ROUTLEDGE

European and American Extreme Right Groups and the Internet

MANUELA CAIANI AND LINDA PARENTI

EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN EXTREME RIGHT GROUPS AND THE INTERNET

Social movement studies have rarely addressed right-wing extremism and, conversely, research on the radical right has rarely located it within a social movement perspective. With its systematic cross-country comparison and focus on networks, this volume constitutes a very valuable exception. Theoretically innovative and empirically sound it demonstrates how much there is to gain by bridging insights from the two fields.

Donatella della Porta, European University Institute, Italy

A lot has been said and written about the galaxy of extreme right groups in Western democracies, and their relation to the Internet. Caiani and Parenti shift the conversation from anecdote and speculation to systematic empirical analysis. Drawing upon dominant paradigms in social movement research, and carefully exploring both online networks and offline activism, the authors have produced a text that will appeal not only to those focusing on the extreme right, but to all those interested in the relationship between militancy and communication technology at large.

Mario Diani, Universitat Pompeu Fabra Barcelona, Spain, and
University of Trento, Italy

This book is a major contribution to the study of right-wing political parties and movements and their use of modern technologies. Scholars of political science in general, and in the field of Computer-Mediated Communication and Information Communication Technologies studies will find an intriguing analysis of the relation between political organizations and the Internet. The well written, original and thought provoking volume sets a high standard for the analysis of the interplay between 'online' and 'offline' reality.

Johannes Pollak, Institute for Political Science & Webster University Vienna, Austria

Practitioners and scholars have highlighted the threat posed by political extremists using the Internet to further their objectives. These conclusions are mostly based upon speculation. Conversely, this fascinating book's careful comparative study uses mixed methods to empirically examine how right-wing American and European organizations attempt to harness the Internet to construct their identities, recruit and spread their message. It fills major gaps and offers important lessons for both policy makers and academics.

Joshua D. Freilich, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, USA

European and American Extreme Right Groups and the Internet

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1 START National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (University of Maryland): www.start.umd.edu.

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List of Abbreviations

ADL	Anti-Defamation League
AN	Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance – Italy)
BNP	British National Party (United Kingdom)
BPP	British People's Party (United Kingdom)
BPPWD	British People's Party Women Division (United Kingdom)
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Christian Democratic Union – Germany)
CIS	Centro di Investigazione Sociologica (Center of Sociological Investigation – Italy)
CMC	computer mediated communication
COMM	commercial groups and publishers
COS	cultural opportunity structure
CSU	Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (Christian Social Union of Bavaria – Germany)
CUL	cultural, New Age, neo-mystical, traditional Catholic groups; including Christian Identity and KKK groups
DHS	United States Department of Homeland Security
DOI	digital opportunity index
DVU	Deutsche Volksunion (German People's Union)
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
ES	Spain
EUMC	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
FN	Front National (French National Front)
FPO	Freiheitliche Partei Osterreichs (Freedom Party of Austria)
FR	France
ICT	information and communication technologies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRC	Internet relay chat
IT	Italy
JN	Junge Nationalisten (Young National Democrats – Germany)
KKK	Ku Klux Klan (United States)
LN	Lega Nord (Northern League – Italy)
MFL	Movimento Fascismo e Libertà (Freedom and Fascism Movement – Italy)
MIL	Militia, Patriot organizations
MSFT	Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore (Tricolor Flame Social Movement – Italy)
MSI	Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement)

NAT	nationalistic and patriotic organizations (including Militia, Patriot)
NAZI	neo-Nazi groups
NF	National Front (United Kingdom)
NGO	non-governmental organization
NPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party – Germany)
NR	nostalgic, revisionist and negationist groups
NSM	National Socialist Movement (United States)
NSP	National Socialist Punk (United States)
OTH	single-issue organizations, other groups
PdL	Popolo delle Libertà (Freedom's People – Italy)
PM	political movements (including white supremacists)
POS	political opportunity structure
PP	political parties
PxC	Plataforma per Catalunya (Platform for Catalonia – Spain)
REP	Die Republikaner Partei (German Republican Party)
SIOE	Stop Islamification of Europe (United Kingdom)
SNA	social network analysis
SNS	social network sites
SPLC	Southern Poverty Law Center (United States)
SUB	subcultural organizations
TE-SAT (Report)	Terrorism Situation and Trend (Report)
TOS	technological opportunity structure
UISP	Unione Italiana Sport (Sporting Italian Union)
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
URL	uniform resource locator
USA	United States of America
VB	Vlaams Belang (Belgian Flemish Interest)
WTO	World Trade Organization

Chapter 1
Extreme Right Organizations and the Internet: An Introduction

We commonly look at the Internet as a crucial modern tool for the development of a 'global village', diffusion of information, communication and equality among citizens, global thinking and universalism. It has further raised hopes about its effects on democracy in societies, and in particular on the role of civil society and its organizations. However, it is also evident that the Internet has a dark side, which is not widely explored.

How and how much do right-wing extremist organizations throughout the world use the Internet as a tool for communication and recruitment? What is the potential role of the Internet for the identity-building process of right-wing groups, and how does the use of the Internet influence their mobilization and action strategies? How do right-wing radical groups utilize the Internet to set their agenda, build contacts with other extremist groups, spread their ideology and encourage mobilization?

