Social Categorization, Moral Disengagement, and Credibility of Ideological Group Websites

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Abstract

Background: The online presence of ideological groups has enabled the dissemination of group beliefs and ideas through a variety of new media outlets. Websites offer a way for these groups to share aspects of their ideology and to create a sense of shared identity. While ideological groups have been of interest for decades, little empirical research has examined their online presence.

Aims: To compare non-violent and violent ideological group websites to each other and to non-ideological websites with respect to social categorization, moral disengagement, and website credibility; To examine the relationships of psychological processes to website credibility.

Method: A content analysis approach was used to rate 105 websites (violent = 32, non-violent = 36; non-ideological = 37) for aspects of social categorization, outgrouping, moral disengagement, content features of credibility, and structural features of credibility.

Results: Violent ideological group websites manifest a greater degree of social categorization, outgrouping, and moral disengagement than non-violent ideological and non-ideological websites. Regressions showed that these three variables negatively predicted content and structural website credibility for non-violent ideological groups, but did not significantly predict website credibility for violent groups or non-ideological groups.

Limitations: Potential limitations include: small sample, use of raters (vs. normative website visitors) to evaluate websites, inclusion of only English language websites, limited number of psychological processes examined, possibility of more fine-grained categories of websites within the three categories.

Conclusions: Social identity processes and formation on websites vary for different types of groups and impact perceived credibility of such groups in online environments.

Social Categorization, Moral Disengagement, and Credibility of Ideological Group Websites

The increasing internet presence of ideological groups has generated interest in understanding more about what these groups do and how they exert influence in online environments. Broadly speaking, ideological groups have clear, persistent, strongly-held values and beliefs that serve as a mental model or guiding framework for understanding and interpreting events, information, and the world in general (Mumford et al., 2008; Van Dijk, 2006). Ideological groups have a presence on social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter and develop their own websites designed to serve a variety of information dissemination, advocacy, and community-building goals (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1997; Matusitz & O'Hair, 2008; Shafer, 2002; Stanton, 2002). Groups that create a website have the ability to present and promote beliefs, ideas, and opinions to anyone with access to the internet – especially those who already share the ideology, others who may be exploring alternative ideologies and social identities, and still others who might oppose the ideology. The potential for promulgating ideological views is virtually unlimited. A number of non-violent civic, religious and political ideological groups such as the Sierra Club, the United Methodist Church, and the Jewish Voice for Peace have websites that offer a range of information about their ideologies, mission, history, and current events, and provide opportunities for dialogue with and involvement in the group. These groups tend to have prosocial ideologies as expressed in group mission statements like "promoting the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources" (www.sierraclub.org) or "working together for peace, social justice, and human rights….to support the aspirations for Israelis and Palestinians for security and self-determination" (www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org). Unfortunately, there are analogous ideological groups such as the Animal Liberation Front, the Army of God, and the English Defence League that

sanction violence and hate in service of their ideologies. These group ideologies and associated missions reflect intolerance and contempt.

It is critically important to understand the similarities and differences in the online presence and influence of non-violent ideological groups and violent groups that propagate violence, target youth, and provide information and resources that perpetuate hate (Shafer, 2002). First, online access has increased exponentially with the global reach of the internet and with the high potential for mass replication and proliferation of novel, interesting, or extreme views through varied social media outlets. This may be especially true for younger generations of digital natives, who understand, seek out, and routinely use digital technology. Second, ideological groups seek to influence or even convert neutral observers and do so through a number of means (Frischlich & Rieger, 2013). For example, they create strong online communities that are not immediately recognizable as extremist. Additionally, they may attract youth online, using this forum to promote offline activities such as concerts, volunteer opportunities, or other leisure activities to further socialize and indoctrinate them towards the ideology. At least one study has shown that propaganda from violent extremist groups has been rated as interesting and persuasive despite the fact that this material was also rated as unpleasant, one-sided, and aversive (Frischlich & Rieger, 2013), suggesting that these groups have surmounted an important first persuasive hurdle of getting people to pay attention. Youth whose identities are still forming and who are seeking to "belong" somewhere may be especially vulnerable to and drawn in by these kinds of online influences. Their limited life experiences and lower levels of skepticism may increase the likelihood that youth will accept ideological groups as legitimate and credible (Flanagin & Metzger, 2008).

Websites sponsored by ideological groups are of particular interest due to the degree of control groups have over the content and structure of their websites. Prior research has shown that

the websites of violent ideological groups are more difficult to access, have more stringent rules and regulations on discussion boards, and offer less user control over online settings and content (Griffith et al., 2013; Jensen et al., 2013). Additionally, these websites may be subject to less monitoring and scrutiny than social media websites, such as Facebook, which have terms of service policies that forbid overt threats and hate speech (Heath & O'Hair, 2009; Facebook terms of service policy), enabling violent groups to advocate their views with less threat of being detected, blocked, or shut down. Websites also enable groups to attract individuals who would otherwise be unable or unwilling to attend functions or meetings but who still express an interest in the group's ideology and desire to participate in the group (Lee & Leets, 2002).

Some important differences have been identified between violent and non-violent group websites (Griffith et al., 2013) and discussion forums (Angie et al., 2011), but additional research is needed. Griffith et al. (2013) compared violent and non-violent group websites from a communication and media-use perspective, examining information variety, types of media used, member characteristics (number of members, average member tenure, amount of active member participation), member control, and website functionality. Violent group websites contained more pro-group information, displayed more emotionally-evocative images, and had a more tightly-controlled online presence than nonviolent groups. They also used multiple media types such as videos, flyers, newsletters, and music to share information. Online activities of ideological groups have also been studied with respect to psychological processes. In a study of discussion forum messages on a small number of violent (9) and nonviolent ideological group websites (10), Angie et al. (2011) showed that violent group discussions exhibited social identity formation (i.e., encouraging integration with the group through participation), moral superiority (i.e., conveying a sense of righteousness and superiority of the ideology), self-expression (i.e., discussing/displaying

group symbols), dehumanization (i.e., discussing outgroup members in derogatory ways), ethnic outgrouping (i.e., demonizing ethnic minorities as the cause of current injustices or life conditions), and moral disengagement to a greater extent than nonviolent group discussions. It is unclear whether these patterns would be similar in a larger set of violent group websites. Additionally, we do not know if these same psychological processes are present beyond the discussion boards and appear on the general areas of these group websites, or whether these processes influence perceptions of website credibility. Examination of group websites is important because this reflects the public face of the group. Furthermore, not all visitors to the website will view or participate in discussions on message boards. Accordingly, the present study has two main purposes. The first is to compare and contrast violent ideological, non-violent ideological, and non-ideological group websites with regard to the presence of several psychological processes, including social categorization, outgrouping, and moral disengagement mechanisms. The second purpose is to evaluate how these psychological processes influence perceptions about the credibility of website content and structure for these groups.

