# Media Use and the Social Identity Model of Collective Action: Examining the Roles of Online Alternative News and Social Media News

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# Media Use and the Social Identity Model of Collective Action: Examining the Roles of Online Alternative News and Social Media News

## Michael Chan[1]

## Abstract

This study examines the potential for alternative and social media to stimulate the core antecedents of protest participation (identity, efficacy, and anger) in the context of Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement. Findings from a representative sample supported the social identity model of collective action (SIMCA), such that all antecedents predicted intended protest participation. Identity and anger mediated the relationship between online alternative news and protest intention, while anger and efficacy mediated the relationship between social media news and protest intention. The findings demonstrate the benefits of theoretical integration from related disciplines to better understand the mobilizing potential of collection action through news media use.

## Keywords

protests, social media, alternative media, social identity, efficacy, anger, Hong Kong

Recent scholarship and media commentary on the Internet and political activism have highlighted the pivotal roles played by digital media in mobilizing protests, such as facilitating collective demands for regime change in the Middle East (Howard & Parks, 2012) and creating discursive spaces for deliberation and action mobilization for social movements like Occupy Wall Street (DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012). Yet, given the often wide media coverage of protests and their potential for political

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influence, there have been relatively few studies at the individual level that have examined how social media *and* alternative media can influence collective action.[1] Past studies have focused primarily on social media and its role in "traditional" forms of political participation (e.g., Bode, Vraga, Borah, & Shah, 2013; Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010), such as determining the selection of public officials (e.g., working for political candidates) and influencing policy makers (e.g., signing a petition). Alternative media and activities that challenge the legitimacy of the status quo have been underexamined, even though they are indicative of citizens' dissatisfaction with the government in responding to their grievances and represent a threat to the "established political order" (Dalton, 1993). While acknowledging the burgeoning literature on alternative media, scholars in the field also note that not enough attention has been paid to the "users" of alternative media (Downing, 2003) and how such media can mobilize collective action (Atton, 2007).

Recent studies have started to address these shortcomings and have demonstrated a positive relationship between online alternative media use and protest (Leung & Lee, 2014) as well as explicating some of the mechanisms in which different uses of social network sites can influence protest participation (Valenzuela, 2013). This study extends this line of work by integrating research on media and protest participation with insights from the social-psychological literature on collective action. More specifically, the social identity model of collective action (SIMCA) points to three core antecedents of collective action that lead to protest (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008): psychological attachment with the in-group (identity), perceived injustice experienced by the in-group leading to certain emotional states (anger), and the perception that one has the agency to influence society (efficacy). While these antecedents have good predictive power, the question of what could potentially inculcate or amplify these beliefs has received less attention.

The study focuses on the roles of social media and online alternative news media as important purveyors of meaning and their ability to create and sustain "collective action frames" that can spur participation (Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1992). Alternative media not only questions and challenges existing power relations and seeks to facilitate social and political change (Downing, 1984) but can also engender beliefs that the in-group is strong, has been treated unfairly, and is capable of changing its circumstances. The study thus adopts a theoretically informed approach to better understand the dynamics of collective action, with alternative media and social media on one end, protest on the other, and the antecedents of collective action (i.e., the SIMCA) in between. Structural equation modeling (SEM) will be used to examine the relationships.

Hong Kong provides a suitable context for the study because it has experienced numerous mass protests as part of the pro-democracy movement, which has been very vocal in the call for greater democracy for the city state since China's resumption of sovereignty in 1997 (Lee & Chan, 2011). Moreover, Hong Kong features a rich media environment. Facebook penetration, for example, is one of the largest in the world at 60%, and there exists an active and vibrant online public sphere that is sympathetic to the pro-democracy movement.

# Literature Review

## Mainstream Media and Collective Action

The political communication literature has long acknowledged the importance of the news media for a functioning democracy as informed and knowledgeable citizens are more likely to adhere to democratic norms, be interested in current affairs, and participate in political activities (Delli Carpini, 2000). Less theorized however is the impact of news media on protest participation (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2009). The extant literature suggests three possible mobilization mechanisms. First, media coverage of protests can create what Kielbowicz and Scherer (1986) call a "collective awareness," in that audiences can identify with and relate to the grievances expressed by the protesters to their own lives. For example, "We are the 99%" was a frequently adopted slogan as part of the Occupy Movement and sought to instill a collective consciousness among the general public as the exploited majority in binary opposition to the wealthy minority. By propagating the slogan through the mass media, the movement sought to encourage greater self-identification among citizens, which may in turn lead to support and action. Second, coverage can sustain existing protesters because it validates their efforts to seek national publicity through their activities. It also expands the scope of the struggle by drawing sympathies and new recruits from previously ambivalent "third parties" such as the general public and interest groups (Rucht, 2004). Third, news coverage can provide important "mobilizing information" on the practicalities and logistics of how and where individuals can participate if they wanted to join the social movement or protest (Lemert, 1984).

