016: 15). Therefore, this study contributes to filling these gaps by analyzing a case of impoliteness (in replies to tweets 1 and 3) in a Twitter discourse from both an interactional and a moral order perspective.

To achieve our aim, we address the following research questions: (1) What moral order expectations are explicated or implicated by the replies?; and (2) What pragmatic functions do the replies perform to respond to DT's tweet?

One topic that has garnered academic interest among scholars is the reactions of politicians, including DT, to climate change and the activism of climate change activists (Nordensvard and Ketola, 2021: 1). However, very little attention has been paid to how the public reacted to his tweets that were deemed impolite or inappropriate. Thus, this study attempts to unveil part of this truth that occurred on Twitter and unearth the moral features explicated and the pragmatic functions performed. Notably, this study does not attempt to exonerate or blame any parties; rather, it attempts to unveil the characteristics of witnesses' responses to an impolite tweet.

## IMPOLITENESS AND MORAL ORDER

This section briefly reviews the relevant literature on impoliteness theory and moral order analysis and how they can be applied to studying political discourse on Twitter.

### 1 IMPOLITENESS

Impoliteness has been gaining popularity in research among scholars (Şekerci, 2023: 125). Impoliteness can be defined as 'the use of communicative strategies that are intended or perceived to attack face or increase face loss' (Culpeper, 2011: 23). Face is the public self-image a person claims in an interaction (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61). Impoliteness can be intentional or unintentional, depending on whether the speaker aims to cause face damage. It can also be direct or indirect, depending on whether the face attack is explicit or implicit. 'Impoliteness is sustained by expectations, desires, and beliefs about social organization' (Culpeper, 2011: 254).

Impoliteness can be analyzed at different levels of interactional structure, such as speech acts, super-strategies (Culpeper, 2005: 41-42), or their pragmatic functions (e.g., Matley, 2018; Tayebi and Parvaresh, 2014; Salimi and Mortazavi, 2023). According to Culpeper (2005: 41-42), super-strategies are the general ways of implementing impoliteness, such as bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withholding politeness. However, along with the discursive turn in (im)politeness research, Culpeper re-engineered his framework to include conventional impoliteness formulae and implicational impoliteness (2011), to which this study has resorted in the analysis.

### 2 MORAL ORDER

Moral order is a concept that refers to the shared norms and values that regulate the conduct of individuals and groups in a society. It is based on natural law, a set of universal principles governing human behavior and morality. In other words,

it is a socially constructed set of expectations that guide our sense of right and wrong, good and bad. The moral order is reflected in a patterned set of verbal and non-verbal actions that indicate our alignment or disalignment with certain moral values and norms (Domenici and Littlejohn, 2006). Moral order is implicit in most interactions but can become explicit when a transgression violates some expectations. According to the sociological perspective, morality is a characteristic of social groups rather than individuals: *should* and *ought* are calls to behave in certain ways that originate from society, not the individual (Dant, 2012: 44).

Be that as it may, moral order is not a fixed or static phenomenon but rather a dynamic and contested one. Different societies and cultures may have other moral orders, and even within the same community, there may be conflicts and challenges to the dominant moral order. For example, the rise of social media and digital communication has created new opportunities and dilemmas for moral expression and judgment, especially concerning political discourse and public figures. Moral order can be related to impoliteness in two ways: first, impoliteness can be seen as a form of moral transgression that breaches some moral norms of politeness or civility; and second, impoliteness can be seen as a form of moral judgment that evaluates others' behavior based on moral standards (Haugh, 2007: 308). In both cases, impoliteness can trigger moral talk or moralizing discourse that explicates or implies the moral order expectations relevant to the interaction (Bergmann, 1998: 279-288). For example, in a study, it was found that participants were offended as some of their expectancies were not met, namely, interpersonal expectations, deference entitlement, reciprocity, and ritual-based expectations (Tayebi, 2016). Another study analyzed the comments left on the official Facebook page of an actress who had posted a nude photograph of herself and found the moral order expectations of having prudency, demonstrating awareness of, and avoiding causing, emotional discomfort, upholding one's honor, having decency, and demonstrating positive jealousy (Parvaresh and Tayebi, 2018).

### 3 TWITTER AND IMPOLITENESS

Twitter-based impoliteness in politics needs more attention for several reasons. First, the availability of online data from multiple commentators on Twitter means that the same event can be interpreted differently by others (Terkourafi, 2019: 6). Second, impoliteness and incivility can arise when political issues are at stake (cf., e.g., Terkourafi et al., 2018).