Ideological Groups and Social Identity

People are attracted to ideological groups for a variety of reasons. These groups provide sets of defined beliefs, structure and meaning in life, and predictable social interactions that reduce uncertainty and threat (Hogg, 2007; Hogg, Meehan, & Farquharson, 2010; Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Mumford et al., 2008). Social identity develops through group membership and emotional attachment to a group, with the knowledge that the group is distinct in positive ways from other groups (Hogg, 2003; Tafjel, 1982; Tafjel & Turner, 1979). Uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg, 2007) suggests that self-concept uncertainty motivates people to seek out social identities through group identification. Groups that have a clear sense of purpose, well-defined goals, and internal

homogeneity provide unambiguous prescriptions for how members should think, feel, and behave. Individuals with uncertain self-conceptions are attracted to these types of unified and highly cohesive groups, including ideological groups, because they reduce uncertainty. In establishing and maintaining their social identities, ideological groups may encourage social categorization by highlighting the uniqueness of their beliefs and values relative to other groups (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002) or by proclaiming superiority over groups with competing views (Angie et al., 2011; Parker & Janoff-Bulman, 2013). The anonymity of the virtual community may perpetuate identification with the ideological group by giving individuals the opportunity to routinely socialize with other like-minded individuals and act on extremist views. Virtual communities have the ability to provide social identity, structure, and support for extremist views.

Violent and non-violent ideological groups are likely to differ in their use of social categorization. Violent ideological groups define themselves not only through a specific ideology or worldview, but are also willing to take more extreme actions to promote, defend, and protect that worldview from outside threats. Hogg and colleagues (2010) suggest that this may be the appeal of extremist groups to individuals high in identity uncertainty or who feel their own self-concept is threatened. The willingness of these groups to aggressively defend and promote their agendas, sometimes through violent actions, provides a sense of security and can promote greater identification with and loyalty to these groups (Hogg, 2005, 2007; Hogg et al., 2010). Other research has suggested that different dimensions of social identity may differentiate violent and non-violent groups (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2006). Subjective identification with and attachment to a group's ideology is one aspect of social identity characterized by internal focus on the group of interest, something that fosters critical evaluation of the group's actions (Leidner, Castano, Zaiser, & Giner-Sorolla, 2010), which may

explain why many ideological groups never become violent. Alternatively, social identity can be rooted in glorification of the group or when the superiority of the group relative to other groups is emphasized, as well as unquestioning deference and loyalty to the group's ideology, leadership, rules, symbols and actions (Roccas et al., 2006). This aspect of social identification is not conducive to critical internal evaluation, enabling a group to justify hate and other acts of violence towards others who do not share their views. In light of this, we propose the following hypothesis:

> H1: Violent ideological group websites will display more extreme social categorization in the form of group differentiation, group superiority, and disagreement with dissenting views than non-violent ideological and non-ideological group websites.

Ideological Groups and Outgrouping

Ingroup glorification is associated with other psychological processes also likely to differentiate violent and non-violent ideological group websites, such as outgrouping. A number of theories identify potential threats that motivate outgrouping (Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006). For example, Realistic Group Conflict Theory (RGCT) suggests that competition for scarce resources results in bias towards outgroups (Bobo, 1983; Sherif & Sherif, 1969). Symbolic threats to group values and beliefs have also been shown to increase intergroup bias, negative stereotypes, and racism (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Stephan & Stephan, 1996, 2000). Threats to a group's perceived value or to its distinctiveness as a group can also lead to denigration of the source of the threat, which is often an outside group that holds different or opposing views (Tafjel & Turner, 1979). This tendency toward positive evaluation of one's own group and negative evaluation of outgroups, known as intergroup bias, has been linked to the self-enhancement and the self-esteem of individual group members (Aberson, Healy, & Romero, 2000; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). Ideological groups may exhibit intergroup bias more than non-ideological groups because the beliefs and values

at the very core of these groups' existence are susceptible to symbolic and perceived group value threats, especially when the ideology falls outside of mainstream or normative societal views. One form of outgrouping often seen in violent ideological groups is discrimination and hate towards ethnic minorities (Angie et al., 2011; Hogg, 2003; Moghaddam, 2005; Pittinsky, Shih, & Trahan, 2006). The ideologies of some hate groups are framed around "protecting" the ingroup from the threat of destruction by the enemy rival ethnic group. Violence in these groups is often viewed as a justifiable means to various ends such groups have in mind (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). These extreme forms of outgrouping are the consequence of decreased self-sanctioning or self-reprimanding associated with moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999).

H2: Violent ideological groups will display outgrouping in the form of seeing outgroups as enemies, negatively comparing the outgroup to others, and distorting information about the outgroup to a greater extent than non-violent ideological and non-ideological group websites.

Ideological Groups and Moral Disengagement

Moral agency has both proactive and inhibitive components in that individuals and groups can initiate actions that are right, just, and humane, or refrain from actions that are wrong, unjust, and inhumane (Bandura, 1999). Social cognitive theory (SCT) suggests that inhibitive or self-regulatory aspects of moral agency need to be activated in order for people to recognize and do what is right (Bandura, 1989). However, there are a number of ways in which people can bypass self-regulatory processes, resulting in selective disengagement from reflection on unethical behavior and self-sanctioning both before and after the behavior has occurred. First, reprehensible behavior and the consequences of such behavior can be cognitively restructured or framed in ways that make it seem acceptable or even morally correct. Cognitive restructuring mechanisms include

moral justification (e.g., killing an enemy that threatens one's way of life or survival), euphemistic language (e.g., eliminate a target vs. kill a person), advantageous comparison of the reprehensible behavior to other more destructive or widespread atrocities, and disregard for or distortion of the consequences (e.g., a group uses hateful language without acknowledging the violence and discrimination that results from this). Second, moral agency can be weakened by lessening personal responsibility for one's actions through displacing responsibility onto leaders or authorities (e.g., I was just following orders), or diffusing responsibility through division of labor or group decision-making such that no one person feels accountable. Third, it is easier to commit violent or unjust acts against others who are made to seem less than human or when attributions of blame are assigned to these victims. A quote cited by Akins (2006) from a Ku Klux Klan website exemplifies many of these moral disengagement mechanisms:

> "Enemies from within are destroying the United States of America. An unholy coalition of anti-White, anti-Christian liberals, socialists, feminists, homosexuals, and militant minorities have managed to seize control of our government and mass media…We shall liberate our nation from these savage criminals and restore law and order to America." (p. 129).