In this volume, we try to answer these questions, locating the complex relationship between extreme *right groups* and *the Internet* in a broader scenario of new challenges and opportunities provided by new technologies to civil society organizations (Mosca 2007). Indeed, whereas the use of the Internet to conduct politics is a well-known and much-studied phenomenon mainly concerning left-wing social movements (e.g. the anti-globalization movement, the Zapatista movement, etc.), or concerning institutionalized political actors (such as institutions and political parties), so far, little scientific attention has been devoted to the extreme right and the Internet. Furthermore, there is no systematic comparative analysis on how the extreme right uses the Web infrastructure in different countries. On the descriptive level, we must note that the current debate on the potential role of the Internet for right-wing organizations is characterized by much theoretical speculation on the basis of scarce and fragmented empirical evidence. We know little about how and to what extent extreme right groups use the Internet for their political communication and mobilization.

This book aims to fill this gap. By conducting a systematic comparative analysis of different types of right-wing organizations in Europe and the United States and mixing qualitative and quantitative research techniques, it systematically explores the role of the Internet for the construction of identity of right-wing organizations as well as for influencing their mobilization, organizational contacts and action strategies.

In order to empirically investigate these different aspects of the potential role of the Internet for extremist groups, this research employs three methods. It uses

social network analysis, based on online links between right-wing organizations, to investigate the organizational and potential mobilizational structure of the right-wing milieu. It conducts a comparative formalized *content analysis of websites* operated by radical right-wing organizations in order to address the communicative dimension of right-wing radicalism through the Internet. Websites may indeed be considered as "combinations of technologies, actors, and types of actions yielding different emerging structures of online civic participation" (Bruszt et al. 2005: 151). The aim of this part of the study is to trace the specific use of the Internet for diffusing propaganda, promoting 'virtual communities' of debate, raising funds, and for organizing and mobilizing political campaigns. It performs a *protest event analysis* of the daily press in the last five years (2005–2009) in order to observe the recent evolution of the 'offline' mobilization and repertoires of action of right-wing groups, linking them to their online practices. Finally, a consultation of government and watchdog sources and far right documents allow us to reconstruct the context of right-wing mobilization, both online and offline.

The analysis focuses both on right-wing political parties and on non-party organizations, even violent groups, in six selected countries: France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States, for a total of 556 groups. Our main goal is to analyze and explain differences between different types of right-wing organizations and different countries, against the background of the political, cultural and 'technological opportunities' in the offline sphere. Indeed, we assume that different processes of radicalization using the Internet may be adopted by different types of groups in various political and cultural contexts.

In this chapter, after defining the main concepts (including right-wing extremist groups and cyberactivism), we shall discuss some main hypotheses from the literature on political mobilization and social movements, but also from research on media and political communication studies (political activism and CMC, computer mediated communication and ICTs (information communication technologies), within which this research on extreme right groups and the Internet can be located: in particular the influence of the political, cultural and technological 'opportunity structures', offered by the national contexts in which these groups operate and the characteristics of different types of right-wing organizations. Additionally, we will discuss the role of the Internet for right-wing groups within different approaches to political mobilization and political violence and terrorism, as well as in the context of theories on the democratic potential of Internet. We shall continue the chapter by describing the research methods and the empirical material (sources) on which this book is based and we will conclude with an overview of the content of the volume.

Cyberactivism and Democracy

Internet politics, cyberactivism, or online activism, can be broadly defined as the use of electronic communication technologies for various forms of 'politically

oriented' activism, namely an activism in the civic political sphere through the Internet (Vegh 2003: 71). In fact, cyberactivism "crosses disciplines, mixes theories with practical activist approaches, and represents a broad range of online activist strategies, from online awareness campaigns to Internet-transmitted laser-projected messaging" (McCaughey and Ayers 2003: 2).

Ever since social scientists began exploring the role of the Internet in politics, about a decade ago, the debate has focused on many effects of the Internet on society, especially its influence on participation and pluralism (Mosca 2007: 1). The transformative potential of new information and interactive technologies has been often referred to by the first wave of enthusiasts (e.g. Ayres 1999; Meyers 2001; Norris 2001) as able to open "a new era of an expanded and vibrant global civil society." In order to refer to the (new) interactions between citizens and politics in the era of electronics, new terms have been introduced, such as *e-participation* (i.e. the formulation of political opinion online), *e-governance* (i.e. the online access to information and public services), *e-voting* and *e-referendum* (i.e. the possibility to participate in online elections) (Cotta et al. 2004: 254–258), and above all *e-democracy* (della Porta and Mosca 2005a), defined as the growth in the opportunities for citizens' political participation as a result of the Internet (Rose 2005). Optimistic commentators on the new technologies have stressed several positive effects arising from them, such as their capacity to overcome the one-to-many character of the once-dominant mass media in favor of unmediated connections among the new global citizens, as well as their potential to "revive a dormant public sphere by creating new networked spaces for participation and de-territorialized domains for deliberation" (Bruszt et al. 2005: 149).

In particular, it has been argued that new ICTs and especially the Internet would encourage citizens alienated from institutions of representative democracy to become involved in new types of political activities and to become re-engaged with traditional forms of participation (Russo and Smets 2012). Indeed as a new means of communication, these technologies would provide a larger portion of the population with information on politics which had previously been limited to the few, thereby improving the possibilities for the public to become more interested in politics and consequently more engaged in it (ibid.). The presence of self-managed resources, such as the websites, might also reduce the 'filtering' function of journalists on political issues.

