

Social Media for Social Change: Social Media Political Efficacy and Activism in Student Activist Groups

Alcides Velasquez and Robert LaRose

Social media activism has become very relevant for many student activist groups. How can political use of social media be motivated? The concept of Social Media Political Efficacy was proposed to resolve inconsistencies in prior theories of social media activism. A survey ($n = 222$) of members of 3 student activist groups showed that social media political efficacy was positively related to successful experiences using social media for activism. The relationship between social media political efficacy and social media activism was stronger than that between the concept of political efficacy employed in prior research and social media activism. Theory and social media activism implications are discussed.

Introduction

Although some studies have found that political uses of social media are not as extensive as generally believed (Carlisle & Patton, 2013; Glynn, Huge, & Hoffman, 2012; Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, & Verba, 2012), for many members of student activist groups social media have become central to coordinate political actions, express political views, and for issue-oriented advocacy (Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Wollebæk, 2013; Smith, 2013; Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012). Moreover, some studies suggest that political uses of social media have a mobilization effect among youth, as they create opportunities for individuals that otherwise would not participate (Kruikmeier, van Noort, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese, 2013). How can the use of social media for activism be explained and furthermore, motivated?

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© 2015 Broadcast Education Association *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 59(3), 2015, pp. 456–474
DOI: 10.1080/08838151.2015.1054998 ISSN: 0883-8151 print/1550-6878 online

Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, are applications that use information and communication technologies to enable users' content generation, expression, and social interaction (Velasquez, Wash, Lampe, & Bjornrud, 2014). However, before the advent of social media as a mean for group political participation and activism, researchers had already become interested in online political participation (OPP).

Previous studies have tackled OPP from a variety of perspectives. Examples include the examination of the relationship between media use and online and offline political participation (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011), whether online interactions are as effective as face-to-face (FtF) interaction for specific types of political mobilization (Hooghe, Vissers, Stolle, & Mahéo, 2010; Vissers, Hooghe, Stolle, & Mahéo, 2012), and the influence of online news on participation (Nah, Veenstra, & Shah, 2006), among many others.

Some research has tried to explain OPP through the concept of internal political efficacy (IPE). The relationship between IPE and many political behaviors among different populations and cultures has been previously studied (e.g., Finkel, 1985, 1987; Hayes & Bean, 1993; Morrell, 2005; Karp & Banducci, 2008; Pattie & Johnston, 1998; Rudolph, Gangl, & Stevens, 2000). IPE is defined as individuals' belief that the political actions they undertake will influence their political environment (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954).

However, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1986, 1991, 1997) acknowledges the diversity of human capabilities (Bandura, 1997, p. 36). In SCT efficacy beliefs are not a contextless global disposition (Bandura, 1997, p. 42), on the contrary they operate according to the different demands of the context specific situations (Bandura, 1997, p. 43). Furthermore, in the context of political behaviors, Wollman and Stouder (1991) found that when examining specific modes of political participation, efficacy beliefs regarding that specific mode of political participation were the most accurate predictors of the behavior. Consequently, efficacy beliefs should be measured in terms of a specific capability judgment that may vary across realms of activity (Bandura, 1997, p. 42).

Additionally, IPE not only does not refer to capability judgments regarding specific modes of political participation, but also it is usually operationalized in terms of how individuals feel regarding their qualifications to participate in politics or to work in public office, while "One can comprehend fully the machinations of governmental systems but lack a sense of efficacy to influence them." (Bandura, 1997, p. 484). Therefore, if the mode of political participation under study is the use of social media for political purposes, efficacy should be defined in terms of individuals' perceived capabilities to use social media effectively to achieve their political objectives. Moreover, studies have shown that IPE and online political efficacy are also empirically distinct (Velasquez, 2014, p. 237; Velasquez & LaRose, 2015).