Extremist ideological groups may manifest greater moral disengagement than more mainstream ideological groups and non-ideological groups on their websites. First, the extreme beliefs and views held by these groups make it difficult for them to work through normal political and social channels to accomplish goals (Akins, 2006). Consequently, these groups may turn to coercive or violent actions in order to perpetuate their ideologies. For example, Animal Liberation Front is an international underground group that engages in unlawful destruction of facilities and removal of animals from laboratories and other locations in support of their animal rights and

liberation ideology. Website content can be framed in ways that enable group members to morally justify violent actions. Second, the ideologies of some extreme groups are grounded in hatred towards other groups. Identifying one or more groups of enemies that threaten the ideological values of the group provides fertile ground for dehumanizing others, blaming outgroups, and selectively interpreting or distorting outcomes of group actions. The Ku Klux Klan's white supremacy, anti-immigration ideology exemplifies these types of hate groups. Third, members of these groups who are highly identified with the group ideology are likely to be loyal to the group and its leaders (Angie et al., 2011; Hogg, 2003; Roccas et al., 2006). Calls to action on group websites make it easy to displace or diffuse responsibility for individual actions. In light of these observations, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Violent ideological group websites will display moral disengagement mechanisms to a greater extent than non-violent ideological and non-ideological group websites.

While websites offer many opportunities for ideological groups to disseminate ideas and motivate members to support the group, little is known about how the psychological processes on these websites are related to aspects of website credibility.

Ideological Website Credibility and Psychological Processes

Information credibility has been conceptualized as the believability of information and/or its source (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953) and it is assumed that credibility assessments involve both objective judgments and subjective receiver perceptions (Metzger, 2003; Metzger, Flanagin, & Medders, 2010). Research on the credibility of websites suggests that at least two general categories of factors are important in understanding website credibility, including content features and structural features (Metzger, 2003; Metzger 2007; Metzger et al., 2010; Teven & McCrosky, 1997). Initial research highlighted five content criteria potentially important for assessing the credibility of

a website, including information accuracy (free of errors), authority (credentials/qualifications of website author), objectivity (fact vs. opinion), currency (information is up to date), and coverage/scope (depth of information) (Alexander & Tate, 1999; Brandt, 1996). Structural features of a website may also inform credibility judgments. Aesthetic qualities of the website, opportunities to examine or provide feedback, contact information, website architecture that facilitates navigation, and attractiveness and dynamism of a website have been shown to influence user assessments of credibility (Hong, 2006; Metzger, 2003; 2007; van Birgelen, Wetzels, & van Dolen, 2008).

Metzger's review of online credibility research (2007) noted that several studies using a variety of samples demonstrated that internet users rarely or occasionally engaged in fact-checking or verifying kinds of behavior to evaluate website credibility. More recent research has suggested that evaluation of credibility may be less tied to information accuracy than it is tied to perceived trustworthiness. Metzger, Flanagin, and Medders (2010) suggest that rather than evaluating the credibility of website information in a cognitively effortful manner, credibility assessments rely on social information and cognitive heuristics. Their focus group study findings showed that credibility assessments were influenced by social heuristics such as social information pooling (e.g., user-generated comments, testimonials, reviews, reputation systems), social confirmation of personal opinion (e.g., users share similar interests, personalities, viewpoints), and interpersonal recommendations (referrals from friends), and cognitive heuristics such as endorsements of the website (expert opinions, ratings, links to other credible sites or groups), and confirmation of expectancies (e.g., appearance as expected, information consistent with own views).

In terms of structural website features, research by Fogg (2003) showed that people most frequently use site presentation criteria (graphics, readability, navigation ease, functionality) to

evaluate credibility, followed by content features (e.g., breadth, accuracy, bias), source motives (e.g., did source have something to gain), and source reputation (e.g., name recognition, third-party endorsements). These findings were consistent with results of other studies (Eysenbach & Kohler, 2002; Rieh, 2002).

In considering credibility assessments of ideological websites, several points are important to bear in mind. Given that some viewers of ideological websites are seeking to confirm or adopt a social identity, their evaluations of credibility may be particularly susceptible to social confirmation and cognitive expectancy biases. If ideological websites provide social confirmation of one's personal views or are a good match with one's beliefs and values, they are likely to be viewed as more credible (Metzger et al, 2010). Alternatively, if the content or structural features of an ideological website run counter to one's expectations for that website, this expectancy violation is likely to reduce credibility. These biases have implications for how psychological processes on a website might relate to perceived ideological match or expectancy violation. For instance, the presence of social categorization, outgrouping, and moral disengagement on violent ideological group websites is likely to match the beliefs and values of and confirm expectations of individuals seeking to adopt or confirm this kind of extreme identity. However, individuals looking to identify with non-violent ideologies may find the presence of social categorization, outgrouping, and moral disengagement processes on non-violent websites incongruent with the beliefs and values highlighted on those sites which could aversely influence credibility.

These psychological processes could be related to website credibility even for viewers not seeking identity or affiliation with the group. Violent ideological groups may recognize the need to include certain content and structural features that will make the group seem credible to a broader range of viewers in the face of the extreme ideas, beliefs, and values that comprise their ideologies.

When outgrouping, social categorizing, and moral disengagement are infused within a violent ideology and are present on a group's website, credibility features aimed at boosting goodwill, expertise, currency, and trustworthiness may also be more pervasive. This would not necessarily hold true for non-violent ideological group websites which may not see as much need to appeal to viewers other than through their ideology. While goodwill is likely to be part of non-violent ideologies, features reflecting currency or expertise may not be highlighted to the extent they are on violent ideological websites.

Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

H4: Social categorization, outgrouping, and moral disengagement will correlate positively with website content credibility features for violent ideological groups and negatively for non-violent ideological groups.

It is less clear how social categorization, outgrouping, and moral disengagement might relate to structural features of website credibility for different types of ideological groups. Given that structural features influence credibility (Metzger et al., 2010) and that these features are particularly important when individuals first visit a website (Davern, Te'eni, & Moon, 2000), this may be important to examine. Here again, violent ideological groups may see the need to use structural website features to attract and retain visitors, such as how well the website is organized, suggesting a positive correlation of structural features and negative psychological processes. However, ideological groups in general may focus more on the ideas they are expressing and promoting and less on structural website features, so the relationship between psychological processes and structural features may be weak.

RQ1: Will psychological processes on ideological websites be related to structural website features related to credibility for violent and non-violent ideological groups?

The present study uses content analysis to compare violent and non-violent ideological group websites to each other and to non-ideological group websites on three sets of key variables, including social categorization, outgrouping, and moral disengagement. Additionally, this study seeks to understand whether and how these website characteristics relate to content and structural credibility website features and if these relationships differ across website types.

