Interactions of News Frames and Incivility in the Political Blogosphere: Examining Perceptual Outcomes

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The anonymity and flexibility of the online world allows the free expression of views. This same anonymity and unconstrained expression can initiate uncivil debate. The political blogosphere is thus replete with uncivil discussions and becomes an apt context to examine the influence of incivility on news frames. Moreover, although there is an increasingly growing literature on framing, few have examined framing effects in the contemporary media landscape. Thus, the present study brings in literature from incivility and framing effects to examine the influence of incivility on news frames for perceptual outcomes. The study uses an experiment embedded in a Web survey. Findings show that incivility increases the credibility of a news article while decreasing political trust and political efficacy. Further, results demonstrate the interactions of incivility and news frames. For instance, news credibility is increased only in the value framed condition. And a combination of strategic frames and incivility results in the least political trust and external efficacy. Implications are discussed.

[Supplementary material is available for this article. Go to the publisher's online edition of Political Communication *for the following free supplemental resource(s): stimulus material for the experiment.]*

Keywords incivility, political blogs, news frames, news credibility, political trust, efficacy

The Internet has changed the way we keep ourselves informed and has added myriad ways to gather news. Besides traditional news outlets, individuals can get their information from online news portals such as Google News, social networking sites, and the blogosphere among others. Moreover, the Internet has become one of the common tools for political discourse, and scholarly attention has increasingly turned to the role of this new medium in reinvigorating democracy. The anonymity and flexibility of the online world allows the free expression of views. For example, Stromer-Galley (2002) claims that the absence of nonverbal cues in online discussions leads to a "lowered sense of social presence and heightened sense of anonymity" (p. 35). She further observes that these

characteristics facilitate political conversations online by mitigating perceived social risks. However, the same anonymity and unconstrained expression can initiate increased uncivil discourse online relative to face-to-face communication (Dahlberg, 2001; Dutton, 1996; Hill & Hughes, 1998; Papacharissi, 2002).

The political blogosphere is replete with uncivil discussions, so much so that some have called for the development of rudimentary guidelines (O'Reilly, 2007). The political blogosphere then becomes an apt context to examine the influence of incivility on news content. Using a Web-based experiment, this article tests the influence of incivility and news frames on three perceptual outcomes: news credibility, political efficacy, and political trust. Nearly 15 years ago Morris and Ogan (1996) argued that the introduction of any new medium should make us rethink the basic theoretical assumptions in our field. Over the years, research has shown the influence of the online world on communication concepts (e.g., Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002; Tewksbury, 2003). Although researchers have begun to posit questions of how the social media landscape influences traditional communication concepts, few scholars have examined framing effects in the political blogosphere.

News Frames

In recent years, research on framing has emerged from a range of disciplines and academic domains (D'Angelo, 2002; Shah, Domke, & Wackman, 1996, Borah, 2011a). Framing research draws on literature from "sociology, economics, psychology, cognitive linguistics and communication" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 9); "political science, sociology and media studies" (Hertog & McLeod, 2001, p. 139); and "cognitive, constructionist, and critical" studies (D'Angelo, 2002, p. 870). "Frames in communication" (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 106) refers to the framing research that develped from sociological foundations. In general, this research tends to focus on the "words, images, phrases, and presentation styles" (Druckman, 2001, p. 227) that are used to construct news stories and the processes that shape this construction. Frames highlight some aspects of reality while excluding other elements, which might lead individuals to interpret issues differently.

Framing Effects

Besides examining media frames, researchers have most enthusiastically studied the processes involved in the formation of the audience frame. Kahneman and Tversky (1979) were the first to demonstrate how different presentations of essentially the same information can have an impact on people's choices. This approach, called "equivalency" (Druckman, 2001, p. 228) framing, examines the influence of different but logically equivalent messages. However, scholars in political communication found this definition of framing limiting and "not very useful" (Simon, 2001, p. 77). In politics, framing almost always involves adding or subtracting information in the different alternatives. The "emphasis" (Druckman, 2001, p. 230) approach to framing, which has become popular in political communication, demonstrates that accentuating certain considerations in a message can influence individuals to focus on those particular considerations. Druckman (2004) aptly points out that in many cases, especially with political issues, there is not always a way to present a situation in different but equivalent ways. Instead, emphasis framing effects refer to situations where, by "emphasizing a subset of potentially relevant considerations," individuals are led to focus on these considerations in the decision-making process (Druckman, 2004, p. 672).

It is within emphasis framing that scholars have again differentiated frames—episodic versus thematic (Iyengar, 1991), strategy versus issue (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), or in terms of values (Brewer & Gross, 2005; Shah, Domke, & Wackman, 1996).