This study contributes from a SCT perspective to theories of youth's use of social media for activism by differentiating between general perceptions of political efficacy (i.e. internal political efficacy) and perceptions of social media political efficacy

in order to resolve weaknesses and inconsistencies in prior theories of OPP, and also contributes by proposing a possible mechanism to explain youth's participation in online activism. Specifically, this study looks at how efficacy perceptions of young activists are influenced by one of the sources of self-efficacy perceptions, previous enactive experiences (Bandura, 1997, p. 80), and at how efficacy beliefs specific to the context of the behavior have a stronger relationship with the likelihood of engaging in social media activism (SMA) than IPE.

Review of Literature

Two sets of studies that have used IPE in the context of OPP can be identified. A first group is comprised of studies that examined how general Internet use was related to political efficacy perceptions. Lee (2006) found that Internet use was positively associated with beliefs of political efficacy, although the relationship depended on the type of Internet use. Reading political news and using the Internet for contacting politicians and public sector officials through e-mails or newsgroups posts had a positive relationship with IPE perceptions. In contrast, using the Internet for entertainment purposes such as visiting adult, games, or music sites was not related to individuals' perceptions of IPE. In another study, Kenski and Stroud (2006) looked at the relationship between Internet access and online exposure to political information, and found that Internet use was positively related with political efficacy. Wang (2007) found that individuals that used sites such as discussion forums to express their political opinions or interacted online with public officials reported higher levels of IPE.

These findings can be interpreted from a SCT perspective. According to Bandura (1997) enactive experience is the most powerful source of efficacy beliefs since it allows individuals to learn through their own experience the reach of their own capabilities. However, if these experiences are not perceived as successful, they can diminish individuals' perceived capabilities of what they can achieve. Therefore, it should be positive experiences what should feed perceptions that social media can be used as an effective tool for political purposes.

H₁: Successful enactive experiences using social media for political participation will be positively related to social media political efficacy.

Likewise, the information processed through successful enactive experiences should increase individuals' general perceptions about their control over their environment through their political actions, as it is themselves directly who are actively trying to influence and control it. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H₂: Successful enactive experiences using social media for political participation will be positively related to internal political efficacy perceptions.

The second set of studies examined the role that IPE perceptions play in the relationship between Internet use and political participation. The studies in this group have reported mixed findings. While some provided evidence that efficacy perceptions influenced online and offline participation, others did not find evidence that suggested this.

Findings by Wang (2007) showed that neither Internet political opinion expression nor participation in political campaigns were significantly associated with political efficacy. In contrast, Brunsting and Postmes (2002) showed that political efficacy was related with Internet political uses and political participation. On the other hand, Vitak and colleagues (2011) did not find a significant relationship between political efficacy and online political participation. While in SCT efficacy is defined in terms of context specific situations, these studies used measures of political efficacy that might have not measured capability perceptions in the online context.

Following SCT (Bandura, 1986, p. 231), the level of self-efficacy at one point in time predicts the specific behavior by which the efficacy perception refers to. It can be hypothesized that individuals' perceptions that they are capable of using social media to attain their political objectives should be positively related with likelihood of engaging in SMA.

H₃: Social media political efficacy will be positively related to likelihood of social media activism.

Also, as the concept of self-efficacy refers to a multifaceted and dynamic belief system that operates in the different human activity domains and according to the different demands of the context specific situations (Bandura, 1997, p. 43), social media political efficacy (SMPE) should have a stronger relationship with SMA than IPE. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H₄: The relationship between social media political efficacy and likelihood of engagement in social media activism will be stronger than the relationship between internal political efficacy and likelihood of engagement in social media activism.

Methods

Sample and Data Collection

This study used a purposive sample of members of political, activist, and advocacy groups in a large United States Midwestern university. A set of 19 organizations were identified through the university's Office of Student Life. Organizations that favored similar methods for their social media activities, such as Facebook pages or groups, Twitter, and blogs, were contacted. Three group leaders expressed interest in having

their group participate. These organizations were the official representatives of the Democratic (DG) and Republican (RG) parties on campus, and an environmental organization (EG). In exchange for their participation, groups were offered a donation of \$75.00. Group members received \$2.00 in advance for their participation.