Method

Website Identification and Classification

Websites for actual groups represented at a national or international level were considered for inclusion in this study. Community or regional groups were not included since the size and visibility of such groups is likely much smaller. Websites eligible for consideration had to identify with a group that meets face-to-face or otherwise facilitates member connection and interactions through the computer-mediated contact. Three types of group websites were identified for this study, including violent ideological, non-violent ideological, and non-ideological. The list of websites from prior research (Griffith et al., 2013) was used as a starting point and other websites were identified through following links within these websites and through keyword Internet searches. Keyword search terms were based on the names of known ideological and non-ideological groups (e.g., "the Ku Klux Klan" and "American Civil Liberties Union") and ideological issues (e.g., "animal rights"). An initial list of 120 websites was compiled for evaluation. Information from the "About Us", "Mission Statement", or "Statement of Purpose" area(s) of each website were reviewed and rated on several criteria by three trained coders to determine whether a website was ideological or non-ideological. These criteria included: 1) articulates a mental model about the goals the group seeks to obtain that is rooted in events of the past; 2) ties interpretation of events to the mental model; 3) focuses on a few, core

transcendent goals largely centered on a return to a past idealized state; and 4) rejects beliefs that are not congruent with the mental model. An overall mean across raters and criteria was computed for each website and means were transformed into Z-scores. Groups with a Z-score greater than 1.00 were classified as ideological, and groups with a Z-score less than -1.00 were classified as non-ideological.

Examination of Z-scores showed that several groups did not cleanly fall into a single category and therefore were removed from consideration. These groups included *Oxfam International*, *Amnesty International*, *Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)*, *Hare Krishna Society*, *Amitabha Buddhist Society*, *Students for a Democratic Society*, *Project Reason*, *La Leche League*, *Free Believers Network*, *Muslim Aid (UK)*, *U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance*, and *American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA).* Additionally, face validity of group types was also taken into account to ensure that ratings matched overall impressions of the groups' ideological/non-ideological standing. In several instances, groups received ratings that were incongruent with overall perceptions. These groups included *National Audubon Society* and *Save our Wild Salmon*. These groups showed ideological tendencies in some areas of the website while remaining non-ideological in nature regarding other criteria. These groups, similar to those listed above, do not fit distinctly within one category and thus may have an unintended influence on relationships between predictors and key outcomes. For that reason, these groups were also removed from the sample.

Ideological websites were identified and classified as violent if they met one or more of the criteria described by Griffith et al. (2013), including: 1) the website sanctions violence, 2) the website is associated with one or more other groups known to sanction violence, 3) members of the group represented on the website have been linked to acts of violence, and 4) the website or

group has been classified as a hate group and/or a violent group by a reputable third party source (e.g., *Southern Poverty Law Center*). Overall, this process resulted in a sample of 105 groups with 68 groups categorized as ideological (violent = 32, non-violent = 36) and 37 groups categorized as non-ideological. The final list of selected websites was reviewed by three experts on ideological groups and is included in Table 1.

Development of Content Rating Scales and Coding Process

Concurrent with developing the criteria for categorizing websites and the website list, literature was reviewed addressing the topics of social categorization, moral disengagement, ideological groups, website characteristics, and credibility. Based on this review, definitions and rating metrics for the content coding were developed for key variables in each of these categories. Rating metrics were based on the literature or were borrowed or adapted from previously validated metrics (Angie et al., 2011). The format of each rating scale included the construct definition along with a 5-point rating scale with examples anchoring the low, middle, and high end of the scale. Example ratings scales are provided in the Appendix, one reflecting an aspect of social categorization (superiority) and one reflecting an aspect of moral disengagement (misrepresenting consequences).

Once rating scales were developed, six doctoral student coders from Psychology and Communication were divided into two groups of three. Each group was randomly assigned to rate either the predictors or the criteria for the coding assigned that week in an effort to minimize same source method bias. Thus, predictors and criteria for a given website were always rated by different groups of coders. Coding took approximately four months.

Rater Training. Raters were trained together in several ways prior to the coding. First, they were instructed to use a "surfing" perspective when scanning and reading the websites for

information related to the variables of interest (Rains & Karmikel, 2009). Content analytic studies of websites often focus on the homepage and other specific areas of the website to identify relevant information (e.g., Gerstenfeld, Grant, & Chiang, 2003; Zhou, Reid, Qin, Chen, & Lai, 2005). Griffith et al.'s (2013) study analyzed website content at both primary and secondary levels within the websites, demonstrating the need for exploring beyond the home page. This and other evidence has suggested that website study designs should include at least a second level analysis (Symonenko, 2006). Accordingly, raters were instructed to expand their search for information relevant to the rating scales to the second level of each group's website and, if need be, to examine additional levels. For example, some of the structural credibility information such as contact information was found several levels into the website.

A second aspect of rater training involved frame-of-reference training (Bernardin & Buckley, 1981) in order to familiarize coders with the variables of interest, the coding process, and rating errors that sometimes occur such as central tendency and halo errors. Raters were provided a complete set of rating scales for evaluating the predictors and criteria of interest. They practiced applying the rating scales on approximately eight ideological and non-ideological websites not included in the present sample. After rating several websites independently, raters met to compare and discuss similarities and differences in how they applied each rating scale. When discrepancies existed, the relevant definition and scale anchors were reviewed and clarified, and discussion continued until the raters reached consensus regarding the application of that scale. Coding practice lasted for approximately three weeks until raters reached acceptable levels of inter-rater agreement.

During the coding process, rater agreement was empirically evaluated on a weekly basis between coders in each group and any agreement problems were addressed. If agreement was

low for a given week's coding (e.g., more than 25% of the rating scales had agreement below .60) coders were re-trained and the websites were re-coded. Inter-rater agreement was calculated with an r^*_{wg} to estimate the degree of interchangeability of raters (Lindell & Brandt, 1999). This measure of reliability refers to the degree to which ratings made by coders are nearly identical (Kozlowski & Hattrup, 1992). Raters typically had very similar ratings and this lack of variance made r^*_{wg} more suitable for assessing reliability than intraclass correlation inter-rater reliability estimates. The latter estimate will be artificially suppressed when ratings across coders lack variability (Stemler & Tsai, 2008; Tinsley & Weiss, 1975). Inter-coder agreement was acceptable for all measures including site credibility ($r^*_{wg} = .68$), structural credibility ($r^*_{wg} = .80$), social categorization ($r^*_{wg} = .76$), outgrouping ($r^*_{wg} = .75$), and moral disengagement ($r^*_{wg} = .95$).