Strategy Versus Value Frames

Strategy frames use the language of wars, games, and competition, as well as performers, critics, and voters, and focuses on the performance, style, and perception of the candidates. As a result, policy positions in strategy frames are interpreted as winning a voter block. Strategy frames pay attention to the motives of political actors, where coverage of issues is framed in terms of a "game" or "strategy." Strategic framing tends to incite cynical reactions in news consumers (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), specifically when there is a higher level of strategic news present in the coverage (de Vreese, 2005). Scholars have also linked the exposure of strategic frames to decreases in voter turnout, trust in government, and civic duty (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1994). Strategic news coverage has been found to reduce learning (Valentino, Buhr, & Beckmann, 2001) and decrease intention to participate (Valentino, Beckmann, & Buhr, 2001). In a recent study on value versus strategy frames, Lee, McLeod, and Shah (2008) found that news frames altered the importance of considerations employed in decision making. More specifically, their study showed that participants shied away from using partisanship as a primary consideration in the strategy framed condition.

Value frames or "value conflicts" on the other hand, usually depict policy debates as a clash of basic values. By their very nature, political issues require choices to be made between competing values (Sniderman & Theriault, 2004). Value frames provide an interpretive framework to understand a political issue (Ball-Rokeach & Loges, 1996; Ball-Rokeach, Power, Guthrie, & Waring, 1990). Value frames resonate with individuals' preexisting schemas, perhaps reinforcing existing values. Shah et al. (1996) demonstrate that value frames prompt the spread of activation to related issue schemas, influencing individuals' judgments about other issues, vote choice processes, or candidate character.

Moderators of Framing Effects

Recent work on framing effects demonstrates an increasing interest in the moderating processes involved in framing. In general, a moderator is a variable that "affects the direction and/or strength of the relation" between a predictor and a criterion variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986, p. 1174). In terms of framing, the variables that condition framing effects are called moderators (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 111). Several framing studies have started delving into conditions that might abate framing effects (e.g., Druckman, 2001; Druckman & Nelson, 2003).

The extant literature on framing (e.g., Borah, 2011b ; Druckman, 2001, 2004) has demonstrated that framing effects are not universal; varied characteristics can shape the influence of frames (see Borah, 2011a, for different moderators in framing effects). For example, Druckman (2004) demonstrated that framing effects are conditioned by elite competition and deliberation. Understanding the variety of characteristics that can moderate the effects of news frames is, then, fundamental to the growth of research on framing. The present article attempts to understand the moderating effects of incivility and news frames in the context of the political blogosphere.

Theoretical Explication of Incivility

Incivility has been studied in many different contexts such as negative political advertising (e.g., Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Finkel & Geer, 1998), television talk shows (e.g., Mutz, 2007; Mutz & Reeves, 2005), and the online world (Borah, in press; Hwang, Borah, Kang, & Veenstra, 2008; Papacharissi, 2002, 2004; Phillips & Smith, 2004; Thorson, Vraga, & Ekdale, 2010). Scholars have defined incivility in numerous ways. Sobieraj and Berry (2011) point out that different types of incivility examined in different contexts, such as negative advertising or television talk shows, are not the same. The authors claim that the incivility literature includes "researchers who vary in the way they define negativity and/or incivility as well as the way they operationalize these concepts" (p. 21).

Incivility can be conceptualized along a continuum[1] that ranges from relatively milder forms of incivility (e.g., Mutz & Reeves, 2005) to severe versions of incivility (e.g., "outrage" in online discourse; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011). Manipulations used in the milder form of incivility show disrespect or frustration at the other side (Mutz & Reeves, 2005). On the other hand, incivility in the online world is a much more severe version, using strong derogatory remarks and foul language (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011). The incivility manipulations used for the present study would fall within the severe form of incivility called "outrage" (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011). Whether incivility is understood in terms of television talk shows or in the political blogosphere, the findings from the literature demonstrate serious consequences.

Incivility and Its Consequences

Civility is often considered a social norm of interpersonal communication. Civility plays an important role in the regulation of individuals' own behaviors as well as in the formation of normative expectations of others' behaviors. Others' violation of normative expectations such as civility leads to detrimental consequences regarding attitudes and behaviors (Fraser, 1990).

Previous research from the social psychology literature has consistently shown that face-threatening behaviors, such as verbal attacks on the self, produce negative consequences in interpersonal and workplace relationships (Kinney & Segrin, 1998), including negative emotional reactions, job dissatisfaction, and aggressive reactions (Cox, 1987; Gambaro & Rabin, 1969; Gentry, 1972; Hokanson, 1961; Rule & Hewitt, 1971; Segrin & Fitzpatrick, 1992).