Data Collection.

Data were collected using a mixed-mode surveys approach and the Tailored Design Method (Dillman, 2007). Data were collected during one of the regular group meetings. Participants received an envelope with an informed consent letter, two \$1.00 bills, and the survey questionnaire. The researcher explained to the participants that they did not have to answer the survey or any of the questions in it if they did not want to and that only the researcher would have access to their answers. Students that did not attend the meetings were contacted through postal mail. Multiple contacts were used in order to maximize response rate (Dillman, 2007). Finally, those individuals who did not attend their group meeting and who were not contacted by postal mail were contacted via electronic mail, their incentive was a \$2.00 gift card from an online retailer.

Sample.

Response rates can be seen in Table 1. A total of 224 surveys were received. However, two had to be excluded because they did not have any questions answered whatsoever. Of these 222 individuals, 29.5% were members of the DG, 18.5% were members of the RG, and 52.3% were members of the EG. Tables 2 and 3 include descriptive information for each group. Results of an ANOVA suggested that no significant difference existed regarding time spent on Facebook daily $F(2,219) = .788, p = .456$ and average Internet daily use $F(2,219) = .900, p = .408$ across groups. Results showed that a significant difference existed in age $F(2,219) = 3.59, p = .029$ and in time as group member $F(2,219) = 23.24, p < .001$, across groups. Post-hoc Tukey tests revealed that individuals in the EG ($M = 21.4, SD = 3.61$) had a significantly higher mean score for age compared to individuals in the DG ($M =$

Table 1
Response Rates by Groups and Survey Modality

	RG	DG	EG	Response Rate by Modality
Response rate for Survey Modality				
Face-to-face	100%	100%	100%	100%
Postal mail	34%	30%	21%	23%
Online survey	16%	15%	6%	8%

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Time as Group Member, Age, Facebook Use, Internet Use for Each Group and Overall

	RG		DG		EG		All Groups	
Average age (SD)	20.9	(1.5)	20.06	(1.2)	21.4	(3.61)	20.9	(2.8)
Average daily hours of Facebook use (SD)	2.6	(2.4)	2.2	(1.5)	1.96	(2.56)	2.18	(2.26)
Average daily hours of Internet use (SD)	13.89	(8.1)	11.9	(8.1)	10.9	(8.7)	11.8	(8.4)
Months in the group (SD)	17.9	(16.2)	8.94	(12.0)	5.3	(5.3)	8.9	(11.4)

20.06, $SD = 1.2$) and in the RG ($M = 20.9$, $SD = 1.5$); and that the reported mean score of time as members of the group for individuals of the RG ($M = 17.9$, $SD = 16.2$) was significantly higher compared to the mean scores of members of the DG ($M = 8.94$, $SD = 12.0$) and of members of the EG ($M = 5.3$, $SD = 5.3$).

Results of the Chi-Square tests showed that there was a statistical difference across groups regarding gender, $\chi^2(2, n = 222) = 8.71, p < .05$. However, no significant difference was observed across groups regarding whether individuals had a Facebook account or not, $\chi^2(2, N = 222) = .258, p = .879$. Since the Chi-square test is highly sensitive to sample size and number of observations for each cross tabulation cell, differences for race and ethnicity could not be calculated, given the low occurrence of races others than white.

Table 3
Percentages for Gender, Race, and Facebook Account Ownership by Groups and Overall

	RG	DG	EG	All Groups
Males	53.8%	44.4%	29.6%	38.6%
Females	46.2%	55.6%	70.4%	61.4%
Race ^a				
White	100%	93.7%	80.5%	88%
African American	2.6%	4.7%	6.1%	5%
Asian	0%	9.4%	10.4%	9%
Native American	2.6%	3.1%	2.6%	3%
Hispanic/Latino	2.6%	4.7%	6.1%	5.2%
Facebook account	95%	95.4%	95.7%	96.5%

Note. ^aFor race respondents were asked to check all the possible answers that applied, this is why for some groups the total percentage for races adds more than 100%.