The three mechanisms provide the theoretical linkages between mainstream media use and protest participation. However, research has consistently shown that mainstream media adheres to the "protest paradigm" where coverage tended to be biased and negative, emphasizing violent and sensational elements rather than the underlying issues and grievances underlying such protests (McCurdy, 2012). In a content analysis of the print and online editions of American mainstream newspapers, Hoffman (2006) found no significant difference in the amount of mobilizing information despite the greater interactivity, multimedia elements, and more space afforded to an online medium. One reason put forward by the author was that organizational practices and routines of professional newsrooms as well as the journalistic norms of objectivity and neutrality do not really provide sufficient incentives to disseminate information that can challenge the status quo. Harlow and Johnson (2011) further demonstrated differential coverage of the 2011 protests in Egypt where *The New York Times* generally followed the protest paradigm while alternative media sought to legitimize the actions of the protesters.

The biases mentioned above are also applicable to Hong Kong's media system. Nominally, the Hong Kong media has a large degree of autonomy under China's "one country two systems" principle and therefore is not subject to the mainland's media censorship and restriction of information flows (e.g., banning of Twitter and blocking of Google). Instead, influence is indirect, exemplified by the state's strategy of

coopting owners of media companies with political and economic incentives so as to soften any potential criticism of China (Lee & Chan, 2009). Thus, the current media system in Hong Kong tends to be pro-establishment with only one mainstream tabloid that is supportive of the pro-democracy cause. Of course, this does not mean that pro-establishment media does not report on protests. Rather, they may adopt similar strategies to the Western media to delegitimize protests and their leaders, regardless of whether the information is distributed online. Therefore, Hong Kong citizens who desire information sympathetic to the pro-democracy movement need to turn to alternative media, which will be elaborated next.

## Alternative Media and Collective Action

While there are several approaches to theorizing alternative media in terms of emphasis, scope, and aims (see Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2008), two of its prominent characteristics are encompassed in its broad definition as media "devoted to providing representations of issues and events which oppose those offered in the mainstream media and to advocating social and political reform" (Haas, 2004, p. 115). First, alternative media disseminates "counter information" that represents the voices and views of those who are ignored or misrepresented by the mainstream media (Atton, 2007). Second, it advocates political and social change by actively challenging political institutions (Downing, 1984). Alternative media is therefore often partisan in its ideology and anti-establishment in its views. Content is typically produced by ordinary citizens or amateurs who are not constrained by nor follow the media practices and news routines of mainstream news professionals.

An obvious outcome for these practices is that alternative media will place much more emphasis and importance on mobilizing information relative to the mainstream media. It can be as straightforward as informing participants on protest locations and times, to explicating strategies and rules of conduct, thus serving an educational as well as a mobilizing role for protests. Partisan reporting by the alternative media also involves the production and maintenance of content that is favorable to the protagonists and critical of the antagonists, yet also evokes sympathies from bystanders. This was supported by Boyle and Schmierbach's (2009) study of the use of mainstream and alternative media use in an American city, which found that alternative print and alternative online news predicted protest participation.

Of course, the term *alternative media* is quite broad and can take diverse forms and purposes in different cultural contexts. In Hong Kong, it is characterized by the growth of *Internet social movement media* that has proliferated since the July 1 2003 protest (Leung, Sze, & Yee, 2011). The protest is considered a watershed moment in Hong Kong politics as half a million people from different walks of life took to the streets to protest against the government's decision to enact the National Security Bill, which many feared would diminish individuals' civil liberties and threaten free speech (Sing, 2010). Of the various repercussions, one was the reinvigoration of the pro-democracy movement and the realization that citizens do have the ability to influence government policy and public opinion (Ma, 2005). Another was the rise of online alternative media

that were more critical of the government and provided a discursive space for those interested in and sympathetic toward the pro-democracy movement.

An exemplar is *inmediahk.net*, founded in 2004. Through textual analyses and in-depth interviews with its contributors and editors, Yung and Leung (2014) uncovered five key features of the website: being a source of news that is neglected by the main-stream media, serving as a public sphere by allowing anyone to post and comment on news stories, providing a centralized platform for social activists to express their grievances and provide mobilizing information, setting the news agenda with new stories that are subsequently taken up by the mainstream media, and broadly serving as an "agent of civil society activism." Quantitative analyses by Leung and Lee (2014) provide supportive evidence of the mobilizing potential of alternative media in Hong Kong by demonstrating a positive relationship between its use and protest participation. Given these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H1:** Alternative media news is positively related to protest intention.