Today we have thousands of NGOs, organized social movements, lobby groups and political activists who make use of the Internet for their activities (Axford and Huggins 2001: 75). Cyberspace is indeed becoming a vital link and meeting ground for civil society organizations and political collective actors, fostering the emergence of "multiple mini-public spheres" (ibid.: 75). Moreover, as for democracy 'from below', it is stressed by scholars that the ICTs also "create strategic innovation … that could not so easily have been made in an offline environment" (Coleman and Blumler 2009: 119). Indeed, contrary to 'passive consumers' or voters in the mass communication democracies, "the global cybercitizen would

be a user as producer, contributing to online debates and interacting directly with others" (Bruszt et al. 2005: 150).

Regarding the participation in politics, the Internet would therefore allow an expansion of not only the 'users', but also of the producers of (political) information, increasing the channels of participation. Being horizontal, bidirectional and interactive, communication via the Internet should reduce hierarchies, by increasing participation from below (Warkentin 2001). Indeed during the debates among citizens within the cyber-sphere social relations of solidarity can be consolidated and the interest for the community reinforced (della Porta and Mosca 2005a).

In addition, as noted, by increasing the channels of information available to citizens, and facilitating in this way the participation of those who do not normally have a voice, the Internet would also reduce political inequalities at different levels (Ayres 1999; Cotta et al. 2004: 256; Myers 2000). From this point of view, the Internet is considered to increase not only the amount of information available, but also the pluralism of sources and contents. However, as underlined by Garrett in his recent review on the state of the art of the studies on Internet and collective actors "what is absent in the literature is the empirical analysis of the negative consequences of new ICTs" (2006: 218).

First of all, skeptics (e.g. Coleman 2003, 2005; Margolis and Resnick 2000) have pointed out that the Internet could reduce citizens' participation instead of increasing it. For example, it has been said that virtual participation could risk obscuring and substituting (therefore decreasing) real participation. In addition the 'equalizing' effects of the Internet have also been called into question, underlining that this new medium could favor organizations and people already rich in resources and committed in politics (Margolis and Resnick 2000 quoted in Mosca 2007: 2). Following this reasoning, emphasis has been therefore put on the possibility that media of the contemporary age and their new channel of the "virtual marketplace" would empower those elites able to use the new tools of communication (Cotta et al. 2004: 256). Those supporting this approach stress that technology is accessible only to the few (i.e. is connectivity really so ubiquitous? Who has access?) and call attention to "the dangers of the emergence of another exclusive and elitist public, not much different from the bourgeois public sphere" (i.e. how does Internet usage correlate with other demographic or social class variables such as gender, age, occupation, income, level of education, and so on? Bruszt et al. 2005: 150). In this regard, some authors suggest that innovation of the Internet stays only in its technology, while often "rather than using the virtual world to explore new ideas and possibilities, we remain creatures of habit and convention" (Hindman 2009; Street 2011: 268).

For what concerns pluralism, there are no doubts that the Internet has increased the amount of information (in terms of quantity) and has made access to it easier. By disseminating alternative information and by creating a new open space for debate, the Internet has been seen as opening opportunities for public communication for media-activists who seek to criticize, create and redefine forms and media

content (Klinenberg 2005). However, some skepticism has arisen on the quality of interactions through the web (della Porta and Mosca 2006: 532) as well as of the information available on the Internet. A big issue therefore emerged: is Internet communication able to overcome social and/or ideological barriers? (Rucht 2005, quoted in Mosca 2007: 2; Sunstein 2001). Shulman (2009, quoted in Karpf 2012: 171), for example, argues that online mobilization results largely in "comments by the public of low quality, redundant and generally superficial." On the one hand, it is true that the Internet allows "the construction of new public spheres where social movements can organize mobilizations, discuss and negotiate their claims, strengthen their identities, sensitize the public opinion and directly express acts of dissent" (Mosca 2007: 2). On the other hand, as noted with reference to 'social capital,' such processes do not necessarily foster the emergence of 'collective goods.' Being composed of all the social resources which 'help to do things'—namely those aspects of social structures which facilitate the action—"[social capital] does not bring automatically to 'harmony' and social integration, but it can also favor conflict and be reinforced by them" (Foley and Edwards 1997: 551). As scholars have started to talk about "bad social capital" in order to underline that the external outcomes of associational activities are not always positive (Berman 1997; Coleman 1990), similarly concerning the Internet, observers have begun to doubt the positive effects of it. In particular, the risk of a sort of "balkanization" of the Web is underlined, with a tendency for Web users to get in contact only within ideologically homogeneous groups (Cotta et al. 2004: 257; della Porta and Mosca 2009). In sum, if the empowering potential of the Internet is obvious, and the democratic 'equalizing' and 'normalizing' effects are still under debate, the necessity to study also the undesirable effects of it is called for, since as stated "there are numerous theoretical arguments regarding the ways in which technologies could contribute to social ills, including violent conflict escalations, overwhelming flows of misinformation, and political polarization" (Garrett 2006: 217–218). Some scholars, though still at a theoretical level, even suggest alarming scenarios according to which "politically extreme online communities mobilize participants to socially detrimental actions" (Sunstein 2001, quoted in Wojcieszak 2009: 564). As argued the new technologies, above all the Internet, could have many effects at the same time and "it is more correct to assume that they could reinforce and weaken democracy, as well as exert scarce influence on democratic processes" (Bimber 2003: 30). In addition there is still a limited reflection on what becomes the meaning of the Internet for politics and in particular democratic politics, when those using this new medium are actors which might have 'anti-democratic' goals. This represents a matter of considerable scientific (and normative) significance to both scholars and practitioners of political communication since the Internet can greatly influence politics, being at the same time a source of information, a tool of communication and a portion of the public sphere (Polat 2005). The virtual Net is not exempt from limitations, simplifications and manipulations (Ceccarini 2012: 90). It will therefore depend on the aims and content of the political communication