Psychological Processes Rating Scales

Several psychological processes were measured by aggregating coder ratings on a number of metric rating scales. The s*ocial categorization* scale (α =.93) was comprised of four items, including group differentiation (the degree to which the group compares and contrasts itself to others on its website), superiority (the extent to which the group expresses its own superiority and entitlement), disagreement with dissenting views (the degree to which the group rejects views differing from their core beliefs), and deindividuation (the degree to which group members are encouraged to view themselves as part of a group rather than individuals and to behave in ways consistent with group expectations). The second psychological process scale, *outgrouping*, consisted of three items (α =.96). These included seeing outgroups as enemies (the extent to which the website portrays the world as black and white and that groups/individuals who do not share their views are enemies), information distortion (the degree to which the

website misrepresents news and information about outgroups to serve ingroup beliefs and purposes), and negative social comparisons (the extent to which the website expresses negative social comparisons with the outgroup). The *moral disengagement* (α = .95) scale was based on four of Bandura's (1999) dimensions including dehumanization (the degree to which the website deemphasizes human qualities and discourages compassion and sensitivity with regard to outgroups), misrepresentation of consequences (the extent to which the website distorts the relationships between the actions they advocate and the effects of those actions), euphemistic labeling (the extent to which language is sanitized in order to lessen the emotion intensity of the reality of the group's message or actions promoted) and displacement and diffusion of responsibility (the extent to which the website assigns blame to other groups or avoids taking responsibility).

Website Credibility Rating Scales

Website credibility was assessed using *website content credibility* and *website structural credibility*. *Content credibility* (α = .91) refers to the extent to which the website attempts to appear as if providing credible content (Flanagin & Metzger, 2007; McCroskey & Young, 1981; McCroskey & Teven, 1999). This scale contained five items including trustworthiness (extent to which the group website attempts to appear honest and reliable), fairness (the extent to which the group website attempts to appear objective and balanced), expertise (the extent to which the group website attempts to appear qualified and intelligent), goodwill (the extent to which the group website projects unselfishness and concern for others), and currency/recency (the extent to which information on the website is up to date). These were rated on a five-point likert scale (1 = not at all; 5 = to a great extent) and ratings were averaged across items and raters to form an overall score. *Website structural credibility* (α = .76) refers to the structural composition of

websites (van Birgelen et al., 2008; Eysenbach & Kohler, 2002; Fogg, 2003; Metzger, 2007). This scale contained six items including website organization, website architecture, and overall cleanness, which were rated on five-point scales, and presence of privacy policy (Y = 1, N = 0), presence of contact information for the group (Y = 1, N = 0) and whether the website included a third-party endorsement (Y = 1, N = 0). Item scores were averaged across items and coders to create an overall score for structural credibility features.

Covariates

Two other variables were assessed as controls in this study. To control for differences in the range of information provided on the websites about the groups, information diversity was assessed. This was a one-item rating of the degree to which the website provided a wide range of information about the group, ranging from 1, very narrow scope of information, to 5, contains information about many topics relevant to the groups and the group's goals. The second control variable indicated whether or not (Y = 1, N = 0) the website fostered an online community where visitors could participate in discussion forums, comment on articles, or comment on blog posts. A yes response was assigned if one or more of these kinds of community activities were available.

Analyses

Basic descriptive statistics were calculated for the constructs of interest for each website category (non-ideological, non-violent ideological, and violent ideological). Simple *t*-tests were conducted to test the first three hypotheses, using unpooled estimates for the few instances when homogeneity of variance was violated. Correlations and hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to test hypothesis 4 and the research question.

Results

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations at the scale and item level for the psychological processes and credibility constructs. With regard to social categorization, *t*-tests showed significant differences in the overall scale mean and item-level means. Consistent with hypothesis 1, violent ideological group websites (M = 4.13, SD = .49) showed greater social categorization than non-violent ideological (M = 3.06, SD = .70) websites $t(66) = -7.43$, $p < .001$. Both categories of ideological websites had higher mean levels of social categorization than non-ideological group websites (M = 1.45, SD = .51) $t(71) = -11.19$, $p < .001$ (non-violent), $t(67) = -22.037$, $p < .001$ (violent). The pattern of means for outgrouping and moral disengagement were similar with the violent websites showing the highest levels (M_o = 4.16, SD = .55; M_{md} = 3.43, SD = .59) and the non-violent ideological websites (M_o = 2.62, SD = .99; M_{md} = 2.22, SD = .76) and non-ideological websites (M_o = 1.20, SD = .54; M_{md} = 1.16, SD = .29) showing significantly lower levels, $t(66) = -7.99$, $p < .001$ (violent vs. non-violent outgrouping), $t(67) = -22.45$, $p < .001$ (violent vs. non-ideological outgrouping), $t(66) = -7.24$, $p < .001$ (violent vs. non-violent moral disengagement), $t(67) = -19.76$, $p < .001$ (violent vs. non-ideological moral disengagement). These results support hypotheses 2 and 3. Interestingly, the non-violent ideological websites evidenced modest amounts of social categorization and outgrouping, suggesting that ideological groups in general use these processes in forming and maintaining distinct social identities. Content and structure credibility were higher for the non-ideological (M_c = 3.90, SD = .60; M_s = 2.65, SD = .41), $t(67) = 10.92$, $p < .001$ (content), $t(66) = 5.98$, $p < .001$ (structure) and non-violent (M_c = 3.48, SD = .70; M_s = 2.59, SD = .37), $t(66) = 7.28$, $p < .001$ (content), $t(62) = 5.51$, $p < .001$ (structure) websites compared to the violent ideological websites (M_c = 2.33, SD = .59; M_s = 2.04, SD = .43).

Correlations among the study variables by website category are shown in Tables 3 and 4. Social categorization, outgrouping, and moral disengagement show large, positive correlations for non-violent ideological websites (avg. r = .81) and non-ideological websites (avg. r = .88). Correlations for the violent ideological websites were also fairly large (avg. r = .67) with social categorization and moral disengagement showing the lowest correlation (r = .52). These psychological processes showed no relationship to website content credibility or structural credibility for the non-ideological websites. However, they showed modest to large negative relationships with credibility for the non-violent ideological websites, with an average correlation of -.67 for content credibility and -.37 for structural credibility. Comparatively, outgrouping and moral disengagement were not significantly related to either type of credibility for the violent ideological websites, while social categorization showed modest negative correlations with content credibility (r = -.38) and structural credibility (r = -.43).

A series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to test hypothesis 4 and research question 1 as shown in Table 5. Separate regressions were conducted for website content credibility and website structural credibility for each website category, with covariates entered in step 1 and the three psychological processes entered in step 2. Consistent with the zero-order correlations and hypothesis 4, standardized beta coefficients indicated that social categorization (β = -.14), outgrouping (β = -.78) and moral disengagement (β = .23) accounted for significant variance in website content credibility for non-violent ideological groups ($R^2\Delta$ = .48, $F(5, 31) = 3.72$, $p < .01$). The positive beta for moral disengagement is likely due to suppression effects given the high intercorrelations of these variables. With regard to the violent ideological websites, hypothesis 4 suggested that these psychological processes would contribute positively to ratings of website content credibility. However, neither the covariates nor the

psychological processes accounted for significant variance in website content credibility for the violent websites. Taken together, these findings partially supported hypothesis 4 and suggest that these types of negative processes hurt content credibility perceptions more for non-violent websites than for violent ones.