The recent literature on impoliteness has emphasized online communication, especially Twitter, thanks to its text-based medium, which provides researchers with enough verbal evidence to investigate impolite occurrences (Oz et al., 2018). For instance, Hemphill, Otterbacher, and Shapiro (2013: 877) checked 380 members of Congress' Twitter accounts and found that they use Twitter to advertise their political positions. Twitter has also empowered individual users to address their representatives directly and publicly (Theocharis, Barberá, Fazekas and Popa, 2020: 2). In their study, Theocharis et al. (2020: 1) used tweets that mentioned

the members of Congress, indicating 18 percent incivility in the tweets that spiked when controversial policy debates and events occurred. In another study, 500 tweet events addressed Spanish and English Prime Ministers. They found that English respondents used sarcasm and implicated impoliteness to attack the negative face of the Prime Minister, while Spanish respondents used insults and rectification to attack the positive face of the Prime Minister (Saz-Rubio, 2023).

Ott (2017: 60) takes the discussion further and argues that ‘Twitter ultimately trains us to devalue others, thereby cultivating mean and malicious discourse.’ This feature on Twitter, Ott argues, ‘breeds dark, degrading, and dehumanizing discourse; it breeds vitriol and violence; in short, it breeds Donald Trump’ (ibid.: 62). Social media has been integral to DT’s campaign, as proven in many studies (Clarke and Grieve, 2019: 1). DT’s Twitter account has been the recipient of multiple studies (e.g., Ott, 2017; Clarke and Grieve, 2019; Ross and Caldwell, 2020; Wells et al., 2020; Nordensvard and Ketola, 2021). For example, Clarke and Grieve (2019: 1-3) studied how DT’s style of tweeting shifted from 2009 to 2018 due to his communicative goals. These stylistic patterns represented the degree of conversational, campaigning, engaged, and advisory-style discourse (ibid.: 1). Ross and Caldwell (2020: 12-13) conducted an appraisal study of DT’s tweets from the Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective and concluded that he uses appraisal in various ways to undermine and attack his opponents.

## METHODOLOGY

In this section, the methods and procedures used to collect and analyze the data for this study are described.

### 1 DATA COLLECTION

Twitter’s prominence as one of the most popular and extensively utilized social media platforms for political discourse cannot be overstated, especially for politicians. Therefore, we chose Twitter as the data source for this study, as we were interested in how Twitter users expressed their offense-taking and carried out pragmatic functions of impoliteness and moral judgment in response to controversial and provocative tweets by DT and GT.

The study focused on the tweets that came in reply to two original tweets: one by DT telling GT to ‘chill’ on December 12, 2019, and another by GT telling DT to ‘chill’ on November 5, 2020. These tweets were selected because they were similar in content and tone, and they triggered a lot of reactions from Twitter users and activists who disapproved or approved of their mocking of each other.

The impolite replies that had taken offense at the original tweets were collected and analyzed using MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software. Notably, the tweets that did not impolitely address the original tweets, such as those that agreed with them, praised them, or were off-topic, were excluded. Culpeper’s

framework on impoliteness (2011) was used to filter out those tweets that were not impolite. In this framework, conventionalized impoliteness refers to explicitly rude and offensive behaviors, such as insults, threats, curses, dismissals, etc. Implicational impoliteness refers to implicitly rude and offensive behaviors, such as sarcasm, innuendo, digs, etc. Implicational impoliteness can be divided into three subtypes: form-driven, convention-driven, and context-driven. Form-driven impoliteness occurs when a behavior's surface form or semantic content is marked and suggests a negative meaning. Convention-driven impoliteness occurs when there is a mismatch between the context projected by behavior and the context of use (external mismatch) or between different parts of the behavior (internal mismatch). Context-driven impoliteness occurs when an unmarked or absent behavior mismatches the context and violates the expectations of the interlocutors. Table 1 summarizes the model of impoliteness proposed by Culpeper.

Due to the difference in the numbers of followers between GT (5.3 million as of November 6, 2023) and DT (87.4 million as of November 6, 2023), DT received significantly more replies than GT. Therefore, the data collection process differed slightly for each line of replies. For the replies to DT, the responses were collected and analyzed simultaneously until saturation was reached in themes, which was 72 tweets. Saturation is a state in qualitative research where no new codes or themes emerge from the data, indicating that the sample size is adequate for the research question (Guest et al., 2006: 59). Culpeper's impoliteness framework was applied

