



While extravagant violent displays such as beheading videos by the Islamic State are ordinarily interpreted as attempts to intimidate enemies, they might also be an effective way to lure new members into violent groups and spread violent behavior. Studying specific intragroup mechanisms displaying parochial cooperation and trust might therefore help explain how members of a group engage in intergroup violence.

Introduction

People prefer to acquire mental representations and behavior from prestigious individuals over dominant ones, as prestige is associated with prosociality, generosity, skill, wisdom, and success, whereas dominance with aggressiveness, manipulation, and narcissism [1]. However, in the context of intergroup conflict, in-groups behaving violently against out-groups hypothetically become prestigious, because parochial altruists who engage in violence against out-groups act in defense of their in-group, therefore prosocially, which should make them desirable cultural models to learn from.

The concept of credibility enhancing displays (CREDs) can be used to study violent displays in intergroup conflict and explain how individuals join the fighting. To avoid manipulative freeriders, cultural learners need to evaluate who is trustworthy by observing whether the cultural model does as he says. Observing a cultural model who supports his claims by CREDs should increase his trustworthiness, make his mental representations more contagious, and transmit the correspondent behavior [2]. During an open intergroup conflict when harming out-groups is accepted and even celebrated, this mechanism should apply for the transmission of intergroup violence too.

Method

The preliminary online experiment used text vignettes and manipulated the presence of violent CREDs. Czech participants ($n = 69$) read a vignette describing a Czech guerilla fighter capturing a member of SS during WW2, who spoke to other Czechs about the need to fight for freedom and subsequently killed or did not kill the Nazi. Self-report questionnaires assessed model's trustworthiness, prestige, and dominance, and participant's group identification.

Results

Performing violent CRED significantly increased perceived trustworthiness of the cultural model measured by a self-report questionnaire ($t(67) = 1,96, p < .05, r = .23$) and thermometer ($U = 390, p < .01, r = -.29$). Moreover, trustworthiness had a strong positive correlation with model's perceived prestige ($p < .001, r = .61$) and a weak negative correlation with perceived dominance ($p < .05, r = -.23$). Finally, hierarchical multiple regression shown that 52 % of variance was predicted by CREDs, prestige, dominance, and group identification. Results thus suggest that in-groups violent towards out-groups in the context of intergroup conflict might be considered by other in-groups as desirable cultural models to learn from, perhaps because they behave as parochial altruists.