Regression analyses examining the relationships of psychological processes to website structural credibility showed a pattern of findings similar to the content credibility regressions. Covariates were not significantly related to ratings of structural credibility for either type of ideological website. However, as indicated by the standardized betas, social categorization (β = .14), outgrouping (β = -.86) and moral disengagement (β = .14) accounted for significant variance in website structural content for the non-violent ideological websites ($R^2\Delta$ = .41, F(3, 32) = 7.37, $p < .001$). Again, the positive betas are likely due to suppression. The psychological processes did not account for significant variance in website structural credibility for the violent ideological websites.

With regard to the non-ideological groups, standardized betas indicated that information diversity (β = .60) was the only variable that accounted for significant variance in website content credibility ($R^2\Delta$ = .36, $F\Delta$ (2, 34) = 9.36, $p < .001$) and website structural credibility (β = .57, $R^2\Delta$ = .38, $F\Delta$ (2, 34) = 9.06, $p < .001$). Social categorization, outgrouping, and moral disengagement did not significantly predict website content credibility or website structure credibility after controlling for information diversity and the presence of an online community.

Discussion

This study extends the research on the online presence of ideological groups in some important ways. First, it provides evidence that psychological processes important to social identity formation and ethical behavior are embedded within general areas (i.e., home pages,

about us pages) on websites developed by ideological groups. Ideological groups are important sources of social identity for some individuals. Their online public faces, as manifest through their websites, show the presence of social categorization (highlighting group distinctiveness and superiority) and outgrouping (diminishing outside groups) processes known to influence the development and maintenance of social identity (Hogg, 2007; Tafjel & Turner, 1979; Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). Additionally, websites of ideological groups also included content reflecting a number of moral disengagement mechanisms – mechanisms that reduce self-sanctioning and can increase the probability of unethical behavior. Our comparison of the degree to which these psychological processes were present on violent and non-violent ideological group websites indicated substantially higher levels of social categorization, outgrouping, and moral disengagement on the violent sites. These findings are consistent with and extend prior findings with ideological group discussion forums and message boards (Angie et al., 2011). To some extent, all ideological groups in this sample appeared motivated to engage visitors and encourage group members online to initiate and enhance identification with the group. However, use of these processes was more pronounced on violent websites.

A second contribution of this research is that it highlights the relationship of psychological processes to website credibility, and, by extension group credibility, for the different categories of websites examined. The psychological processes of social categorization, outgrouping, and moral disengagement were unrelated to the websites' structural and content credibility for non-ideological groups. This may be because the source of social identity for these non-ideological groups comes not from a rigidly defined set of beliefs and values, but from shared activities, interests, and goals. Research on social identities in online communities has suggested that in addition to the social exclusion aspect of social identity, online groups have

more positive ways of fostering a sense of cohesion such as promoting a shared repertoire of activities and artifacts and mutual engagement of community members (Pape, Reinecke, Rohde, & Strauss, 2003).

Alternatively, we expected and saw that social categorization, outgrouping, and moral disengagement were negatively related to website content and structural credibility features for non-violent ideological groups. Interestingly, these groups use psychological processes that likely increase social identification, but that may ultimately undermine their credibility, at least with the ratings used in this study. The very nature of these processes may contradict important beliefs and values held by non-violent ideological groups, something that may be fairly noticeable to viewers of these websites. Thus, the means through which non-violent groups communicate their ideological positions appear to be an important part of how the group is viewed. At the bivariate level, these processes were also negatively correlated with website content and structural credibility for the violent groups, but the relationships were not as strong. When used together to account for variance in website credibility, these processes did not significantly contribute to the credibility of violent websites.

Theoretical Implications

Parker and Jannoff-Bulman (2013) note that outgroups are fundamental to ingroup identification (i.e., social identity) for morality-based groups. While most ideological groups have some level of belief that their views, values, and beliefs are "right", the implied or stated consequences of not endorsing and following the ideology range from being labeled as socially unjust to condemning one's soul for all eternity. Thus, there is a range of "morality" implied by different types of ideologies. Angie et al. (2011) found some evidence that violent ideological group discussion boards contained significantly more religious content than non-violent

ideological groups. This suggests that social identity formation is not the same for all types of groups. Some processes are emphasized much more than others in ideological groups, and those sanctioning violence are likely to engage in certain processes more than others. Additionally, social identity motivations of the individuals seeking to identify with ideological groups may influence credibility assessments (Hogg, 2007; Thoroughgood, Padilla, Hunter, & Tate, 2012). Hogg suggests that the need to reduce self-uncertainty (about one's cognitions, perceptions, feelings, behavior, etc.) through social categorization is higher in some individuals. These individuals seek out ideological groups which provide meaning, strong sets of values and beliefs, and clear norms for behavior that reduce this uncertainty. Thoroughgood et al. (2012) suggests that there is a susceptible circle of followers who are more likely to seek out destructive leaders and their groups. One category of followers consistent with attraction to ideological groups are the "lost souls", or those individuals who seek to identify with a leader because they lack self-concept clarity, have poor core self-evaluations, have basic needs that are unmet, and are experiencing distress in their personal life. A second category of followers includes the "acolytes", or individuals whose values and goals are congruent with the leader's/group's values and goals and who see the ideological leader as a source of expert power able to promote them. We only explored three psychological processes here that might contribute to the social identity of such groups, but there are likely others that will also show differences across these types of groups.

Psychological processes associated with social identity formation in ideological groups may also impact perceived credibility of such groups in online environments. If the group's ideology is inconsistent with the psychological processes used to convey it, its credibility may be harmed, which would reduce the group's ability to attract new members. Additionally, persistent

use of ideology-inconsistent processes could erode member support for the group because this could create conditions for de-identification. Alternatively, group members could get used to these inconsistencies over time through moral disengagement processes, which justify the ethicality of exclusionary social categorization processes. Such disengagement may make the psychological processes seem more consistent with the ideology over time and credibility doubts could decrease. Examining the credibility of violent ideological group websites over time from the perspective of group affiliates would be an interesting area for future research.

Practical Implications

Ideological groups are undoubtedly important to the fabric of modern society, reflecting a wide variety of political, religious, and social ideals. Non-violent ideological groups have the potential to promote pro-social values, provide meaning, and facilitate just ethical behavior. However, to the extent that they use psychological processes that undermine their credibility, members and potential members may remain less than fully committed and even skeptical about the group. Non-violent groups may want to capitalize on other ways to enhance social identity that do not involve negative comparisons with outside groups.