Table 1 Culpeper's (2011) framework on impoliteness

Impoliteness main type	Impoliteness formulae type		Example
Conventional impoliteness formulae	Insults	Personalized negative vocatives	'You f*** moron'
		Personalized negative assertions	'You are such a hypocrite.'
		Personalized negative references	'your little hands'
		Personalized third-person negative references	'She's a nutzo.'
	Pointed criticisms/complaints		'that is total crap.'
	Unpalatable questions or presuppositions		'- why do you make my life impossible?'
	Condescension		'that's childish.'
	Message enforcers		'- do you understand [me]? (tag)'
	Dismissals		'get lost'
	Silencers		'Shut your stinking mouth.'
Threats		'I'm gonna straighten you out.'	
Negative expressives		'Damn you.'	
Implicational impoliteness	Form-driven		—
	Convention-driven		—
	Context-driven		—

to filter out the irrelevant tweets. For the replies to GT, all the responses were checked, and those that did not take offense and offensively addressed her using Culpeper's impoliteness framework were filtered out. As a result, 35 tweets were obtained. It was acknowledged that the number of tweets for GT was almost half as many as those for DT. However, this can be justified, as the aim was to derive common categories of moral order expectations and pragmatic functions for both lines of replies rather than separate ones. Therefore, the quantity in number is not considered an issue in a qualitative study, as no statistics were dealt with. Additionally, the number is beyond the researchers' control, as GT has received fewer replies.

## 2 DATA ANALYSIS

For the first research question, the researchers coded the parts of the tweets that explicitly stated or implied what they construed as inappropriate in GT and DT's tweets. As mentioned earlier, some of the tweets might not have taken offense at GT or DT's tweets but performed an impolite act in their responses. It was also identified how they explicated or implicated their moral order expectations, i.e., how they expressed their sense of right and wrong, good and bad, based on their moral values and norms. Open coding was utilized to generate initial codes from each line of replies, such as anger management (GT), respect for autistic people (DT), concern for climate change (DT), refrainment of attention seeking (GT), etc. Then, axial coding was conducted to group these codes into broader common categories, such as respect and manners.

For the second research question, the researchers coded and labeled the pragmatic functions that the users fulfilled to respond to DT's tweet in an impolite or offensive way. The 'pragmatic functions' label was adopted following Matley (2018) and Tayebi (2014). Pragmatic functions can go beyond the literal or conventional meanings of words and sentences and depend on context, situation, intention, expectation, etc. For example, when a speaker says, 'It's cold in here,' they may have the pragmatic function of requesting the hearer to close the window or turn on the heater, even though they are not explicitly saying so. Pragmatic functions are general and can include one or several speech acts that serve a common communicative goal. For example, when a respondent criticizes DT or GT, they may perform several speech acts, such as asserting, expressing opinions, questioning motives, etc. Still, together, they have the pragmatic function of criticizing personal characteristics.

An iterative process of coding and analysis was followed, where the codes and categories were constantly compared and refined. Moreover, MAXQDA's features were used to visualize and explore the data in different ways, such as using word clouds, code matrices, etc.

Several strategies were adopted to ensure the credibility and dependability of the study's findings. Two coders (the authors) independently coded a sample of 20 tweets from each line of tweets using MAXQDA's inter-coder agreement



function. Any discrepancies or disagreements were discussed and resolved by revising the coding scheme or the coding process during joint coding sessions until a consensus was reached on all the coded segments.

## RESULTS

To answer the first research question, the section below discusses the explicit or implicit labels the participants gave to show that their moral order expectations have been violated. To answer the second research question, we discuss the general pragmatic functions of the tweets and their instances, followed by sample extracts from the tweets.

### 1 APPEALING TO MORAL ORDER

Some have taken issue with the tweets of both parties and labeled them as ‘insulting’, ‘name-calling’, ‘using children’, ‘bringing children to politics’ for DT, and ‘calling a president by first name (while she should not)’, ‘yelling’, ‘grumpiness’, and ‘immaturity’ for GT. These features constitute a face-threat to both parties involved because they can damage both DT’s and GT’s public images and identities. Therefore, it can be said that appealing to moral order shows how the Twitter face-threat witnesses’ expectations are violated and how they have clarified their perceived norms. Some replies have used the word ‘yelling’ for both parties, which seems to be something that they might have considered while reading the tweets. To them, these features, such as outraging and yelling, are breaches of moral and societal norms and should be avoided. Table 2 shows how individuals might expect DT and GT to behave in their tweets based on the analysis of the reply tweets.