## Social Media and Collective Action

Leung and Lee's study also showed that social media news use was related to alterna-tive news use and previous protest participation. This is understandable, given that most online alternative media in Hong Kong are embedded within social network sites such as Facebook, which provide a convenient way to disseminate news stories to those who "Like" the page. Those individuals can then "Share" news stories among their own friends, which may in turn divert more traffic to the alternative media Facebook page, leading to a potentially virtuous circle of increased news dissemina-tion and network expansion. These uses of Facebook resemble what Bennett and Segerberg (2012) call an "organizational agent" as the multitude of "Likes" and the linkages that come from them forms a loose organizational structure that can be har-nessed in subsequent collective actions. This potential is magnified in the Hong Kong context because of a Facebook penetration rate at around 60%, which is even higher for the younger generation. Moreover, Hong Kong's relatively small geographic land mass and highly advanced public transportation system are particularly conducive to the logistics of mass gatherings and protests in public places. Based on the discus-sions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H2:** Social media news use is positively related to alternative media news use.
**H3:** Social media news use is positively related to protest intention.

## Social Psychological Antecedents of Collective Action

While there is some evidence linking alternative media and social media news use with collective action, there is still a lack of work examining the conditions in which use relates to participation. In other words, what are the important mechanisms or motivations that mediate media and protest? Gamson (1992) pointed to

three important components that help legitimize and support the activities of social movements: the feeling that something is morally wrong or unfair (injustice), the belief that collective action is possible and can achieve desirable outcomes (agency), and a clear delineation of the "we" as the in-group who are the aggrieved versus the "them" as the out-group responsible for the state of affairs (identity). At the individual level, social psychologists are more concerned with how the subjective perceptions of identity, agency, and injustice can motivate people to participate in collective action. These can be represented by the concepts of *social identity*, *efficacy*, and *anger*.

*Identity.* According to social identity theory, individuals self-categorize themselves in terms of the social groups they belong, such as race, gender, political party, and activist organization. Such psychological affiliations are essential for maintaining a positive self-esteem, and thus provide the motivations to subjectively evaluate the in-group more positively vis-à-vis the out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Protests can therefore be conceived as a form of intergroup competition where the in-group acts collectively to gain prestige, status, or other benefits (tangible or otherwise) at the expense of the out-group. Self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) further elaborates that those individuals who identify more with the in-group are more likely to internalize the norms, values, and attitudes of the group as their own, and act in accordance with the group's goals and interests. This is supported by over two decades of social identity studies on collective action, which demonstrated that higher levels of *group identification* with the in-group are related to greater likelihood of engagement, in contexts such as labor disputes (Kelly & Kelly, 1994), the gay rights movement (Stürmer & Simon, 2004), and voting in elections (Greene, 2004).

*Efficacy.* Agency is largely represented by studies focusing on *efficacy*, which is premised on resource mobilization approaches that stress individuals' perceptions of the relative costs and benefits of participation (Klandermans, 1984). Those with high levels of "individual efficacy" believe that they have the ability to positively influence the outcome of a situation that they are in, and thus perceive benefits of collective action to outweigh costs. This is contrasted with "group efficacy," which is the belief in the group's ability to influence an outcome. Because it is concerned with achieving group goals, group efficacy is generally a stronger predictor of collective action because such acts lead to group outcomes. More recently, scholars have proposed the concept of "participative efficacy" that links both individual and group efficacy dimensions, such that "one can make a difference through one's own contribution to the collective efforts aimed at achieving group goals" (van Zomeren, Saguy, & Schellhaas, 2012, p. 619). In contrast to the collective action literature, political scientists conceive "political efficacy" in terms of citizens' ability to participate in democratic life and focus on two key dimensions. "Internal efficacy" measures individuals' perceived competence and knowledge about political affairs, while "external efficacy" focuses on perceived government responsiveness to citizen demands (Kenski & Stroud, 2006).
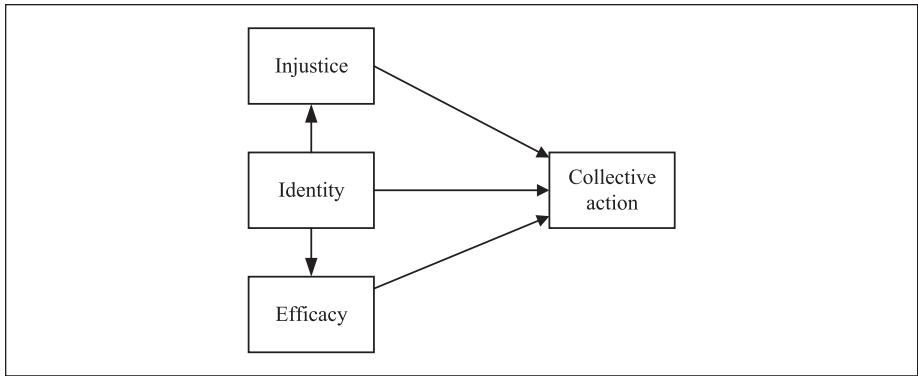
**Figure 1.** The social identity model of collective action.