Figure 1. Correlation between trustworthiness and prestige

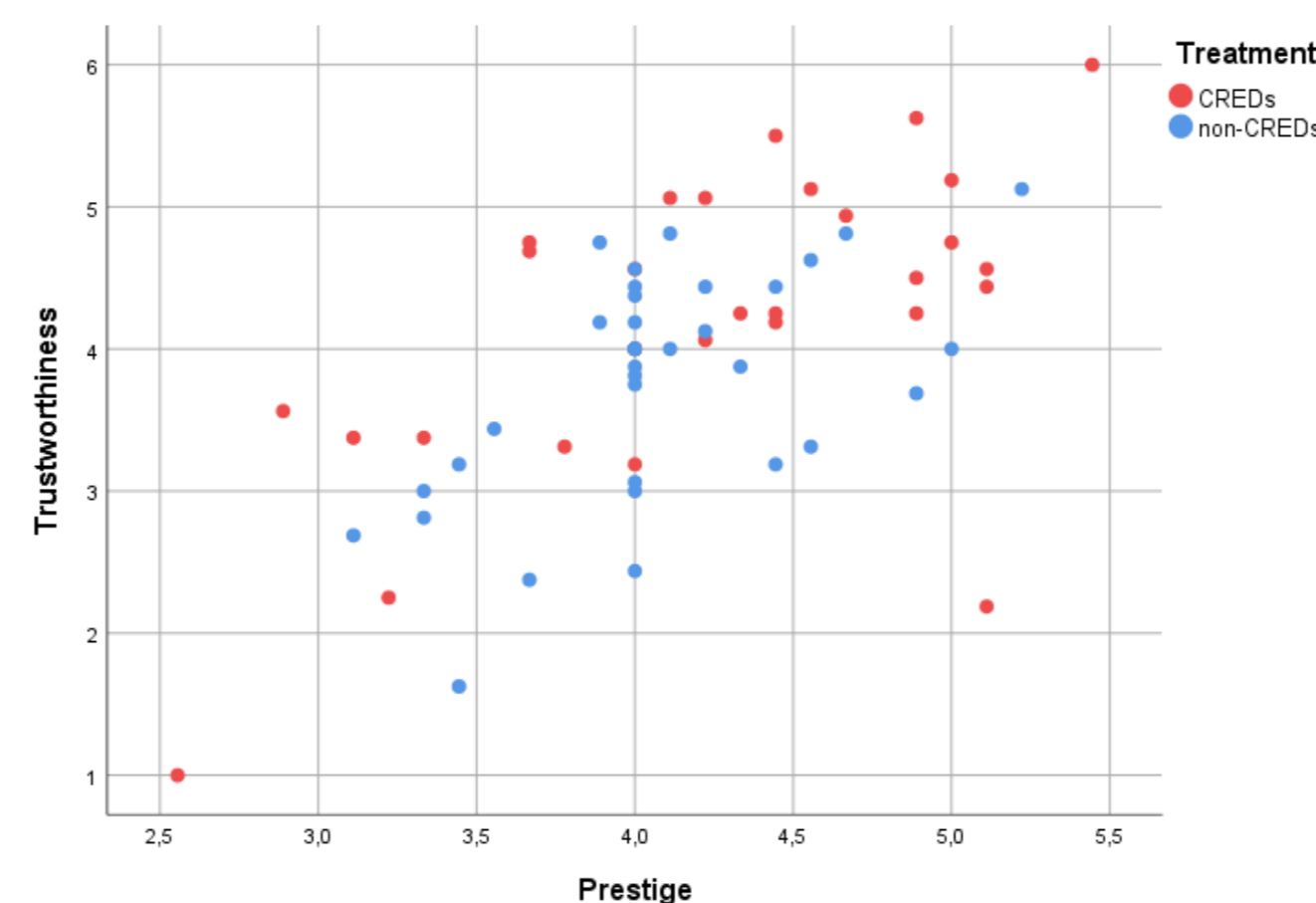


Table 1. Hierarchical multiple regression predicting the trustworthiness of a violent cultural model

Predictor	ΔR^2	Trustworthiness		
		<i>b</i>	SE	β
Step 1				
Dominance	.42***	-.36	0,14	-.24*
Prestige		.92	0,15	.58***
Step 2				
Dominance	.04*	-.42	0,14	-.28**
Prestige		.87	0,15	.55***
CREDs		.39	0,19	.20*
Step 3				
Constant	.09**	.38	1,00	-
Dominance		-.38	0,13	-.26**
Prestige		.96	0,14	.61***
CREDs		.36	0,17	.19*
Group identification		.30	0,09	.30***
Total R^2	.52**			

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .01$.

Future designs

Future experiments ought to focus on behavioral measures of trust generated by violent CREDs. Playing a trust game with an in-group who performed (or did not) a violent CRED against an enemy out-group would assess trust as a behavioral response – not just as a perceived quality. Intergroup prisoner's dilemma manipulating the presence of a violent CRED would assess how exposure to CREDs influences cooperation of other in-groups during intergroup competition.

The role of religion: As various studies suggest that religion increases ingroup trust, cohesion, cooperation, and prosociality [3][4][5][6][7][8], it should be expected that religious violent CREDs toward out-groups additionally facilitate trust among in-groups, especially because religious people are generally seen as more moral than atheists [9] and therefore likelier to promote parochially altruistic behaviors. Religion is therefore considered not to be a cause of intergroup conflict, but rather an effective catalyst that may motivate individuals to participate in intergroup conflict [10].

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