Findings in this study also suggest that the credibility of violent ideological groups can potentially be undermined when their use of negative psychological processes is highlighted publicly. For example, online media outlets, traditional media, watch agencies, and others have called attention to the violent nature of these types of groups, but have not yet focused on the type of psychological manipulation that can occur. Some violent ideological groups are moving towards a sanitized public face and internet presence. Greater public awareness of this sanitization could embolden these groups, potentially increasing their credibility with group members and affiliates. Alternatively, public awareness of such facades could result in increased

skepticism and vigilance of those outside the group. Additionally, identifying whether these changes are associated with a reduction in psychological and/or physical violence is also needed to understand these trends.

Reform for some violent groups may be possible through interventions aimed at increasing awareness of moral disengagement and providing support for greater self-sanctioning. Unfortunately, certain ideologies are grounded in violence against other people and groups such that reducing or eliminating the violence necessarily would change the ideology. It remains to be seen whether these groups can adapt their ideological views so violence is not seen as the only means to maintaining the ideology.

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. First, while we analyzed three times as many groups as previous studies looking at ideological group websites, the number of groups within each website category was still relatively low, ranging from 32 to 37, reducing the power in some of the analyses. Nevertheless, these *N* sizes are sufficient for means testing and bivariate correlations and the regression results were fairly consistent with the correlations. Second, evaluations of credibility were made by coders rather than individuals seeking to explore ideological groups as a source of social identity. The relationship of psychological processes to credibility should be explored in this type of sample. Third, this study was limited to English language websites given that this was the language spoken by the researchers and coders involved in the study. It would be interesting to see if the patterns of results hold in non-English ideological websites. A fourth limitation is that we only examined a few psychological processes on ideological websites and we recognize that others may also be operating such as norm setting and enforcement, emotional appeals, and social conformity. These could be examined in future

studies. Additional control variables would have also been desirable, such as website size, age, and location, but this information was not consistently available across all websites. Finally, given sample sizes, we classified all non-violent organizations into one category, without the specific type of ideological organization or group the website represented. For example, websites reflected religious, environmental, political, and social groups. The same held true for the violent ideological websites with there being a range of ideological types as well as levels of violence subsumed within our categorization. Future research should explore similarities and differences in distinct types of ideological groups with respect to psychological processes and website credibility.

Concluding Remarks

In an age where social uses of the internet are expanding exponentially, it is important to continue exploring the presence, nature and impact of ideological groups that have an online presence. Such groups are capable of exerting substantial influence on attitudes, beliefs, and values, particularly for individuals seeking social support and social identities. While there are many pro-social ideological groups, there are also anti-social, violent ones that continue to attract people. We hope this research stimulates new understanding and continued study in this domain.

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Table 1

Ideological Groups by Category

No.	Non-Ideological	Non-violent Ideological	Violent Ideological[a]
1	Amateur Entomologists' Society	American Baptist Church	Aggressive Christianity Missionary Training Corps
2	American Association of Retired Persons	American Cause	Alpha 66
3	American Astronomical Society	American Civil Liberties Union	Americans for Truth About Homosexuality
4	American Botanical Council	Americans United	Anarchist Federation
5	American Cancer Society	Center for Bioethical Reform	Animal Liberation Front
6	American Diabetes Association	Christian Exodus	Army of God
7	American Fisheries Society	Coalition to Stop Gun Violence	Aryan Nations
8	American Heart Association	Coffee Party	Creativity Movement
9	American Meteorological Society	Council of Conservative Citizens	Earth Liberation Front
10	American Red Cross	Earth First!	English Defence League
11	American Sewing Guild	Federation for American Immigration Reform	Ezzedeen Al-Qassam Brigade (Hamas)
12	American Trucking Associations	Freedom from Religion Foundation	Heterosexuals Organized for a Moral Environment
13	Amnesty International	Friends of the Earth	Imperial Klans of America
14	Asian American Arts Alliance	Hadassah	Institute for Historical Review
15	Association of Woodworking and Furnishing Suppliers	Independent American Party	Jewish Defense League
16	Atomic Age Alliance	IslamiCity	Kingdom Identity Ministries
17	Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America	Islamic Society of North America	Ku Klux Klan
18	British Beatles Fan Club	Jewish Voice for Peace	League of the South
19	Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder	John Birch Society	National Alliance
20	Doctors without Borders	Latter Day Saints (Mormon) Church	National Association for the Advancement of White People
21	Habitat for Humanity	Libertarian Party	National Democratic Front
22	Jenny Craig	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People	National Socialist Movement
23	Lions Club	National Coalition for Men	Negotiation is Over
24	Mensa	National Organization for Women	Operation Rescue
25	Mustang Club	National Rifle Association	Power of Prophecy
26	National Association for Amateur Radio	NOH8 Campaign	People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
27	National Association for the Self-Employed	ONE Campaign	Prairie Fire Organizing Committee
28	National Association of Miniature Enthusiasts	ProLife Action League	Sovereign Citizens
29	National Association of Rocketry	Sierra Club	The Barnes Review
30	National Street Rod Association	Socialist Party USA	United for a Sovereign America

31	Photographic Society of America	Tea Party Nation	Volksfront
32	Shriners International	The Family International	Westboro Baptist Church
33	Society of Professional Journalists	Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations	
34	Special Olympics	United Methodist Church	
35	Teamsters	United Pentecostal Church International	
36	US Tennis Association	United States Conference of Catholic Bishops	
37	Yellow Ribbon Club		

Note. [a]It is not recommended to visit violent, ideological group websites without extensive virus protection software and encryption service enabled on your computer.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Psychological Process and Credibility by Website Type