In one of the often-cited studies in the political communication literature, Mutz and Reeves (2005) showed that uncivil exchanges among politicians in a televised debate significantly decreased viewers' trust in politicians, Congress, and the system of government. Other scholars have demonstrated the detrimental effects of incivility on evaluations of candidates (Fridkin & Kenney, 2008) and on levels of trust in Congress and the president (Forgette & Morris, 2006). However, an experimental study by Brooks and Geer (2007) suggests that uncivil attacks in political advertisements may not have detrimental effects on citizens, and might even have some beneficial effects. These authors found that although uncivil political ads are seen as less informative and less fair, they have some positive effects on political engagement.

Scholars have also started examining the incivility present in the online world. In a recent study, Sobieraj and Berry (2011) found that uncivil online discourse is "extensive" and "takes many different forms" (p. 19). In an experimental study, Hwang et al. (2008)

examined the influence of uncivil messages in the political blogosphere on deliberative attitudes and emotions. Specifically, the results show the detrimental effects of incivility on hostile emotions, open-mindedness, and attitude certainty. Similarly, in another experimental study Thorson et al. (2010) demonstrated the influence of an uncivil blog post on news credibility.

Psychological Mechanisms in Incivility Effects

Prior research indicates that different psychological mechanisms could influence how individuals react to disagreement and incivility (Kunda, 1987, 1990). Individuals tend to use different mechanisms depending on their level of motivation. According to the theory of motivated reasoning, the motives for political reasoning can be understood in two ways: accuracy goals (which motivate individuals to make accurate judgments) and defensive goals (which motivate individuals to defend their prior attitudes).

Defensive motivations could be a potential explanation for the psychological processes involved in incivility effects. Uncivil messages in a discussion could bring forth strong perceptions of hostility, which can lead to defensive motivations (Kinney & Segrin, 1998). In a work setting, research has shown that nurses exposed to verbal abuse from doctors and supervisors demonstrate anger, powerlessness, and dissatisfaction with their jobs (Cox, 1987, 1991a, 1991b). Ng and Detenber (2005) demonstrate that incivility produces hostile perceptions and negative evaluations of online discussants. Primarily, the results showed that individuals in the uncivil condition were perceived as more aggressive, unreliable, dishonest, and selfish than individuals in the civil condition.

Research Hypotheses

Drawing from the literature on framing effects and incivility, the present study examines the moderating effects of incivility on news frames in the context of the political blogosphere. The credibility of a news story is fundamental in beginning to understand the implications of repurposed materials on the political blogosphere. Prior studies from both streams of literature also indicate the influence on political trust and efficacy; however, interactions between incivility and news frames on these outcomes have not been examined before. Hence, besides looking at perceptions of news credibility, the present article examines perceptions of politics as well.

News Credibility

Perceptions of the media's credibility are among the most important factors when thinking about evaluations of the media. Prior research has indicated that audiences employ different standards for judging the news media (Newhagen & Nass, 1989). Evaluations of the newscaster are important for television news credibility. On the other hand, newspapers are often judged for the overall credibility of the newspaper as an institution. Newhagen and Nass (1989) contend that "the criteria for credibility and the predictors of credibility may depend on the receiver's perspective on the medium" (p. 278).

Research from the social psychology literature can also be used to understand the processes underlying comparative judgments. One excellent example is a study on persuasion where Tormala and Clarkson (2007) found that the credibility of a target message could differ depending on a message immediately preceding the target message. They showed that when a moderately credible target message was preceded by a low-credibility message,

the attitude toward the target message was significantly more favorable than when it was preceded by a high-credibility message. The first message set the context for the participants to judge the second message. Essentially, the moderately credible message was perceived as more credible when compared to the low-credibility message. Understanding news media credibility, then, becomes increasingly important in the contemporary media landscape, where audiences are able to read a newspaper article side by side with an opinionated piece. In a recent study, Thorson et al. (2010) show that individuals perceive uncivil opinionated language as less credible. Their findings also demonstrated that the credibility of a newspaper article was higher in the uncivil condition.

Moreover, we know from prior research that strategy frames are associated with decreased political trust and cynicism. When exposed to the strategy frame, participants perhaps become aware of the connotations related to partisanship. It is very likely that participants would relate a news story framed strategically with lesser credibility. Moreover, the value frame would resonate more with participants' moral values that could increase the credibility of the story. Thus, drawing from the literature on news credibility, incivility, and news frames, the first set of hypotheses are proposed.

H1: The news credibility of a newspaper story will be higher when it is adjacent to an opinionated uncivil blogger commentary compared to an opinionated civil blogger commentary.

H1a: Among participants who are in the uncivil condition, those exposed to the value frame condition will regard the newspaper story as more credible than those exposed to the strategy framed condition.

H1b: Among participants who are in the uncivil condition, those exposed to the value frame condition will regard the newspaper story as most credible.