and mobilization spread through this new medium, the quality of the virtual public sphere created and therefore the consequences on democracy.

This book shall enter into this debate by investigating an object of study thus far rarely explored in the literature on civil society organizations and ICTs: the use of the Web by radical (right) organizations.

New Technologies and (Extremist) Civil Society Organizations: 'Mind the Gap'

As mentioned, the research on the Internet and politics online has so far been partly selective, mainly focused (at least at the beginning) on institutional politics and/or on some specific types of political actors.

The first studies on the use of the Internet related to the political context, concerned the *institutional communication* via the Net (Coleman et al. 1999). In particular, political institutions and their websites were examined (Trechsel et al. 2003). Everything began with the investigation of public administration and the opening of new channels of direct communication (more open, faster, more transparent, Zuurmond 2005) between them and citizens. According to these authors, by decentralizing communication, the Internet could make institutions and authorities more accessible and transparent to people (e.g. Trechsel and Mendez 2005), enhance transparency and collaboration among public institutions, offices and agencies (e.g. Fountain 2001), and the digital interactions between governments and citizens (e.g. e-governance, see Cotta et al. 2004: 255–256).

Other works on (institutional) online politics have focused on *political parties*, especially during electoral campaigns (see, for example Kluver et al. 2007; Trechsel et al. 2003). Many studies have therefore explored the ways political parties utilize the Web for electoral and political events (e.g. Baringhorst et al. 2009; Gibson et al. 2003; Hooghe and Vissers 2009; Strandberg 2009; Vaccari 2008; Xenos and Bennett 2007), as well as single candidates' websites and blogs (e.g. Jarvis and Wilkerson 2005; Stanyer 2008). Several analyses focus on the contents of parties' websites (e.g. Gibson et al. 2003; Margolis et al. 1999; Trechsel et al. 2003), others on party 'profile' on the Internet (Hooghe and Teepe 2007), or on more specific topics such as party networks and hyperlinks (e.g. Ackland and Gibson 2005). In this regard, research has shown that political parties tend to utilize the Net according to a 'top down' approach, mainly to "provide information to potential voters, journalists, and other political actors, but did not seek to engage or involve or mobilize citizens" (Kluver et al. 2007: 262). For instance, research on political parties and candidates in Finland, the Netherlands, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and the United States have showed that political parties mainly use their websites to transmit political information and propaganda (ibid.). Similarly, other works on the topic have suggested that "the Internet is not used to increase interactivity in party communication with voters, activists and citizens" and when there is this interactivity, it is mainly controlled from above (della Porta and Mosca 2006: 2). However, there are also indications that "the use of the web did not simply

reify existing political structures", implying some transformations in the actors themselves (Kluver et al. 2007: 262). In addition, recently studies on political parties and the Internet have started to pay attention to more dynamic Internet platforms such as social network sites (SNS) and video channels such as YouTube for example (e.g. Utz 2009, see also the analysis of the 2008 American presidential election by Towner and Dulio 2011). Political campaigning through the Web and the role of political party websites and blogs during elections have been studied either in national case studies and comparative research, as well as at the European level (Kluver et al. 2007). The use of the Internet for information and propaganda (in particular concerning the rhetoric of images and words) could be relevant, it has been argued, also regarding extreme right organizations (Lilleker 2006: 162–164).

As the Internet can influence the behavior of individuals and organizations, the strand on *social movements* and ICTs have addressed the impact of the Internet on the main dimensions that concern social movements: mobilizing structures, opportunity structures and framing processes (Garrett 2006: 203). Works on social movements and the Internet have especially looked at left-wing organizations both at national and transnational level (e.g. among others, Bennett 2003, 2004; Bennett and Segerberg 2011; Bennett et al. 2008; Calenda and Mosca 2007; Cernison 2008; della Porta and Mosca 2006; Mattoni 2012; Rucht 2005; Stein 2009; Van Laer and Van Aelst 2010). The main focus is the way the Internet and new ICTs are used by these groups to promote, organize and diffuse protests online, as well as on the organizational and structural changes of the movements fostered by Web interactivity (for a complete overview see Van de Donk et al. 2004). Concerning mobilizing structures these studies have stressed particularly the intertwining between the Internet and organizational and identification processes of social movements (Mattoni 2012). Moreover, a special attention is paid to the emergence of online international protests such as Seattle and the new global movement (e.g. Andretta et al. 2002; Bennett 2003; on the Zapatista movement see Chadwick 2006). However, more recent works have argued that it is reductive to consider the new technologies—especially those based on Web 2.0[1]—only as tools of information and organization of political mobilization for collective actors (Bennett 2003). Beyond influencing the traditional logic of collective action (in terms of effects on the organizational and identity aspects of social movements), digital media indeed led to a new logic of "connective action" (or "connective action networks") (Bennett and Segerberg 2012: 1), where communication becomes a prominent part of the organizational structure, giving birth to new types of mobilized actors based on personalized content sharing across media networks (ibid.: 1–2). In these new forms of mobilization high levels of organizational resources are no longer required for the development of action, nor the formation of a 'collective identity.' This results in a big change in the core dynamics of action, where protests seem