	Non-Ideological *n* = 37		Non-Violent, Ideological *n* = 36		Violent, Ideological *n* = 32	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Social Categorization (overall) [abc]	1.45	0.51	3.06	0.70	4.13	0.49
Group differentiation [abc]	1.47	0.80	3.10	1.12	4.38	0.56
Superiority [abc]	1.47	0.59	2.71	0.89	4.15	0.85
Disagree with dissenting views [abc]	1.59	0.77	3.67	0.91	4.54	0.53
Deindividuation [abc]	1.38	0.62	2.74	0.85	3.47	0.71
Outgrouping (overall) [abc]	1.20	0.54	2.62	0.99	4.16	0.55
Outgroups as enemies [abc]	1.17	0.67	2.50	1.20	4.20	0.71
Information distortion [abc]	1.17	0.34	2.70	0.90	4.06	0.76
Negative social comparisons [ac]	1.47	0.80	3.10	1.12	4.38	0.56
Moral Disengagement (overall) [abc]	1.16	0.29	2.22	0.76	3.43	0.59
Misrep. Consequences [abc]	1.18	0.39	2.19	0.96	3.35	0.69
Displace/diffuse responsibility [abc]	1.12	0.30	2.35	0.97	3.36	0.75
Euphemistic labeling [abc]	1.23	0.30	2.40	0.78	3.56	0.76
Dehumanization [abc]	1.14	0.51	1.95	0.79	3.42	0.80
Content Credibility (overall) [abc]	3.90	0.60	3.48	0.70	2.33	0.59
Trustworthiness [abc]	4.08	0.64	3.50	0.85	2.46	0.72
Fairness [abc]	3.51	0.56	2.75	0.84	1.64	0.58
Expertise [abc]	3.96	0.85	3.30	0.80	2.52	0.79
Goodwill [bc]	4.04	0.82	3.51	1.05	2.03	0.80
Currency [bc]	4.04	0.87	4.34	0.55	3.02	1.15
Structure Credibility (overall) [bc]	2.65	0.41	2.59	0.37	2.03	0.43
Website organization [bc]	4.05	0.71	3.93	0.59	2.98	0.95
Website architecture [bc]	3.41	1.02	3.39	1.02	2.26	0.89
Cleanness [bc]	3.71	0.75	3.72	0.74	2.59	0.98
Contact information	1.66	0.15	1.64	0.15	1.57	0.26
Privacy policy	1.59	0.23	1.53	0.24	1.46	0.29
Third party endorsement [b]	1.47	0.29	1.45	0.33	1.35	0.15

Note. [a] Indicates significant mean differences between non-ideological and non-violent ideological websites; [b] Indicates significant mean difference between non-ideological and violent ideological websites; [c] Indicates significant mean difference between non-violent and violent ideological websites; unpooled estimates for the *t* statistic were used when homogeneity of variance was violated.

Table 3

Non-ideological Website Correlations for Psychological Processes and Website Credibility

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Social categorization	-						
2	Outgrouping	.86**	-					
3	Moral Disengagement	.85**	.92**	-				
4	Information Diversity	.27	.12	.07	-			
5	Online Community	.06	-.07	.02	-.14	-		
6	Website content credibility	.05	-.08	-.12	.60**	-.05	-	
7	Website structural credibility	.19	.03	.09	.53**	.18	.67**	-

Note. n= 37; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Table 4

Non-violent and Violent Ideological Website Correlations for Psychological Processes and Website Credibility

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Social categorization	-	.70**	.52**	.00	.19	-.39*	-.43*
2	Outgrouping	.84**	-	.78**	-.10	.28	-.25	-.20
3	Moral Disengagement	.77**	.82**	-	-.19	.24	-.31	-.10
4	Information Diversity	-.16	-.26	-.17	-	-.45**	.41*	.35
5	Online Community	.15	.27	.31	.11	-	-.23	-.37*
6	Website content credibility	-.65**	-.76**	-.59**	.12	-.42**	-	.47**
7	Website structural credibility	-.45**	-.65**	-.46**	.22	-.30	.82**	-

Note. n = 36 for non-violent ideological websites (below the diagonal); n= 32 for violent ideological websites (above the diagonal); * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Table 5

Relationships of Social Categorization, Outgrouping, and Moral Disengagement to Website Credibility Across Website Type

		n = 37	*n*= 36	*n*= 32
		Non-Ideological Websites[a]	Non-violent Ideological Websites[b]	Violent Ideological Websites[c]
Website Content Credibility		*β*	*β*	*β*
Step 1	Information Diversity	.60**	--	--
	Online Community	.03	--	--
		$R^2\Delta$ .36	--	--
		R^2 Adjusted .32	--	--
Step 2	Social categorization	--	-.14	--
	Outgrouping	--	-.78**	--
	Moral disengagement	--	.23	--
		$R^2\Delta$ ns	$R^2\Delta$ .48	--
		R^2 Adjusted ns	R^2 Adjusted .41	--
Website Structure Credibility				
Step 1	Information Diversity	.57**	--	--
	Online Community	.26	--	--
		$R^2\Delta$ .35	--	--
		R^2 Adjusted .31	--	--
Step 2	Social categorization	--	.14	--
	Outgrouping	--	-.86**	--
	Moral disengagement	--	.14	--
		$R^2\Delta$ ns	$R^2\Delta$ .41	--
		R^2 Adjusted ns	R^2 Adjusted .35	--

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ns = not significant; *F* values for Website Content credibility steps 1 and 2 [a] $F_{change1}(2, 34) = 9.36$, $p < .001$; $F_{change2}(3, 31) = 3.87$, $p < .69$; [b] $F_{change1}(2, 33) = 3.70$, $p < .04$; $F_{change2}(3, 30) = 11.54$, $p < .001$; [c] covariates and predictors did not significantly contribute to content credibility for violent websites. *F* values for Website Structural credibility steps 1 and 2 [a] $F_{change1}(2, 34) = 9.06$, $p < .001$; $F_{change2}(3, 31) = .46$. $p < .72$; [b] $F_{change1}(2,33) = 2.19$, $p < .13$; $F_{change}(3, 32) = 7.37$, $p < .001$; [c] covariates and predictors did not significantly contribute to structural credibility for violent websites.

Appendix

Example Rating Scales

Superiority/Entitlement- Extent to which the website expresses group superiority or entitlement.

1	2	3	4	5
No expression of superiority on the website		*Some expression of superiority on the website*		*Pervasive expression of superiority on the website*
Website views everybody (ingroup or outgroup) as equal and does NOT consider itself better than others		*Includes a small number of statements expressing strong feelings of superiority or many statements making weak expressions of superiority*		*Website expresses or implies feelings of superiority ("Our way is the only right way"), entitlement ("We deserve to have things our way")*

Information distortion - Degree to which website misrepresents information relevant to outgroups.

1	2	3	4	5
Low		Moderate		High
Website accurately reports information from newscasts, books, websites, etc. May even question the veracity of reports to ensure accuracy.		*Some deliberate misrepresentation of information to support views. Includes taking quotes out of context, putting misleading labels on stories, or spinning stories to seem more negative than they are.*		*Information distorted to the point of paranoia, where all information is twisted to fit with the ideology or instead is perceived as a challenge or slight.*

Misrepresenting Consequences – Extent to which the website distorts the relationship between the actions they advocate and the effects the actions cause.

1	2	3	4	5
Website does not attempt to reframe or misrepresent consequences		*Website somewhat attempts to reframe or misrepresent consequences*		*Website constantly attempts to reframe or misrepresent consequences*
Website discusses consequences associated with group events accurately		*Website may attempt to reframe some aspects of consequences associated with group events to make them seem more positive or less negative*		*Website pervasively misrepresents consequences associated with group events in order to minimize the harm caused or exaggerate positive outcomes (e.g., "We are liberating animals not destroying property")*