Table 4
Means, Standard Deviations and Reliability Scores for Variables

	Mean	S.D.	Cronbach's Alpha
Social media activism	5.6	1.17	.82
Social media political efficacy	8.1	1.78	.85
Internal political efficacy	4.7	1.60	.86
Successful enactive experience	5.1	1.20	.85
Social media use	3.9	1.20	.85

Analysis and Results

A total of four observations had to be dropped from the sample before starting with the analysis because those respondents returned the survey with only the demographic information included ($n = 218$). Mean values were imputed to missing data. In no case did imputation of missing values exceeded 10% of the whole sample.

Measures.

Means, standard deviations, and reliability scores for each measure are reported in Table 4.

Dependent Variables.

Social media activism adapted items from Hayes (2009) and used an additive index of four items. The preface asked respondents how likely they were to perform a set of political activities on their own to attain a political objective (1 = *very unlikely*, 7 = *very likely*). Items included: "Post a political comment on a social network site page," and "Post a link about politics on a social media website."

Perceptions of social media political efficacy were derived from theoretical considerations in SCT and recommendations by Bandura (2006) for the generation of efficacy scales. Social media political efficacy was gauged with the preface: "How certain are you that you can accomplish the following politically related activities using social media and the Internet?" Some items were: "Use social media applications to express your political views" and "Use social media applications to obtain a political objective." The additive index was calculated with four items, and the scale ranged from 1 (*lowest perceived capability*) to 10 (*highest perceived capability*).

IPE was measured using the items previously tested and validated by Craig, Niemi, and Silver (1990) such as, "I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics" and "I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most people."

The additive index was calculated using four 7-point Likert scale items that asked respondents to express their level of agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Independent Variables.

The seven 7-point Likert scale items that comprised the additive index for successful enactive experience (SEE) were adapted from the item used by LaRose, Gregg, Strover, Straubhaar, and Carpenter (2007) and based on SCT's definition of the concept. Individuals were asked to express their level of agreement with a set of statements, regarding their experience using the Internet (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Items included: "My personal experience has showed me that it can be useful for expressing my political opinion" and "I have had successful experiences using it to influence others on political matters."

Control Variables.

A control variable for general social media use (SMU) was included in the analyses. This variable was focused only on Facebook as this social media platform is the most popular among social media platforms (Duggan & Smith, 2013). SMU served to indicate a general willingness to share information online that needed to be controlled to discount the competing hypothesis that social media users engaged regardless, in all types of online activities, including SMA. SMU included measurements from previous studies (Lin, Peng, Kim, Kim, & LaRose, 2012), and it was comprised by ten items that asked respondents how frequently (1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Monthly, 4 = Weekly, 5 = Several times per week, 6 = Daily, 7 = Several times per day) they performed a set of social media activities, such as "Update your Facebook status, Create 'events' on Facebook, and Add or change pictures on Facebook."

Results

Fifteen influential outliers were identified through DFBETA scores and were omitted from the rest of statistical analyses. The size of the sample was $n = 203$.

H₁ posited that SEE had a positive relationship with SMPE, and H₂ proposed that SEE had a positive relationship with IPE. Both were supported. A test for significant differences between correlation coefficients (Kullback, 1997, p. 320) across the three groups for the independent and dependent variables was performed. Results showed that the relationship between SMU and SMPE for the RG $r(35) = .31$, $p < .1$, the DG $r(61) = .28$, $p < .01$ and the EG $r(101) = .43$, $p < .001$ were significant. Likewise, the differences between SEE and IPE for the RG $r(35) = .705$, $p < .001$, the DG $r(61) = .148$, $p < 0.1$ and the EG $r(101) = .495$, $p < .001$ were significantly different, $\chi^2(2) = 12.32$, $p < .001$. Therefore, interaction terms

between group membership and SMU were included to test H₁ and interaction terms between group membership and SEE were included in the analysis for H₂.