Table 2 Moral order expectations of online participants

Moral order expectations from both GT and DT	Subcategories for DT and GT	Moral order expectations
<i>Age-appropriate behavior</i>	Refrainment from politics (GT*)	This expectation stems from the belief in age-specific societal roles, responsibilities, and competencies.
	Education prioritization (GT)	
	Responsible adult behavior (DT**)	
<i>Respect and manners</i>	Respect for girls and children (DT)	This expectation is based on the principle of treating all people with dignity and consideration.
	Anger management (GT)	
	Respect for autistic people (DT)	
<i>Concern for the common good</i>	Concern for climate change (DT)	This expectation assumes people should prioritize the world’s well-being over their interests.
	Refrainment from attention seeking (GT)	

\* (GT) directed at Greta Thunberg

\*\* (DT) directed at Donald Trump

### 1.1 AGE-APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR

This expectation is based on the assumption that different age groups have different roles, responsibilities, and competencies in society and that they should act accordingly. For example, some of the replies to GT's tweet suggest that she should behave like a 'typical teenager' who focuses on school, friends, and entertainment rather than politics, activism, or climate change. They also imply that she should defer to the authority and expertise of adults, especially the president, and not address him by his first name or criticize him publicly. On the other hand, some of the replies to DT's tweet seem to suggest that he should behave like a mature and responsible adult who is supposed to be 'respectful,' 'rational,' and 'dignified,' rather than 'childish,' 'impulsive,' and 'petty.'

### 1.2 RESPECT AND MANNERS

This expectation is based on the principle that all human beings deserve to be treated with dignity and consideration, regardless of their differences or disagreements. For example, some of the replies to GT's tweet have called her 'grumpy' with an 'anger management' problem, suggesting that she should work on her own behavior rather than blaming others. One tweet that replied to GT reads, 'he's always much calmer than you ever have been.' Another reply to GT reads, 'you need to learn some manners.' On the other hand, replies to DT seemed to expect him, as the President of the United States, to uphold this principle and to be a role model for others. For example, one reply suggested that DT 'should be ashamed of [his] very angry and obviously biased public pandering' by 'using a child to do it.' Some tweets also imply that he should not attack or mock a minor, especially a girl with Asperger syndrome, and that he should accept his defeat (for not being named Time's Person of the Year) gracefully and peacefully.

### 1.3 CONCERN FOR THE COMMON GOOD

This expectation is based on the idea that individuals or groups should act in ways that benefit the well-being of the larger society rather than their own interests. For example, some of the replies to GT's tweet appeared to express concern regarding her attempt to seek 'attention' from the public and win a 'Nobel prize' at any cost. For example, one tweet claimed that her supporters are those countries that pay no attention to climate change and where 'the pollution goes unchecked.' On the other hand, it appears that some tweets suggest that DT's policies or behavior pose threats to the common good, such as 'denialism,' 'inaction,' or 'destruction'. For example, one tweet reads, 'Just think how passionate you are about money and winning.'

## 2 PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS PERFORMED IN THE REPLIES

Table 3 shows the pragmatic functions of the tweets that have taken offense at DT and GT's tweets. It should be noted that the replies to GT are separate from the responses to DT and are not necessarily made by the same respondents.

Table 3 The general pragmatic functions of the replies to the original tweet

Pragmatic function	Examples* in replies to Trump	Examples* in replies to Thunberg
1. Criticism of personal characteristics	'rape', 'failed political career', 'old age', 'financial gains', 'embarrassment and disgrace', 'psychological issues', 'miserable', 'absolute ghoul', 'lack of maturity'	'anger', 'bitter all the time', 'aggressive', 'a brat', 'crude', 'rude', 'outraged', 'yelling', 'grumpy'
2. Criticism of supporters	'lying', 'smoke and mirrors', 'ignoring'	'... since she is Greta you have to applaud what she says', 'You and your backers have to drop your attempts at the Nobel Prize.', 'idiots made her popular.'
3. Criticism of relatives (DT)	'using children', 'hypocrisy', 'unworthy of the title'	—
4. Praise of the opposing party	'this young girl beats out YOU for the cover of Time magazine.', 'She's 17 and doing what she can to save the planet', '@GretaThunberg outdoes Trump every time she speaks—and the world is better for it.'	'he's [Donald Trump] always much calmer than you ever have been.'
5. Directing	'Stop. She's a child. Please stop.', 'Lay off the kids.'	'Chill Greta, chill!! Go to school and let politics for the adults!', 'Stay quiet, greta'
6. Mockery	'What does this man say?' (Smiley face, smiley face)', 'Your entire, miserable life', 'Fartypants'	'LOL what are you? 16? U tweet like a teenager. Oh, wait...', 'This coming from a very angry looking little girl yelling 'How dare you' shall I find the pics?'
7. Ideology denial (GT)	—	'There is no climate change made by people honey... Stop talking.'

\* in some categories, there are samples from more than one tweet.

There are seven general pragmatic functions found in the tweets. They are briefly elaborated and exemplified in the following sections.

### 2.1 CRITICISM OF PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The first pragmatic function includes those replies that attacked GT and DT's personal characteristics. They believed that DT and GT possess the features mentioned in Table 3, with the possible implication that DT does not occupy the moral high ground to address GT in such a way. The same is true in the other lines of replies to GT. For example, tweet [4] characterizes GT as 'irritating,' and tweet [5] portrays DT as 'low.'