1 See for example the studies of Askanius and Gustafsson (2010), Bennett and Segerberg (2011, 2012) and Merlyna (2012).

to operate with little involvement from conventional organizations, sustained and reinforced over time by a mix of online media and offline activities (ibid.: 3).

In recent years, academic interest in the Internet and extremist social movements and organizations has flourished, especially after the events of September 11. However, the empirical research on this topic is still little, mainly developed within the field of terrorism studies and focusing on religious extremist groups (e.g. Bailey and Grimaila 2006; Benard 2005; Hoffman 2006; Ulph 2006; Vidino 2006).

New Technologies and Extreme Right Groups

Existing empirical studies on the extreme right and the Internet mainly concentrate on the American right (see for example Burris et al. 2000; for an exception on the Italian case, see Caiani and Wagemann 2009; Tateo 2005).[2] Rarer is instead attention given to this phenomenon in Europe (the exception being the use of the Internet by right-wing political parties for electoral campaigns, see Cunha et al. 2003). Yet, the use of ICTs, in particular the Internet, by right-wing extremist groups is an increasing issue worldwide, as many official sources (e.g. TE-SAT Reports) and watchdog organizations (e.g. see the ADL) underline.[3] According to the American monitoring organization Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), almost 1,000 right-wing groups were active in the United States in 2010,[4] most of them with a presence online. An online directory of extremist sites lists 1,280 websites, 42 racist blogs, 30 mailing lists, 33 Usenet newsgroups, 75 Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channels, 231 clubs and groups on Yahoo! and MSN (The Hate Directory, Franklin 2007).[5] The number of illegal far right postings in social networks and video platforms doubled from 2007 to 2008, says a recent study of the German Ministry of the Interior.[6]

In addition, although, as observed, extreme right organizations in the United States are more skillful in making use of new technology than their European counterparts, groups well-versed in the use of the Internet exist in several European countries, above all in Sweden, Norway, Germany, the United Kingdom and

2 For other recent studies on the extreme right and the Web, see Atton (2006), Chau and Xu (2006) and Zuev (2010).

3 For Europe, see the recent investigation of Bartlett et al. (2011).

4 SPLC Report. "Rage on the Right: The Year in Hate and Extremism." *Intelligence Report*, Spring 2010, Issue Number: 137 (http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2010/spring/rage-on-the-right).

5 For other important databases tracking hate sites, see the US Anti-Defamation League (http://www.adl.org/learn/default.htm) and the Simon Wiesenthal Center (http://www.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.asp?c=fwLYKnN8LzH&b=242023).

6 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, "NaziNeonazis on the Net: Videos as Propaganda-Instrument" (our translation), August 14, 2009.

Austria (Caldiron 2001: 335). In 2009, 1,800 far right websites have been counted in Germany (in 2008 it had been 1,707 and in 2007, 1,635 websites). The neo-Nazi 'Kameradschaften' and the National Democratic Party (NPD) alone had 511 websites.[7] According to the 2010 report of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution the number of right-wing extremist websites increased in the year 2009. They focus often on the recruitment of young people. For the authorities it is hardly possible to control the online activities (Verfassungsschutzbericht 2010: 31–32).[8] Likewise, a 2002 study conducted by UISP (Italian Sport Union) on "racism, soccer and the Internet" found that among the websites maintained by soccer fan clubs, the Italians ones were among the most racist (Wetzel 2009: 365). Some of these websites are easily reachable, and apparently 'neutral.' Others are more complex to access and more violent and radical, at the borderline between legality and illegality according to the Mancino Law (Fasanella and Grippo 2009: 158).

In this book we will contribute to this stream of research with a piece of empirical work investigating the degree and forms of use of the Internet by such actors for conducting politics with other means. Indeed, while the number of websites is, in itself, interesting, however, it is the role that the Internet plays within these extremist organizations that provokes scientific interest. As Caldiron (2001) states, the Web works above all as a 'public space' of *debate* where discussions are exchanged and new contacts are made. In Germany, for example, the series of Bulletin Board Systems connected to the Thule network aided German neo-Nazi activists to conserve links and connections amongst themselves, avoiding the dissolution of many of their groups in the first half of the 1990s (ibid.: 335). Besides serving as a communication forum, the Internet also plays a role in discussing and promoting new issues for the extreme right, which rapidly seem to adapt to new technologies and adopt issues, concepts and strategies of communications related to them. In Austria, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution issued a warning regarding the case of the Alpen-Donau right-wing homepage, where politicians were threatened and pictures and private addresses of policemen and journalists were published. According to Willi Lasek, the Alpen-Donau website is a contact point for nearly all extreme right groups (Gepp 2011: 14).