H₁ was assessed through a hierarchical regression. Table 5 shows the results for this analysis. Results of the first model ($R^2 = .219$, $F(7,194) = 7.767$, $p < .001$) suggested that SMU ($\beta = .485$, $p < .001$) and the interaction term for SMU and the DG ($\beta = -.563$, $p < .05$) were significantly associated with SMPE. Also a significant difference existed between the DG ($\beta = .708$, $p < .001$) and the reference group regarding reported levels of SMPE. When SEE was added to the model, the R^2 had a significant increase, ($R^2 = .286$, $F(1,193) = 111.411$). Results of this second model, ($R^2 = .505$, $F(8,193) = 24.590$, $p < .001$), suggested that the variables significantly associated with SMPE were SMU ($\beta = .298$, $p < .001$), group membership, with DG reporting significant higher levels of SMPE ($\beta = .496$, $p < .05$) and SEE ($\beta = .585$, $p < .001$) as hypothesized. For members of the DG, SMU had a weaker relationship with SMPE ($\beta = -.481$, $p < .05$) than for members of the EG. In order to get an idea of the probable size of the effect of SEE on SMPE, a partial correlation coefficient was calculated, controlling for the effect of SMU. Results showed that the significant relationship between SEE and SMPE was high $r(200) = .615$, $p < 0.001$ (Cohen, 1988, p. 79).

Regarding H₂, a hierarchical regression was employed to examine the relationship between SEE and IPE (Table 6). In the first model ($R^2 = .270$, $F(5,196) = 15.197$, $p <$

Table 5
Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Social Media Political Efficacy

	Social Media Political Efficacy	
	Model 1	Model 2
Gender		
Male	.016	.006
Age (Log)	-.063	-.074
Social media use	.495***	.298***
Group		
Republicans	.286	-.112
Democrats	.708**	.496**
Social media use X Republicans	-.248	.099
Social media use X Democrats	-.563*	-.481**
Successful enactive experience		.585***
<i>F(df)</i>	7.7 (7,194)	24.6 (8,193)
<i>R</i> ² change	.219***	.286***
<i>R</i> ²	.219	.505

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.
 $N = 203$.

Table 6
Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Internal Political Efficacy

	Internal Political Efficacy	
	Model 1	Model 2
Gender		
Male	.248***	.204***
Age (Log)	.019	.026
Social media use	.094	.016
Group		
Republicans	.238***	-.620
Democrats	.377***	1.1***
Successful enactive experience		.442***
Successful enactive experience X Republicans		.848
Successful enactive experience X Democrats		-.878*
<i>F(df)</i>	15.19 (5,196)	19.07 (8,193)
<i>R</i> ² change	.279***	.162***
<i>R</i> ²	.279	.441

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

$N = 203$.

.001), results suggested that gender ($\beta = .248, p < .001$) and group membership, RG ($\beta = .248, p < .001$) and DG ($\beta = .377, p < .001$); were significantly related to IPE. The second model ($R^2 = .441, F(8,193) = 19.070, p < .001$) resulted in a significant R^2 change, ($F(3,193) = 18.674, p < .001$), with gender ($\beta = -.204, p < .001$), membership to the DG ($\beta = 1.1, p < .05$), SEE ($\beta = .442, p < .001$) and the interaction between SEE and DG ($\beta = -.878, p < .05$) as significantly related; supporting H_2 . The whole model explained 44% of the variance of IPE. Results of a partial correlation analysis, controlling for SMU, showed that the significant relationship between IPE and SEE was moderate $r(200) = .471, p < 0.001$ (Cohen, 1988, p. 79).

A hierarchical regression examined the relationship between SMPE and SMA (H_3). This hypothesis was also supported. Results are illustrated in Table 7. For the first model ($R^2 = .307, F(6,195) = 14.38, p < .001$), SMU ($\beta = .262, p < .001$) and IPE ($\beta = .468, p < .001$) were significantly associated with SMA. In the second model SMPE was incorporated ($R^2 = .483, F(7,194) = 25.933, p < .001$). Results suggest that IPE ($\beta = .237, p < .001$) and SMPE ($\beta = .514, p < .001$) were significantly related with social media activism, supporting H_3 . The strength of the relationship between SMPE and SMA, controlling for the effect of IPE and SMU, was high $r(199) = .514, p < 0.001$.