Political Trust

Political trust has usually been described as an evaluative orientation toward the government, based on people's normative expectations of how the government is supposed to function (Miller, 1974). Political trust is a function of several variables such as presidential approval (Citrin & Green, 1986), institutional evaluations (Feldman, 1983), or policy considerations (Miller & Borrelli, 1991). Moreover, political trust could also depend on the amount of positive and negative information citizens receive about the government (Hetherington, 1998). In this sense, the media can play a valuable role in individuals' political trust. The media's negativity and lack of substance have been blamed for a growing public mistrust in government (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1994). Additionally, in their study on incivility, Mutz and Reeves (2005) found that uncivil messages decreased political trust. The literature on incivility, strategic frames, and political trust guides the next set of hypotheses.

H2: Participants exposed to an uncivil blog commentary will show lower political trust than those exposed to a civil blog commentary.

H2a: Among participants who are in the uncivil condition, those exposed to the strategy framed newspaper story will show lower political trust than those exposed to the value framed newspaper story.

H2b: Among participants who are in the uncivil condition, those exposed to the strategy frame newspaper story will show the least political trust.

Political Efficacy

Scholars have identified two dimensions of political efficacy—internal and external (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991). Internal efficacy is associated with the roles individuals play in the government, while external efficacy refers to the perceived importance of the government (Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; Morrell, 2003; Niemi et al., 1991). Although the influence of incivility on political efficacy has not been studied yet, there is research on negative campaigning that is relevant for the present study. In a comprehensive meta-analysis, Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner (2007) demonstrated that negative campaigning does not necessarily influence voter turnout but does decrease political efficacy and political trust. Again, with the help of research on strategic frames, political efficacy, and negative campaigning, the last set of hypotheses is formulated.

H3: Participants exposed to an uncivil blog commentary will show lower political efficacy than those exposed to a civil blog commentary.

H3a: Among participants who are in the uncivil condition, those exposed to the strategy framed newspaper story will show lower political efficacy than those exposed to the value framed newspaper story.

H3b: Among participants who are in the uncivil condition, those exposed to the strategy frame newspaper story will show the least political efficacy.

Method

Participants

The data were collected using an experiment embedded in a Web-based survey of participants enrolled in undergraduate courses at a large midwestern university. Their instructors offered extra credit for participation in this study. All potential participants were contacted by e-mail and given the Web site of the online experiment. A total of 239 participants (75.5% female; 73.9% Democrat; mean age = 20.44 years) completed the experiment over a 2-week period in October 2009.

Design and Procedure

The online experiment dealt with the issue of gay rights and consisted of both pre- and post-manipulation survey items. After answering the pretest questions, the respondents were presented with manipulated stimuli in a news analysis story. The study used a 2 (incivility) $\times$ 2 (framed conditions) between-subjects design. Before reading the news story, the respondents read a blogger commentary that was manipulated as either civil or uncivil. The two versions of the manipulated story portray the gay rights issue using a strategy frame or a value frame. After the respondents finished answering the pretest questions, they were told that they would be reading a blog page. Every precaution was taken to make the blog page look real. The page was designed after studying other real blogs. The name of the blogger and other identifying information were blocked in all of the experimental conditions. The blog started with a commentary from the blogger that was manipulated as either civil or uncivil. After the commentary from the blogger, the blogger asked readers to check out a news story from the *Star Tribune,* and the rest of the blog page contained the news story employing either a strategic frame or a value frame.

Manipulations

The subjects were exposed to the first manipulation in order to vary the incivility of the blog. In order to manipulate incivility, the blogger commentary differed in terms of whether it was civil or uncivil. The blogger commentary was developed with the help of prior studies on incivility in the blogosphere (Hwang et al., 2008; Thorson et al., 2010). The commentary was also constructed with the help of actual blogger commentaries from real blog posts on the gay marriage issue. The uncivil message used strong derogatory words and name-calling qualifying as "outrage" (Sobeiraj & Berry, 2011). These uncivil messages demonstrate how incivility can change to a more vicious form in the contemporary media landscape.

The second manipulation in the study was to vary the frames in the newspaper story. The news stories were constructed with the help of prior studies (Brewer & Gross, 2005; Lee et al., 2008) as well as a content analysis of newspaper stories. Two newspapers, one national (*New York Times*) and one local (*Wisconsin State Journal*), were chosen for the content analysis. The main purpose of the content analysis was to investigate the media content of the issue before conducting the experiment. As a sample for the content analysis, a year before the experiment was considered relevant, and the study period chosen was October 1, 2008, to October 1, 2009. The articles were collected using the Lexis/Nexis online database. From the total number of 96 articles, value frames dominated the coverage, with 46 articles (48%), followed by strategy frames, with 32 articles (33.3%).[2] Hence, the news stories for the second manipulation were developed with the help of actual news coverage of the gay rights issue in the national and the local media, as well as prior studies.