Following social movement literature, ICTs are indeed changing the ways in which activists and organizations communicate, collaborate and mobilize, and there are many studies, within a wide range of fields (e.g. sociology, political science and communication), that investigate these changes (Garrett 2006). Research stresses that extreme right organizations use the Internet for several different purposes. Studies of political scientists (Whine 2000), as well as non-governmental organizations (e.g. Stern 1999) have found that the Internet is used for disseminating *propaganda* and inciting violence (Glaser et al. 2002). It is argued that the Internet enhances the traditional tools of political consensus seeking, also

7 See Jugendschutz.net which works on youth protection for the federal countries of Germany.

8 See http://www.bmi.gv.at/cms/bmi_verfassungsschutz/.

for extremist groups (Hoffman 1996; Karmasyn et al. 2000; Mininni 2002). Indeed, "the web, boundless, difficult to be controlled, in a state of continuous change, is the ideal place for those at the boundaries between legal politics and illegal activities" (Fasanella and Grippo 2009: 156). In fact, the Internet can be used by right-wing groups as a means to rally supporters, preach to the unconverted and also to intimidate political adversaries (ADL 2001[9]). Glaser et al. (2002) even point out that racists often express their views more openly on the Internet.

Beyond considering the Internet as a tool of *communication*, current research also pays attention to the Internet as an organizational process in itself (Tarrow 2002: 15). As such, the Internet is thought even to influence the characteristics of the movements, their structure, ideology and scale (Kavada 2003: 3). Indeed, communication technologies "afford opportunities to debate, mobilize, reflect, imagine, critique, archive, and inform" (Downing and Brooten 2007: 538, quoted in Padovani 2008: 3). Focusing on American extreme right groups, Zhou and colleagues (2005) have shown that extreme right organizations use the Internet in order to facilitate *recruitment*, to reach a *international and global audience*, and to find and keep *contacts with other groups*, avoiding national laws and police investigations (e.g. Lee and Leets 2002; Tateo 2005).

When considering the relevance of ICTs at the symbolic level, research on social movements has underlined the capacity of the Internet to generate *collective identities* (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001; Brainard and Siplon 2000; Myers 2000). It is said that the Internet can have an impact on this, facilitating the exchange of resources and information; altering the incentives and calculations of actors about what behavior is desirable and appropriate; creating solidarity and sharing objectives; and socializing actors (della Porta and Mosca 2006: 538). Moreover, studies on terrorism and political violence stress that isolated individual 'consumers' can find a common identity through extreme right websites, convincing themselves that they are not alone, but instead part of a community, even if it is a 'virtual' one (Post 2005).[10] A recent qualitative study on right-wing activists conducted by a team of Dutch researchers (De Koster and Houtman 2008) has shown that the Internet is used by them to create and reinforce a 'sense of community.' Indeed, consumers within these virtual communities (such as forums online, chats and other interactive arenas) discuss their motivations of participation and their expressed goals (Lilleker 2006). In Austria, for example, the Internet is considered to play a central role in the neo-Nazi subculture. The operators of the websites bypass the authorities by using providers in the United States where the renewal of Nazism is

9 http://www.adl.org/poisoning_web/introduction.asp.

10 Concerning the processes of radicalization of Islamic fundamentalists in Europe, for instance, the role of the Internet and the building of an extremist ideology through it has been cited along with several other dimensions like the psychological factors (e.g. childhood trauma, paranoia, personality disorders), the breakdown in social bonds supporting the individual, the push factors of international crises and the influence of radical imams and militant movements (Oxford Analytica 2006).

not forbidden by a 'Prohibition Status' (Verbotsgesetz).[11] These sites, advertising concerts and 'cultural' initiatives play a central role in the ideal building of the extreme right community, which—although virtual—can constitute the basis for the extreme right mobilization and recruitment in the real world. However, the contribution of ICTs to the development of shared collective identities is still a debated issue among scholars. Whereas some argue that the online environment can foster collective identification processes, they still admit that it is no substitute for face to face interactions among activists (Mattoni 2012, see also Diani 2000: 397). In addition, if so (i.e. if there is a positive effect brought about by the Internet on identity building) the further question is "how and to what extent" (Mattoni 2012). Other commentators ask about the type of identity fostered by the Internet (i.e. 'more pluralist', 'more open?' see della Porta and Mosca 2005a: 180).

Furthermore, as students of social movements have stressed, the Internet can play an important role in helping the processes of *mobilization*, by reducing the cost of communication between a large number of individuals (della Porta and Mosca 2006: 542), solving the problem of leadership and coordination, and by allowing the organization of transnational and even global demonstrations (Petit 2004). Indeed, it is said that the network infrastructure behind the Internet offers "a peculiar organizational pattern to social movements in which various nodes, such as individuals, activist groups and even other social movement networks can be connected in a non hierarchical and fluid way" (Castells 2001: 135–136). As for right-wing extremist movements, in 1998 for example, an investigation conducted by *Der Spiegel* uncovered the role of the 'Widerstand' (resistance) circle in the planning of violent campaigns and attacks (ibid.: 336). Collective actors with few material and financial resources offline can find in the easy access and low-cost arena of the Internet a useful tool for coordination and actions. They are for example online petitions, netstrikes[12] and mail-bombings,[13] even illegal actions of hacking and cracking as well as illegal denial of services and malware[14] (e.g. Axford and Huggins 2001; Chadwick 2006). All these actions are called 'cyber-protests' to refer to "initiatives designed to disrupt official versions of online information by, for example, slowing or closing down 'targeted' sites on the Internet through many people simultaneously requesting so much data from a site that it cannot cope" (Jordan 2007: 75).