- [4] If there is a human name for irritation or headache..then it will be definately Greta Thunberg. Idiots made her popular for no reasons. A barking dog is much better than her (Biswas, 2020).

The tweet can be considered a serious case of criticism of personal characteristics of GT. The tweet exaggerates the degree of 'irritation' or 'headache' GT causes to the tweeter by using the phrase 'a human name for.' One possible implication is that GT is 'synonymous with these negative sensations' and is 'universally disliked or annoying.' The tweet goes on to suggest that her supporters are 'idiots' who have made her 'popular for no reasons.' The tweet also compares her to a 'barking dog,' which can suggest the possible cultural implication that she is making noise without any value. It can be examined in light of Culpeper's impoliteness framework, showcasing a series of personalized negative vocatives (e.g., 'Idiots'), personalized negative assertions, and personalized negative references (e.g., 'barking dog'). To the researcher's understanding, there were no implicit or explicit moral order expectations.

- [5] Just when you think Trump can't go any lower... he always finds a way (Belcamino, 2019).

The tweet can be considered a criticism of the personal characteristics of DT. It claims that DT is a 'morally and politically corrupt' leader who constantly 'sinks to new lows' in behavior and performance. The tweet also expresses the tweeter's 'disbelief and frustration' at DT's actions and words. When analyzed in light of Culpeper's impoliteness framework, the tweet contains some conventionalized impoliteness formulae, such as pointed criticisms or complaints. For example, the tweet uses the phrase 'can't go any lower,' a pointed criticism that attacks DT's quality and reputation. The tweet also uses the word 'always,' a message enforcer emphasizing the frequency and consistency of DT's negative behavior. The tweet also uses the word 'he,' a personalized third-person negative reference that distances the tweeter from DT and shows disrespect. A possible moral order expectation of the tweet from DT is that he should respect GT and her views.

## 2.2 CRITICISM OF SUPPORTERS

Another pragmatic function was to criticize supporters. In the replies to DT, it was believed that DT supporters were ‘lying,’ ‘ignoring,’ and ‘hiding’ or ‘embellishing the truth.’ In the replies to GT, the supporters are featured as ‘idiots’ and ‘not cautious about pollution.’ These tweets can take the attack one level deeper and aim at those who form DT or GT’s base, on which they rely. Tweets [6] and [7] are cases in point.

[6] It is embarrassing that a brat who does not reach 18 is so crude and rude but since she is Greta you have to applaud what she says (Alana, 2020).

The tweet is a criticism of supporters of GT and maintains that she is a ‘brat’ who is ‘crude and rude,’ possibly implying that her supporters are ‘hypocritical’ and ‘foolish’ for applauding what she says. The tweet contains several conventionalized impoliteness formulae, such as personalized negative assertions, pointed criticisms or complaints, and condescension. For example, the tweet calls GT a ‘brat,’ which can be a personalized negative assertion that attacks her personality and maturity. The tweet also uses the phrase ‘crude and rude,’ a pointed criticism or complaint that attacks her manners and etiquette. It also uses the word ‘since,’ which could be a condescension that might imply that GT’s supporters have a ‘biased’ or ‘irrational’ reason for supporting her. The tweet appears to use form-driven impoliteness, which involves using marked or mismatched forms that imply a negative meaning. The use of the word ‘you,’ a mismatched form, can mean the tweeter addresses GT’s supporters directly and aggressively. The moral order expectations of the tweet from GT could be that she should be quiet and act age-appropriately.

[7] Absolutely. How is it that the rest of the world can see DJT for what he is, but not his supporters? Could it be those smoke & mirrors some people refer to as #FoxNews, or maybe it’s the Repub members of Congress & #Barr who are willing to lie (Deal, 2019).

The tweet is a criticism of supporters of DT. In addition to DT, the writer has specifically addressed some supporters, such as Republican members of Congress, Fox News, and William Barr, the United States’ Attorney General (2019-2020). The author of this tweet questions their integrity and refers to them as parties who embellish the truth. One implication is that the tweet maintains that his supporters are also ‘deluded’ and ‘misled’ by his propaganda and lies. The tweet exhibits both types of impoliteness, but mainly implicational impoliteness. The tweet contains conventional impoliteness formulae, such as unpalatable questions or presuppositions, and pointed criticisms or complaints. For example, the tweet asks, ‘how is it that the rest of the world can see DJT for what he is, but not his supporters?’, which is an unpalatable question that might imply that Donald DT’s supporters are ‘ignorant’ or ‘irrational,’ and that, probably, they are in the minority of the world’s opinion. The tweet also uses the phrase ‘smoke & mirrors,’ a pointed criticism or

complaint that implies that DT's supporters are deceived or manipulated by his media outlets or allies, such as Fox News, the Republican members of Congress, and Barr, the Attorney General.