Further, to maintain consistency, both news stories were structured identically. They appeared to have been taken from the *Star Tribune*, a local Minnesota newspaper. The placement and length of the quotes remained the same in both versions; however, the content of the quotes differed according to the frame. The strategy frame presented the debates on the gay rights issue as political gamesmanship. Direct quotes from politicians depicted the fights within the two political parties for political gains. On the other hand, the value framed news story presented arguments about the gay rights issue in terms of moral value. Although the stories used different quotes and arguments to emphasize the manipulated frame, the stories used similar wording and phrasing as much as possible (Appendix A).

Dependent Variables

News Credibility. Participants were asked to evaluate the credibility of the news story using an 11-point scale comprised of six semantic differentials with the following anchors: fair/unfair, biased/unbiased, accurate/inaccurate, doesn't tell the whole story/tells the whole story, cannot be trusted/can be trusted, and balanced/imbalanced (Fico, Richardson, & Edwards, 2004; Meyer, 1988). Factor analyses revealed a single factor for the credibility of the news story. Table 1 presents factor loadings. An exploratory factor analysis with promax rotation provided evidence of the items comprising one factor. Items were averaged to create a news credibility index ($\alpha = .92$, $M = 5.21$, $SD = 2.14$).

Political Trust. Political trust was measured with a single item ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.38$). The item was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), and participants were asked to indicate their agreement to the statement "government officials can be trusted."

Table 1
Items and results of factor analysis: News credibility

News credibility ($\alpha = .92$)	Loading
1. Unfair/fair	.85
2. Inaccurate/accurate	.82
3. Biased/unbiased	.86
4. Doesn't tell the whole story/tells the whole story	.70
5. Imbalanced/balanced	.90
6. Cannot be trusted/can be trusted	.86

Political Efficacy. Consistent with prior studies (Niemi et al., 1991), political efficacy was made up of two variables: internal political efficacy and external political efficacy. For internal efficacy, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following two statements: (a) "I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics" and (b) "I feel that I could do a good job in public office as most other people." External efficacy was constructed by asking respondents' level of agreement on the following two statements, which were reverse coded: (a) "I don't think public officials care much about what people like me think" and (b) "People like me don't have any say about what the government does." All items were measured on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The two measures were constructed by taking mean scores, internal political efficacy ($r = .60$, $M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.19$), and external political efficacy ($r = .65$, $M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.43$).

Control Variables. Even though the study used a randomized experimental design, three common control variables were used. To control for respondents' pretest *issue opinion* on gay rights, the study used a single item ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.96$) that asked respondents to rate their agreement on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) with the statement "A marriage should only be between one man and one woman." Participants' *personal relevance* in terms of the issue of gay rights was also measured with a single item ($M = .702$, $SD = .457$) in which respondents were asked if they knew any friends who were gay or lesbian. To measure *partisan identification*, respondents were asked "Which of the following best describes your party loyalty?" They answered on a 6-point scale (0 = strong Democrat, 6 = strong Republican) (73.9% Democratic).

Manipulation Checks

Manipulation checks were conducted for the level of incivility in the blogger's commentary as well as news frames. All manipulation check measures indicated a successful manipulation. After being exposed to the stimulus materials, participants were asked to evaluate the incivility of the blogger's commentary using a semantic differential 11-point scale with one item: uncivil versus civil ($t = 9.87$, $p < .001$, $M = 3.78$, $SD = 2.41$). The news frame manipulation was conducted using two items: "The news story was about the moral values of the gay rights issue" ($t = -8.641$, $p < .001$, $M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.89$) and "The news story was about the political struggle over the gay rights issue" ($t = 3.19$, $p < .001$, $M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.70$).

Results

To test the hypotheses and understand the interaction patterns, a series of ANCOVAs were applied. These analyses controlled for pretest issue opinion regarding gay rights, the personal relevance of the issue to the participants, and party identification. Findings show that the first hypothesis of the study is supported, as uncivil blogger commentary increases news credibility, $F(1, 240) = 9.31$, $p < .003$, $\eta^2 = .03$.[3] The first set of hypotheses tested the effects of frames on news credibility as well as the interaction between frames and incivility. The ANCOVA model demonstrates a significant main effect of frames, $F(1, 240) = 7.60$, $p < .006$, $\eta^2 = .03$. The estimated marginal means for each cell are reported in Table 2. The ANCOVA model also reveals a significant interaction pattern, $F(1, 240) = 4.34$, $p < .03$, $\eta^2 = .01$, supporting H1b (Table 3). The interaction effect shows that uncivil blogger commentary increases news credibility in the value framed condition (Figure 1).