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11 *Online Standard*, "Neonazis unterstützen FPÖ," August 31, 2009, online: http://derstandard.at/1250691664677/Vorarlberg-Neonazis-unterstuetzen-FPOe (accessed May 4, 2011).

12 Netstrike is when hundreds of activists try to access a target website simultaneously and repetitively by creating a virtual sit-in.

13 Mail-bombing consists of sending thousands of emails to a website or a server until it overloads and gets jammed.

14 Malware consists of a malicious software for disrupting or denying operations, obtaining secret information or gaining unauthorized access to system resources (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malware).

Finally, the Internet is also considered a crucial tool for right-wing groups facilitating *contacts* with other right-wing organizations in other countries (De Koster and Houtman 2008), which in turn can increase the mobilization potential of the right-wing sector. Indeed, "through hyperlinks, groups can share their audience … conveying a sense of wider world of supportive and sympathetic voices" (Ackland and Gibson 2005: 1). According to some analyses of American extremist organizations, most sites contain external links to other extremist sites, including international ones (see for example the study of Gerstenfeld et al. 2003, on about 160 American extreme right groups). Other research has showed the use of so-called 'Web-rings' by extremist organizations, namely, websites whose specific function is to link national and international Web communities to each other (e.g. Qin et al. 2007). However, also the impact of the Internet on mobilization of collective actors divides the debate between optimistic and more skeptical views. The latter ones argue that "technology-enabled additions to the repertoire of contention also potentially limit activists," indeed "by formalizing the role of participants, automated tools supporting online action offer a constrained set of actions, thereby excluding important opportunities for collective action" (Garrett 2006: 215). Others point out that the Internet can increase differences among organizations and people (i.e. the digital divide), favoring groups of citizens already active and interested in politics (Norris 2001). Furthermore keeping a website active and updating it requires collective actors and organizations and considerable financial and professional effort. In general, what is sure is that political activism through the Internet can be also problematic (Chambers and Kopstein 2001, for other studies on the pros and cons of the impact of the Internet on politics, see also Bakardjieva 2009; Coleman and Blumler 2009; Hindman 2009; Leighninger 2011).

In this volume, we will address these issues. In the light of the several functions illustrated so far that the literature suggests the Internet can play for civil society organizations, we will explore which ones actually are exploited by extreme right groups and to what extent. In doing so we will discuss what the limits and potentialities of the Internet are for such groups.

Extreme Right Organizations: A Definition

Moving on to necessary definitional criteria of our object of study: what do we mean by extreme right organizations? First of all we must note that 'extremism' has become a very common term nowadays, both in social science and outside academia. However, its usage is rather awkward: nobody arrives at a satisfactorily comprehensive definition. The concept refers to individuals or groups who advocate or resort to measures that lie beyond the moral and political centre of society (Eatwell and Goodwin 2010: 8). It can be associated with ideologies

(values systems) or behaviors.[15] Historically, it has been also used to indicate totalitarian regimes such as communism and fascism.

When applied to extreme right groups, extremism is commonly defined by the elements of anti-constitutionalism and anti-democracy: it is the rejection of the fundamental values, procedures and institutions of the democratic state (Carter 2005). One of the difficulties regarding the definition of extremism is that the real meaning of the concept is ultimately attributed by others to a group rather than by a group labeling itself. Indeed, it is not a value-neutral term, but it is adopted in a pejorative way, as "a term of damnation" (Eatwell and Goodwin 2010: 7). Some go even further, stressing that extremism can be also used "to criminalize protest, discredit any form of 'radical thinking' and label political dissent as potentially dangerous" (Neumann 2008: 3). Furthermore, approaching the notion of extremism, one is confronted with several different synonyms such as fanaticism, zealotry, bigotry, immoderation, terrorism and revolution; some of them, such as, for example, radicalism, are often used interchangeably with extremism.

Extremism can take several forms, which vary across countries and groups and can be divided into at least four types: left-wing, right-wing, nationalist or religious. Left-wing extremism includes a range of Marxist-Leninist, environmental, animal rights, anarchical and anti-globalization groups. Nationalist extremism includes groups inspired by a desire for independence, territorial control, or autonomy because of ethnic or other affiliations. Religious extremists act to comply with a religious mandate or to force others to follow that mandate (Jones and Libicki 2008). These different analytical categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive and can be found in combination in the empirical reality.