The tweet uses the acronym 'DJT,' a marked form with the possible interpretation that the tweeter does not respect or recognize DT's title or authority and that the tweeter is mocking or ridiculing his name or identity. The tweet also uses hashtags, such as '#FoxNews' and '#Barr,' which are mismatched forms that imply that the tweeter is using social media conventions to expose or criticize DT's sources of support or influence. The moral order expectations of the tweets from DT and his supporters can be that they should be honest and accountable for their actions and words and acknowledge and address the issue of climate change (concern for the common good).

### 2.3 CRITICISM OF RELATIVES (DT)

This category was only seen in the replies to DT. The tweets in this group seem to have been affected by Melania Trump's tweet [2], which criticized bringing children into politics. They attributed characteristics such as 'hypocritical' to her. Again, it seemed that the hashtag #Bebest, originally used to support Melania Trump's campaign, has been used against her [6].

- [8] Nothing like going after a young girl with Asperger Syndrome to drive home the point that you are fit for office. #BeBest my ass. For the last 4 years, I've been saying impeachment cannot come fast enough, and now it's finally here. #thursdaythought (O'Reilly, 2019).

The tweet is a criticism of the relatives, which is, in this case, the wife of DT. The tweet possibly argues that DT is 'an insensitive' leader who targets a young girl with Asperger syndrome, a developmental disorder that affects communication and social interaction. Another interpretation is that the tweet expresses the tweeter's contempt for and anger at DT's wife, Melania Trump, who has launched a campaign called 'Be Best' that aims to promote the well-being of children and prevent cyberbullying. The tweet contains conventionalized impoliteness formulae, such as negative expressives and dismissals. For example, the tweet uses the word 'ass,' which is a negative expressive that can express the tweeter's possible 'disgust' or 'disdain'. The tweet also mockingly uses the phrase '#BeBest my ass,' which is most possibly a dismissal that rejects Melania Trump's campaign and suggests that it is 'hypocritical' or 'ineffective.' The tweet also contains convention-driven implicational impoliteness, such as internal and external mismatches. For example, the tweet uses the expression 'Absolutely,' a conventionalized politeness formula that normally expresses agreement or approval. Still, in this context, it is used sarcastically to express disagreement or disapproval. External mismatches occur when the context projected by a behavior mismatches the context of use. For example, the tweet uses the hashtag '#BeBest,' which normally expresses support or admiration for Melania Trump's campaign. However, it seems to be ironically

used to express criticism or mockery in this context. The moral order expectations of the tweet from DT and his wife are that they should respect and protect GT and other children. This appeal to moral order appears to base the premise on the 'rightfulness' of the impeachment.

#### 2.4 PRAISING OF THE OPPOSING PARTY

Praising the offended party can be seen as reclaiming the face of the party who might have lost their face. Tweets [9] and [10] are instances.

[9] You're having a laugh aren't you. You tell others to chill, he's always much calmer than you ever have been (Pothecary, 2020).

The tweet is a praise of the opposing party of GT. From one vantage point, this tweet can imply that GT is a 'hypocritical' and 'aggressive' person who tells others to chill, while she is 'less calm' than DT. The tweet contains conventional impoliteness formulae, such as unpalatable questions. For example, the tweet asks, 'you're having a laugh aren't you?', an unpalatable question that might imply that GT's tweet is 'absurd' or 'ridiculous', and that she is not 'serious' or 'sincere'. The moral order expectation is presumably respect and manners, in that it requires GT to be 'respectful' and 'humble' for her activism and her views, that she should not mock or attack DT, and that she should not tell others to chill or to stop speaking out.

[10] She has more humanity in her pinky finger than you've ever had in your entire, miserable life (Trinity, 2019).

The tweet is a praise of the opposing party of DT. The tweet praised GT and her 'positive' attributes despite her disease and criticized DT's 'negative' characteristics despite his long life, which has been 'miserable.' Children with autism can have a shorter index finger (2D) than their ring finger (4D). The tweet contains some conventionalized impoliteness formulae, such as a personalized negative assertion. For example, the tweet uses the phrase 'your entire, miserable life,' a personalized negative assertion that attacks DT's personality.

#### 2.5 DIRECTING

Directing is a pragmatic function that gets the addressee to perform or carry out a particular course of action. There are examples in tweets [11] and [12] below.

[11] Chill Greta, chill!! Go to school and let politics for the adults! (Cox, 2019).