The second set of hypotheses examined the effects of news frames and incivility on political trust. The findings demonstrate significant main effects of both news frames and incivility. Specifically, the analysis reveals that uncivil blogger commentary decreases political trust, $F(1, 240) = 14.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$. The same model also demonstrates a significant main effects of news frames, $F(1, 240) = 10.62$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$, on political trust. The estimated marginal means for each cell are shown in Table 2. The interaction (Figure 2) between news frames and incivility is also significant, $F(1, 240) = 5.04$, $p < .02$, $\eta^2 = .02$ (Table 3), hence supporting all of the second set of hypotheses.

Finally, two more ANCOVA models were conducted to test the next sets of hypotheses. ANCOVA models examining the influence of incivility and news frames on internal political efficacy show significant effects of incivility, $F(1, 240) = 5.27$, $p < .02$, $\eta^2 = .02$, and news frames, $F(1, 240) = 8.55$, $p < .004$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Primarily, the results show that incivility and strategy frames decrease internal political efficacy. The estimated marginal means for each cell are shown in Table 2. The interaction, however, did not reach significant levels (Table 2).

Table 2
Estimated means from 2×2 ANCOVAs

Manipulations	News credibility[a]	Political trust[b]	Internal efficacy[c]	External efficacy[d]
Value frame				
Civil	$M = 5.04$, $SE = .31$	$M = 4.86$, $SE = .24$	$M = 5.41$, $SE = .19$	$M = 5.25$, $SE = .19$
Uncivil	$M = 6.44$, $SE = .28$	$M = 3.57$, $SE = .22$	$M = 4.74$, $SE = .18$	$M = 4.01$, $SE = .17$
Strategy frame				
Civil	$M = 4.85$, $SE = .25$	$M = 3.68$, $SE = .20$	$M = 4.63$, $SE = .16$	$M = 4.31$, $SE = .16$
Uncivil	$M = 5.11$, $SE = .23$	$M = 3.35$, $SE = .18$	$M = 4.50$, $SE = .15$	$M = 3.77$, $SE = .15$

[a]Scale: semantic differential, 10 = highest credibility and 0 = lowest credibility.
[b]Scale: additive index, 7 = highest trust and 1 = lowest trust.
[c]Scale: additive index, 7 = highest internal efficacy and 1 = lowest internal efficacy.
[d]Scale: additive index, 7 = highest external efficacy and 1 = lowest external efficacy.

Table 3
ANCOVA for all four dependent variables

Dependent variables	Independent variables	N	df	F	p	η^2
News credibility	Incivility	239	1	9.31	.003	.03
	News frames		1	7.6	.006	.03
	Incivility × Frames		1	4.34	.038	.01
Political trust	Incivility	239	1	14.47	.001	.05
	News frames		1	10.62	.001	.04
	Incivility × Frames		1	5.04	.02	.02
Internal political efficacy	Incivility	239	1	5.27	.02	.02
	News frames		1	8.55	.004	.03
	Incivility × Frames		1	2.46	.11	.01
External political efficacy	Incivility	239	1	26.45	.001	.10
	News frames		1	11.37	.001	.04
	Incivility × Frames		1	4.21	.04	.01

Note. Issue opinion, personal relevance, and party ID were controlled.
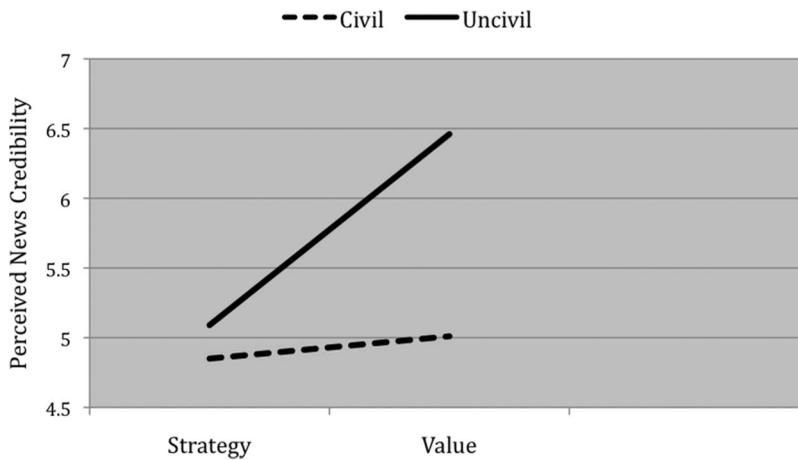

Figure 1. Interaction between incivility and news frames on news credibility.