Table 7
Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Social Media Activism

	Social Media Activism	
	Model 1	Model 2
Gender		
Male	-.079	-.027
Age (Log)	-.011	.031
Group		
Republicans	-.044	-.025
Democrats	.038	.021
Social media use	.262***	.099
Internal political efficacy	.458***	.237***
Social media political efficacy		.514***
<i>F(df)</i>	14.38 (6,195)	25.93 (7,194)
<i>R</i> ² change	.307***	.177***
<i>R</i> ²	.307	.483

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.
 $n = 203$.

Finally, H_4 stated that the relationship between SMPE, a variable that specifically measured the perceived capability of individuals for using social media as a tool for political participation, and social media activism would be stronger than the relationship between IPE, a general measure of efficacy, and SMA. This hypothesis was also supported. It was tested following a procedure designed to test for the significance of the difference between two correlated correlations (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001, p. 146) introduced by Steiger (1980). This procedure tests for the difference between the correlations of two independent variables with a dependent variable, and when the resulting Z is not within the critical values of ± 2.58 for two-tailed test and $p < .01$, a significant difference between the predicted correlations exists, implying that one of the variables has a stronger relationship with the other variable.

Results of the test showed that the correlation between IPE and SMA ($r = .483$, $p < .01$) was significantly different than the relationship between SMPE and SMA ($r = .657$, $p < .01$) = 2.88, $df = 200$. Looking at the correlation coefficients, it can be noticed that SMPE has a stronger correlation with SMA than IPE does. Therefore, H_4 was supported. The strength of the relationship between SMPE and SMA was significantly stronger than the relationship between IPE and SMA.

In sum, results suggest that successful enactive experiences using social media for activism influences positively both, IPE and SMPE perceptions. Furthermore, while

both IPE and SMPE are significantly related to SMA, the relationship between SMPE and SMA is stronger than that between IPE and SMA.

Discussion

This study proposed the distinction between general perceptions of political efficacy (i.e., internal political efficacy) and perceptions of social media political efficacy. Results suggest this distinction makes sense as the conceptualization of efficacy beliefs specific to the social media context had a stronger relationship with social media activism than the global measure of political efficacy beliefs used in previous studies. Also, this study examined successful enactive experiences as one of the sources of efficacy beliefs. Results showed that this concept had a positive relationship with both efficacy concepts.

Findings shed some light on what could be the mechanism that explains social media political uses. Previous studies have already shown that, more than general media use, it is certain kinds of social media use in which youth engage in what implies a relationship between online (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Ekström & Östman, 2013) and traditional offline (Quintelier & Vissers, 2008) modes of political participation. While these studies focused on types of social media use, one theoretical contribution of this study is the emphasis on the nature of the online experience (e.g., successful or unsuccessful), complementing the results of that research.

Successful Enactive Experience and Social Media Political Efficacy

According to Social Cognitive Theory, previous positive experiences related with the behavior to which efficacy beliefs refer to increase those efficacy beliefs. Although the results are based on data from a cross-sectional study, consistent with theory and previous studies (Eastin & LaRose, 2000) results showed that the more individuals perceived that their online experience using social media to participate in politics have been satisfactory, the more they perceived that they had the capabilities to use these media for political purposes. It is possible that in circumstances of successful or satisfactory experiences, political uses of social media will increase efficacy perceptions; while in circumstances of negative experiences, the efficacy perceptions might decrease, especially in the case of individuals who are early in the development of their efficacy or do not have much experience with that particular behavior (Bandura, 1977).