The tweet is directing GT. It argues that GT should chill, go to school, and leave politics to the adults, with the possible implication that she is too 'young,' 'naïve,' and 'emotional' to be involved in such serious and complex issues. The tweet contains some conventionalized impoliteness formulae, such as condescension and dismissal. For example, the tweet uses the word 'chill,' which can be considered condescension and probably implies that GT is 'overreacting' or being 'irrational.' The tweet also uses the phrase 'go to school,' a dismissal that can suggest that GT

is 'immature' or 'uneducated.' As far as implicational impoliteness is concerned, the tweet uses the word 'adults,' which is an unmarked form that contrasts GT's age and status with those of the tweeter and DT, implying that she is 'immature' or 'inferior.' The moral order expectations of the tweet from GT are that she should behave in an age-appropriate manner and not interfere with or challenge the authority or expertise of adults.

[12] Stop. She's a child. Please stop (Jili, 2019).

The tweet is directing DT and argues that he should stop, as GT is a child. The tweet seems to contain a conventionalized impoliteness formula, namely silencers. For example, the tweet uses the word 'stop,' a silencer implying that DT should be quiet or cease his actions. The tweet also contains context-driven implicational impoliteness, such as unmarked behavior and absence of behavior. For example, the tweet uses the word 'please,' an unmarked behavior that normally expresses politeness or request, yet in this context, it is probably used sarcastically to express impatience or annoyance. It appears that the moral order expectation is to respect GT and other children and, presumably, that he should behave more compassionately and ethically as the leader of the United States.

## 2.6 MOCKERY

The tweets in this category have tried to mock both parties in a jocular manner in such a way that can imply 'lack of importance,' 'seriousness,' 'knowledge,' maturity,' etc. Presumably, for example, 'angry looking little girl' is used in reply to GT, or 'fartypants' is used in response to DT to downgrade either one of the parties mockingly. Mockery can be separated from criticism of personal characteristics because it can convey a sense of laughter and humor, while criticism possesses a more serious tone. For example, tweets [13] and [14] can illustrate the point.

[13] LOL what are you? 16? U tweet like a teenager. Oh, wait... (Danann, 2020).

The tweet is a mockery of GT, as it mocks her age and style of tweeting, with the plausible implication that she is 'immature' and 'inexperienced' and that her tweets are 'childish' and 'irrelevant.' The tweet seems to entail conventionalized impoliteness formulae, such as personalized negative assertions and pointed criticisms. For example, the tweet uses the phrase 'what are you? 16?', which is a personalized negative assertion that appears to question GT's maturity and competence. The tweet also reads, 'U tweet like a teenager,' a pointed criticism that negatively evaluates GT's communication and expression. To the researcher's understanding, there were no implicit or explicit moral order expectations.

[14] Seems like you're the one with anger issues and impulsive behaviors (Shoug, 2020).

The tweet can be seen as a mockery of DT's tweet. By reversing the accusation and suggesting that DT himself exhibits 'anger issues' and 'impulsive' behaviors,



the tweet challenges the validity of DT's criticism of GT. The phrase 'seems like' implies doubt or skepticism, casting doubt on the validity of DT's criticism. Additionally, the use of 'you're the one' directly targets DT, creating a mocking tone that challenges his original statement. This implicit comparison between DT's behavior and what he criticized in GT adds to the mockery, highlighting potential 'inconsistencies' or 'hypocrisy' in DT's remarks. The tweet uses implicational impoliteness by indirectly criticizing DT's behavior and convention-driven impoliteness by creating a mismatch between the projected contexts of DT's accusation and the response. DT's original tweet projected a context of GT needing to work on her anger management, while the response projects a context of DT himself having 'anger issues' and 'impulsive' behaviors. It seems to implicitly appeal to the moral-order expectation that he should exercise respect and manners.

### 2.7 IDEOLOGY DENIAL

Ideology denial was defined as opposing the ideology GT held that human activities cause climate change. This category was only seen in replies to GT.

[15] There is no climate change made by people honey... Stop talking (Mediha, 2020).

The tweet seems to deny the ideology of GT, which appears to be that human activities cause climate change. The tweet denies the existence of climate change caused by human activities and tells GT to 'stop talking,' with the possible implication that she is 'wasting her time and annoying others' with her activism.

The tweet appears to contain conventionalized impoliteness formulae, such as silencers and condescension. For example, the tweet uses the phrase 'stop talking,' a silencer implying that GT should be quiet or cease her actions. The tweet also uses the word 'honey,' which could be a condescension that implies that GT is 'naïve' or 'inferior.' It also contains some context-driven implicational impoliteness in that it can mean that GT is 'ignorant' or 'delusional' about climate change. The moral order expectations of the tweet to GT could be that she should show 'respect' and not interfere with or challenge the 'authority or expertise of the adults' and that she should not express her views or emotions publicly or provocatively.