The findings from the last ANCOVA model demonstrate significant main effects of both news frames and incivility. Specifically, the analysis reveals that uncivil blogger commentary decreases external political efficacy, $F(1, 240) = 26.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$. The same model also demonstrates a significant main effect of news frames, $F(1, 240) = 11.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$, on external political efficacy. The estimated marginal means for each cell are shown in Table 2. Further, the model reveals a significant interaction (Table 3) between incivility and news frames, such that external political efficacy is least when individuals are exposed to an uncivil message and a strategic news story, $F(1, 240) = 4.21$, $p < .04$, $\eta^2 = .01$ (Figure 3).
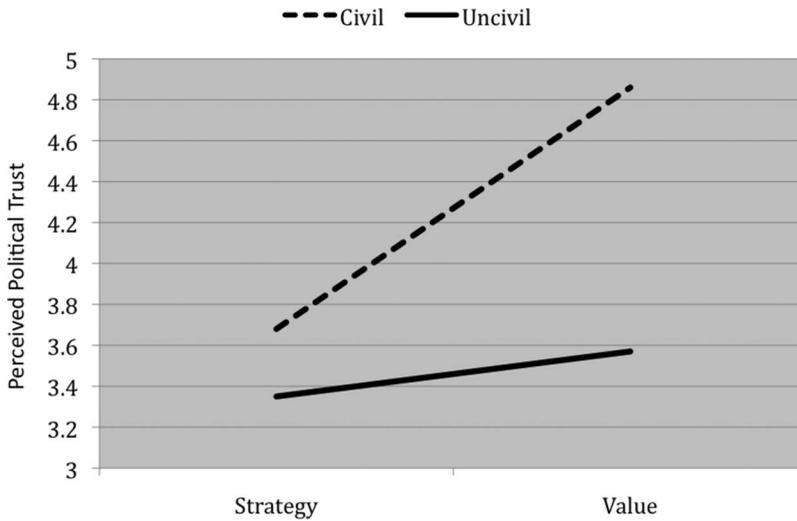
Figure 2. Interaction between incivility and news frames on political trust.
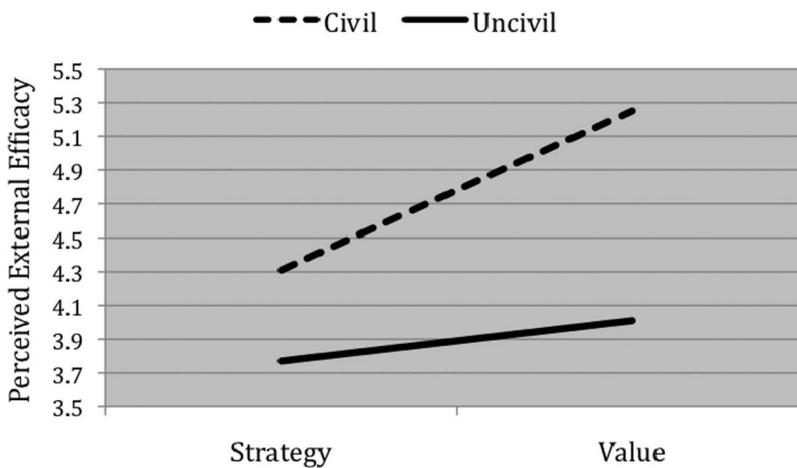

Figure 3. Interaction between incivility and news frames on external political efficacy.

Discussion and Conclusions

This project draws literature from two different streams, framing and incivility effects, to examine the interplay between news frames and uncivil messages in the context of the political blogosphere. Before discussing the implications of the results, it is important to point out some of the limitations of the study. The study used a student sample. Although a heterogeneous college student sample may not "differ drastically from that of most other groups" (Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997, p. 571), testing the hypotheses in an adult sample could provide additional information in the direction of understanding news frames in the social media environment. Moreover, the blogosphere is not a homogenous entity. There are many different kinds of blogs; several factors such as reach of the blog, credibility of the blog, and ratings of the blog on blog-indexing sites such as Technorati could influence how individuals perceive the information received from a blog. The present project did not

manipulate any of the factors in the blog except for the incivility of the message. Many of these factors could influence audience perception of the blog as well as the news story embedded in it.

Despite some of these limitations, the results of this study are fundamental to understanding news frames and incivility in the context of the social media environment. Findings from the set of hypotheses on news credibility show significant main effects of both incivility and news frames. More specifically, uncivil blogger commentary increased the credibility of the news article. Further, the interaction between news frames and incivility shows that participants in the uncivil and the value frame considered the news story the most credible. These findings have valuable implications for research on news credibility. In the contemporary media environment where news articles are placed with opinionated messages, the credibility of the news story could depend on what is juxtaposed next to the story. The present findings support previous research (e.g., Thorson et al., 2010) showing that an objective story is perceived as more credible when juxtaposed to an uncivil message.