As the nature of the data is correlational in nature, it might be the case that those with higher levels of efficacy tend to have more online positive experiences. However, findings in previous studies (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2009; Lampe &

Johnston, 2005) can be interpreted as supporting the notion that successful experiences increase efficacy perceptions and participation. These studies have found that the more positive feedback in the form of comments, "likes," "shares," or a positive score in a reputation system new users receive, the more they continue to use and contribute content to SNS and online communities over time. In the context of the online participation of activist and political organizations, online positive feedback can mean a successful experience for users, and may represent the difference between continuing to engage or not in the group's social media activities.

Social Cognitive Theory states that efficacy perceptions can be generalized to similar activities (Bandura, 1977). This offers a plausible explanation as to why this study found that a positive relationship existed between general social media use and perceptions of online political efficacy. It is possible that individuals that have developed a sense of efficacy of their general social media use might have translated these perceptions into social media political efficacy beliefs.

Although this research did not provide the evidence needed to show this is the case, Social Cognitive Theory suggests a possible process where individual participation is influenced by political uses of social media through efficacy perceptions. The more individuals have a positive experience using social media for political purposes, the more certain they will feel they can use these media successfully for activism. Those experiences may also feed perceptions of internal political efficacy, which should be positively related with traditional offline modes of participation.

Online Political Efficacy and Internal Political Efficacy

Results also confirmed the importance of assessing efficacy beliefs specific to the behavior in question. Although a positive relationship was found between perceptions of internal political efficacy and likelihood of participating in social media activism this relationship was moderate, while the relationship between social media political efficacy and likelihood of participating in social media activism was high and significantly stronger. These results emphasize the difference between new and traditional (i.e., offline) modes of political participation and activism. The use of social media for political purposes demands the possession of certain skills, as well as the perception of the capability to effectively use those skills. In this sense, there might be individuals that believe in their capabilities to use social media for political purposes, but feel they do not have what is needed to participate in a different context (e.g., offline).

As suggested by the results regarding the relationship between social media use and social media activism, even those who are experienced social media users do not necessarily believe they possess the capability to use social media successfully for political purposes. For example, social media may require more formal modes of expression, including proper spelling and grammar and clear communication of goals, than are typically found in casual social media interactions with friends.

Posting “pictures of me, drunk,” for example, is a common practice on Facebook (Morgan, Snelson, & Elison-Bowers, 2010), but might not be a desirable strategy for youth activism and organizing.

Another finding in this study suggested that individuals’ social media use varied across groups and that it was related with social media political efficacy. This relationship, however, was lower for members of the DG compared to members of the EG. As a mere speculation, this difference might be because the nature of the online interactions that members of the DG had might have been more restricted, and might have limited their possibilities of increasing their perceptions of social media political efficacy. The relationship of successful enactive experiences using social media for political participation with internal political efficacy might be explained in the same way.

Implications for Social Media Activism Organizing

Results help us to understand how the different features of social media applications may motivate youth’s use of social media for activism, as well as to facilitate the organization of activist groups’ social media activities. Other studies (Velasquez et al., 2014) found that users of online communities tended to value differently the feedback they received, and this value varied depending on the motivations that users had to participate on these sites. For example, users motivated by status seeking gave a different meaning to a positive vote than users that wanted to improve their skills through their online participation. The former seek the recognition and acceptance of others, while the latter are focused on honing their skills. Furthermore, research has showed (Macaffee, 2013) that the different types of political uses of social media individuals engage in are associated with different motivations.

In this sense, successful experiences will have different shapes for different users, most probably as a function of their motivations for social media activism. To some, a successful experience might be to convince someone about a particular issue. In other cases it might consist of mobilizing a high amount of people, while in others it might take the form of gaining the admiration of other group members. Online activist and advocacy groups have the task of identifying the motivations of members for their online behavior, and depending on this, use the features of the system to communicate to members the positive results of their online participation. For example, Facebook “like” buttons or online communities’ reputation systems that convey the positive opinions of others about the content posted might increase users’ perceptions of their social media political efficacy. This kind of feedback might mean to them that they were successful using social media to achieve a particular objective.