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to analyze the impolite tweets that replied to GT and DT's tweets and took issue with them. The researchers aimed to identify the moral order expectations and the pragmatic functions performed. In determining the tweets as impolite, Culpeper's framework on conventional and implicational impoliteness was consulted to filter out the tweets that could be deemed neutral or polite in tone. Various means of conventional and implicational impoliteness accompanied the moral order expectations and pragmatic functions. The results found three

overarching categories of moral order expectations: age-appropriate behavior, respect and manners, and concern for the common good in replies to DT and GT. Regarding the pragmatic functions, criticism of personal characteristics, criticism of supporters, criticism of relatives (to DT only), praise of the opposing party, directing, mockery, and ideology denial (to GT only) could be determined.

Twitter can be grounds for promoting mean discourse that devalues others (Ott, 2017). Twitter's characteristics can promote the intended effects of the message: the use of acronyms such as 'U' for 'you,' 'LOL' for 'laughing out loud,' the use of hashtags, emojis, and punctuation marks to express emotions, attitudes, and opinions, such as '#BeBest,' '(Smiley face smiley face),' and the use of references, quotations, and mentions to connect or contrast with other users or sources, such as '@realDonaldTrump,' '@GretaThunberg,' are features that Twitter (X) offers in promoting one's discourse. The findings of this study contribute to the literature on moral order and impoliteness in online communication, especially in the face of an existing conflict where respondents can voice their dissent towards any content they deem 'inappropriate,' especially when produced by a famous figure. The findings demonstrate how Twitter users respond to a perceived face threat by influential figures and how they use different processes and strategies to challenge, resist, or subvert the face threat. The findings also reveal how Twitter users construct their own moral order through their tweets and align themselves with or against certain parties based on their values and beliefs. The moral expectancies can be similar or different from context to context, so this study does not purport any generalizations. However, one category of moral order, namely respect and manners, was also found in a Facebook study (respect and decency) by Parvaresh and Tayebi (2018). The findings also show how the participants' expectations are influenced by factors such as the political socio-political standing, age, gender, and health conditions of the face-threat initiator and recipient.

## CONCLUSION

This study is a preliminary step to tap into the pragmatic functions of the content of the tweets that impolitely replied to impolite tweets. This study attempts to propose a new aspect to study impoliteness and find out how impoliteness can produce retaliatory impolite discourse (see, however, Bousfield, 2007; Dobs and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2013; Culpeper and Hardaker, 2017; Nuessel, 2022).

This research delves into impoliteness dynamics on social media, exploring influences like power, ideology, emotion, and reciprocity. Future Twitter studies can explore different instances of impoliteness and compare moral order categories. The findings can benefit social media users, educators, and policymakers by enhancing their understanding of online communication risks and benefits. This knowledge can potentially inform strategies for managing or preventing face-threatening situations. The findings could be of use to educators to raise cultural awareness of impoliteness. The educators can include tweet samples in coursebooks

for learners to form their evaluations of the appropriacy of tweets. This allows learners to analyze and compare impoliteness types, encouraging them to write their tweets in diverse contexts. Ideally, such activities might lead to fostering intercultural communicative competence, critical thinking, and digital literacy.

The limitations of this study are mainly related to the scope and method of data collection and analysis. The study focused on two tweets that do not represent the general patterns of pragmatic functions and moral order expectations on Twitter. The study also relied on a qualitative approach, which may not capture the quantitative aspects of the data, such as the frequency or distribution.

Future studies could expand on the data collection and analysis scope by examining more tweets from different sources or topics or using a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques. Additionally, future studies could investigate the effects of face-threat and facework on Twitter on the offline behavior or attitude of the respondents or other stakeholders. The pragmatic functions and moral order expectations found in this study can be used to compare the findings in similar or dissimilar contexts.

## NOTES

1. While there are very subtle differences between incivility and impoliteness, it can be said, briefly put, that we take incivility to imply a violation of social norms or expectations, while impoliteness suggests a violation of interpersonal standards or expectations.

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**Esmael Ali Salimi** (Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics, Associate Professor) is a Professor of Applied Linguistics in the Department of English Language and Literature, faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran. His areas of research interests include Pragmatics, Second Language Research, and Second Language Acquisition.

📧 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5432-9547>

Email: [easalimi@atu.ac.ir](mailto:easalimi@atu.ac.ir)

**Seyed Mohammadreza Mortazavi** has a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran. His areas of interest include Pragmatics of Politeness, Discourse Analysis, and Second Language Teacher Education.

📧 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2552-1657>

Email: [m\\_mortazavi@atu.ac.ir](mailto:m_mortazavi@atu.ac.ir)