In this research we are interested in extreme right organizations, namely those groups which have as main goal a (total) change of the political, social and economic system on the basis of an ideological model based on nationalism, exclusionism, xenophobia, the quest for a strong state, welfare chauvinism, revisionism and traditional ethics, also with references to national socialism (ibid.: 14; Mudde 2007: 21). Right-wing extremism includes racist and fascist groups. Right-wing extremism is said to be against human equality, whereas left-wing extremism is said to be against individual freedom. However, one common feature of any type of extremism, including right-wing extremism, is interpreting the world through 'black or white' or 'all or nothing' categories (Mandel 2002). Extremism divides the world between friends (those who support their cause) and enemies (those who oppose it), without seeking a common ground among contending parties, nor does it seek common perspectives, as liberalism does (Downs et al. 2009: 153). The 'in-group' is usually seen as treated unfairly, humiliated or deprived of what it otherwise deserves, whereas the 'out-group' is considered as benefiting directly

15 In this sense some scholars, taking into account an action-based and a values-based form of extremism, also distinguish it as consisting of three components: extraordinary, excessive and intolerant political opinion, belief or activity; violent political activity; and activity aimed against the democratic constitutional state (Downs et al. 2009).

from this injustice (Mandel 2002). Furthermore, recent academic attempts to define the (new) extreme right have tended to shift attention from 'old' fascism to 'new populism.' The 'old' extreme right, referring to fascism, has been identified with ultra-nationalism, the myth of decadence, the myth of rebirth (anti-democracy) and conspiracy theories (Eatwell 2003; Ignazi 1997; Merkl 1997). Today populism is considered as one among the four main traits that characterize the common ideological core of the new extreme right (Mudde 2007: 21).[16] At the same time, it insists on the primacy of the people over the elite, portraying itself as the voice of the people (Mény and Surel 2002).

Despite the still open debate on conceptual definition and terminology (which it is beyond the scope of this book to address in detail),[17] extreme right organizations and movements are usually associated, empirically, with various political parties in Europe, such as the Austrian FPO (Freiheitliche Partei Osterreichs), the French FN (Front National), the Belgian FN (Front National) and VB (Vlaams Belang), the German REP (Die Republikaner), etc. (ibid.: 44). In this research we use the term 'extreme right/radical right' to refer to those groups which exhibit in their common ideological cores the characteristics of nationalism, xenophobia (ethno-nationalist xenophobia), anti-establishment critiques and socio-cultural authoritarianism (law and order, family values) (ibid.). This deliberately includes political party and non-party organizations, even subcultural violent groups.

The Extreme Right and the Internet between Opportunities and Resources: Research Design

Turning to the explanatory level, in this book we propose an analysis of the extreme right political activism with the Internet using a theoretical framework combining insights from research on political mobilization and social movements, on the one hand, and media and political communications research (in particular on CMC studies), on the other. The literature on collective action has emphasized that levels and forms of mobilization by social movements, interest groups and citizens' initiatives are strongly influenced by so-called political and cultural opportunity structure (POS and COS), namely the set of opportunities and

16 Populism has been conceptualized as a political *rhetoric*, that appeals to "the power of the common people in order to challenge the legitimacy of the current political establishment" (Abts and Rummens 2007: 407), or an *ideology*, "that considers society to be ultimately separated in two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volontée general* of the people" (Mudde 2004: 543). For a review of the literature on the concept, see Deiwiks (2009).

17 It goes beyond the scope of this study to enter into the terminological debate, i.e. extreme right vs. far right (see for example Carter 2005; Norris 2005), and we will use the two terms interchangeably in this book.

constraints that are offered by the institutional structure and political culture of the political system in which these groups operate (see Koopmans et al. 2005; Tarrow 1994).[18] The concept has been conceptualized mainly looking at the degree of 'closure/openness' of a political system (e.g. in terms of electoral system, degree of centralization, configuration of power between allies and opponents, etc.), as well as, in terms of more inclusive or exclusive cultural contexts vis-à-vis the challengers (e.g. the political culture of the elites, the way authorities manage collective action, etc.). To a certain extent, movement organizations adapt to the public decision-making structure, mobilizing when and where channels of access open up (Tarrow 1989).

From this perspective, and focusing on right-wing political mobilization and communication, we can hypothesize that in countries where the political and cultural opportunities available for extremist right-wing groups (e.g. laws against racism and xenophobia, the degree of legal control on neo-Nazi/neo-fascist groups, electoral constraints toward minor parties, the level of societal consensus against the Nazi past)[19] are favorable (i.e. 'open'), this has a positive impact on their political activism (also online) (Figure 1.1a).

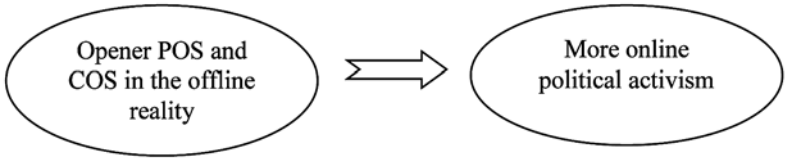

Figure 1.1a Hypothesis 1

However, on the other hand the opposite can also be true and we could find that extreme right groups facing a political and cultural 'closed' context to them in the (offline) reality rely more on the Internet in order to have their voices heard. Indeed, as has been underlined, the media is a political resource for the dissemination of political information which can help extreme right parties overcome their organizational or financial deficiencies (Ellinas 2009: 209). In fact, "the media

18 For a detailed review of the literature on the concept of POS and its operationalization, see Meyer (2004).

19 For these specific dimensions of the political and cultural opportunities for the extreme right, see Koopmans et al. (2005) and Mudde (2007). Other important aspects commonly considered as part of the POS and COS for right-wing groups are: the presence of allies in power (e.g. center-right parties), an authoritarian past (Mudde 2007: 233–255), nostalgic attitudes toward fascist or Nazi regimes (Chirumbolo 1996), and the diffusion within society of xenophobic ideologies (Rydgren 2005a). We will illustrate these aspects in details in Chapter 2.

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