In sum, the information provided by the system and by the interactions with other individuals might increase perceptions of efficacy as long as the information communicates to members of the groups that their online behaviors have been effective in achieving their objective. In the case of the three groups studied, they

focus their participation on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. These systems' feedback affordances are reflected by the number of "likes" to a post, posts comments, shares, re-tweets, and in an increase in the number of followers, among others. Therefore, these features can turn into the sources of information that members of these groups use to assess their performance in their social media political and activist actions. Group members should realize that the system features, as well as the online interactions among group members, have an informative component that might be related with individuals' feelings of efficacy. For example, none of these groups currently have a program for new members focused on socializing and initiating them about the online activities performed by the groups. New members are critical as they are more susceptible to giving up their participation if they do not experience for themselves the benefits of their online actions, and for the groups it is of great importance to focus special attention on newcomers as they will assure the existence of the group overtime.

These considerations are more relevant for groups that do not combine online and offline actions. In groups that combine offline and online actions the sources of information about successful experiences using social media to achieve individuals' and groups' political objectives will be more varied and will also include information about the performance of the individuals and the groups offline. However, for groups that focus exclusively on online actions, or for those that have not moved offline yet (Harlow, 2012), online successful experiences can be the first evidence for members of online activists and advocacy groups about their capabilities to achieve their objectives using social media.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study measured social media activism in terms of the likelihood of engaging in a set of political actions through social media, and how the reported likelihood of following these behaviors were related with social media political capability perceptions. However, behavioral intentions do not consistently translate into behaviors (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005; Sheeran, 2002). Intention-behavior consistency is influenced by type of behavior (Sheeran, 2002). In the context of political behaviors, the intention-behavior relationship has ranged from moderate to strong (Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995; Maloney, Lapinski, & Neuberger, 2013; Vossler, Kerkvliet, Polasky, & Gainutdinova, 2003). The intention-behavior discrepancy can be explained by factors such as properties of behavioral intentions, and personality and cognitive factors (Sheeran, 2002). Further research should account for the intention-behavior gap, or collect actual online behaviors.

This study controlled for social media use focused exclusively on Facebook as it is the most widely used (Duggan & Smith, 2013), however, other social media platforms such as Twitter are also increasingly used for activist purposes (e.g., Earl, McKee Hurwitz, Mejia Mesinas, Tolan, & Arlotti, 2013). Although it is possible that those who use Twitter extensively will also use Facebook with similar intensity,

studies should explore how general Twitter participatory use also influences social media activism.

The cross-sectional nature of the data collected does not allow us to make any causal claims. Moreover, SCT provides for reciprocal causation, where for instance, successful enactment of social media activism at one point in time might lead to more social media political efficacy at a later point in time (e.g., Eastin & LaRose, 2000). However, the theory also asserts that looking forward from any point in time, the level of self-efficacy at that point in time predicts future behavior as has been confirmed in longitudinal and experimental studies (for a review see Bandura, 1998, 2004). Although this study established that a relationship between efficacy perceptions and perceptions of the likelihood of a behavior, evidence has showed how efficacy beliefs contribute causally to behavioral choices (Bandura, 1986, p. 423). However, an experimental study examining the causal relationship between efficacy and behavior in this context will represent a contribution to the research problem raised in this study.

Although individual level political participation was the focus of the present research, social media political efficacy presumably forms at the group level and is influenced by experiences that members of each group have in common. Thus, intra-class correlations could be an issue (Field, 2005; McGraw & Wong, 1996). These were not tested in this study. Future research should attempt to account for intra-group correlations by considering additional individual-level control variables such as group loyalty, perceived group norms for online and offline participation, sense of belonging, and group performance standards, among others. Furthermore, variables typically controlled for in political communication such as partisan strength and political interest were not accounted for here. However, political interest could also be indicated by membership to these activist groups, so that was presumed high across the three and therefore not useful to control any further.

Participants in the study belonged to only one university; therefore a replication of this study is needed to see if the same patterns hold in different demographics. Samples should be extended to a wider variety of student groups, across campuses, so that group-level variations in these variables could be examined systematically through multi-level regression analysis (De Leeuw & Kreft, 1986).

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