This study takes previous research a step further by examining the credibility of a news story not only in the context of juxtaposed opinionated messages but by also investigating how civil and uncivil opinionated messages interact with two different news frames. The significant interaction pattern shows that the effect of the uncivil message is prominent only in the value framed condition. In the case of the strategy frame, the incivility of the opinionated message does not make a significant difference. Prior research demonstrates that strategy frames lead to cynical reactions in news consumers (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; de Vreese, 2005; Valentino, Buhr, & Beckmann, 2001). Perhaps individuals in the strategy frame condition see the story as less credible because strategic coverage in general brings about a cynical reaction to politicians as well as to the source that delivers this news.

On the other hand, the value frame resonates with individuals' existing values (Ball-Rokeach & Loges, 1996; Ball-Rokeach et al., 1990; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Shah et al., 1996). Participants in the value framed condition are able to relate to the story in terms of their existing schemas. When this value framed news story is juxtaposed with an uncivil message, the credibility of the story rises. Compared to the opinionated uncivil message, the objective news story that resonates with their value predispositions seems more credible to participants. In the civil condition, however, the news frame does not make a significant difference to the credibility of the news story. An uncivil blogger commentary, common in the political blogosphere, seems to accentuate the detrimental effects of the strategic frame.

To better understand these results, additional analyses were conducted to test the credibility of the blogger. Results showed that blogger credibility was low overall, but there was a significant difference between the uncivil and the civil condition. Specifically, individuals found the uncivil blog post less credible than the civil blog post (Table 4). Putting these

Table 4
ANOVA of blogger credibility

Variables	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*	η^2
Issue opinion	1	49.2	12.7	.001	.03
Personal relevance	1	.032	.08	.77	.00
Party ID	1	2.1	.55	.45	.00
Incivility	1	122.8	31.7	.00	.08
Error	233				

results in perspective with the credibility of the news story, it seems that participants found the news story more credible in the uncivil condition as they compared the news story to the uncivil blog post.

The findings on political trust do not come as a surprise. The detrimental effects of incivility as well as strategic frames on political trust are reiterated in this study. The interaction pattern suggests that only in the value frame and the civil condition did respondents demonstrate political trust. Findings for political efficacy are consistent with these results. Also, the patterns between internal and external political efficacy are similar. Individuals showed the most political efficacy in the civil and value framed conditions. The significant interaction in the case of external efficacy strengthens the finding that a combination of uncivil message and strategic frame makes individuals feel least politically efficacious.

The results from this study demonstrate that news frames behave differently depending on whether they are accompanied by a civil or uncivil commentary. As already discussed, the social media environment makes it possible for news stories to be interspersed with opinionated commentary. And it is becoming increasingly typical for individuals to get their news from social media sources. These findings definitely point toward a direction that news frames, as understood and studied in traditional media, could alter in the social media environment due to factors such as incivility, common in the blogosphere. Of course, there are other factors besides incivility in the social media landscape that might influence how we understand important concepts such as news frames.

A fruitful possibility for future research would be to investigate related factors in the social media landscape that could influence the findings from this study. For example, if the blog has already established itself as a credible source of information, the interactions that we see in this study regarding credibility may not be the same. The results of this project demonstrate that value and strategy frames could interact with factors from the social media environment in meaningful ways. Future studies should also explore other news frames. The present study content analyzed coverage of gay rights in the mainstream media to help in the construction of the news frame manipulations. Additionally, a content analysis of blogger commentary in political blogs would help determine the online political discourse about gay rights. Although the blogger comments employed in this study were carefully manipulated with the help of prior research and comments in actual blogs, a formal content analysis would be helpful to determine incivility in the blogosphere.

This project undertook the first step in understanding the moderating effects of incivility on framing effects in the context of the political blogosphere. With the help of literature from framing and incivility, the project highlights how testing communication theories in the contemporary media environment is becoming increasingly important. Research on incivility has been mostly confined to the context of television (e.g., Mutz & Reeves, 2005), and recent studies on incivility in the social media environment (e.g., Hwang et al., 2008; Thorson et al., 2010) have not examined news frames. Although uncivil messages can be present in various contexts such as political advertising or television talk shows, incivility in the blogosphere was considered all the more important for its anonymous nature. This anonymity of the political blogosphere could make it difficult to restrain the proliferation of uncivil messages. As a result, understanding their influence on traditional news content becomes fundamental for communication research.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Shanto Iyengar for this suggestion.

2. The unit of analysis for this study is the article. The search words used were gay rights, gay marriage, and same-sex marriage. Each news story was coded for the presence of the two identified frames: strategy and value. Intercoder reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa. The percentage of agreement between the two coders was established at an average of 91% on all measures.

3. Due to the controversies regarding the problems of partial η^2 values generated in the SPSS computer software, this study used η^2 for effect size, which is a more conservative measurement than the partial η^2 (Levine & Hullet, 2002).

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