*Anger.* Studies on injustice explanations emphasize the role of emotions, especially anger, as important functional responses to perceptions that the in-group is perceived to be deprived relative to other groups (Miller, Cronin, Garcia, & Branscombe, 2009). There can be several causes for anger, such as the violation of certain standards or acts that disrupt the achievement of certain goals and objectives, which subsequently activates the "approach motivational system" that seeks to repair the disruption (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009). In the case of perceived injustices, anger can thus be an important driver of protests because they seek to address the disruption. Political psychologists also demonstrated the key role of anger in political engagement. For example, Valentino, Brader, Groenendyk, Gregorowicz, and Hutchings (2011) found that anger with the general social environment predicted higher levels of campaign participation among citizens, while anger toward electoral candidates more specifically also predicted a range of participatory behaviors.

In sum, all three antecedents of collective action described above have empirical support in different literatures, and scholars have attempted to synthesize these different explanations into a parsimonious model of collective action. Based on theoretical syntheses and meta-analyses of past collective action studies, van Zomeren et al. (2008) formulated the SIMCA (see Figure 1). While proposing that social identity has a direct influence on collective action, they argued that the effect is also indirect through injustice and efficacy because high levels of group identification should accentuate feelings of group-based injustice and group-based anger, which can in turn influence protest intention.

Certainly, SIMCA is not the only attempt at an integrative model of collective action. Other motivations have been proposed, such as "moral conviction" (van Zomeren, 2013) and "social embeddedness" (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013).[2] However, for the purposes of the present study, the SIMCA provides an appropriate starting point because the three motivations have well-established empirical support. Indeed, there have already been several studies that have examined the media–motivation nexus and the impact on participation. For example, Chan's (2014a) secondary analyses of 2008 and 2012

American National Election Studies (ANES) data showed that the relationship between online news use and political participation was stronger for those who identified more with their political parties and had higher levels of efficacy. These relationships were expected because partisans are more likely to engage in selective exposure and access online news that is congruent to their existing political views (Stroud, 2008) and social identities (Chan, 2014b), which further strengthens their inclination to participate in activities that help their political party (the "in-group"), so it can defeat the opposing political party (the "out-group"). Increased media use also strengthens efficacy perceptions because it enhances individuals' ability to process information and provides cognitive models for subsequent action and emboldens the individual that they can achieve a successful outcome (Bandura, 2001). Media content can also elicit strong emotion responses, such as anger. For example, video images showing the police physically beating peaceful protesters, or government officials dismissing the claims of the social movement and its leaders, may evoke strong emotions that lead to action.

Thus, while the antecedents of collective action are important predictors of protest, one must also examine the media's role, especially with regard to the alternative media, because its key aims, at least within the Hong Kong political context, are to foster a sense of identity toward the pro-democracy movement, instill a sense among readers that their contributions to the pro-democracy cause can make a difference, and project collective anger toward the government. Therefore, the following research question is raised:

**RQ1:** To what extent are the relationships among online alternative media news, social media news, other media use, and protest mediated by the psychological antecedents of collective action?

## Method

### Sampling

Respondents to the study were obtained through computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) conducted in July 2014 by a university-affiliated research center in Hong Kong. Telephone numbers were randomly selected from a sampling frame derived from the latest residential landline directories. To account for unlisted numbers, the last two digits were randomly replaced by values between 00 and 99. When contact is established, respondents were first screened according to target demographic (aged 18-70). If the household had more than one member, the most recent birthday method was employed to select the target respondent. All interviews were conducted in Cantonese, and a total of 818 interviews were completed. The response rate was 35% following AAPOR RR1 with a margin of error of 3.4%.

### Measures

*News consumption.* Respondents stated the frequency ("0" = *none*, "1" = *1-15 min*, "2" = *16-30 min*, "3" = *31-45 min*, "4" = *46-60 min*, and "5" = *61+ min*) in which they use

the following media to stay informed about political and current events on a typical day: mainstream print newspapers ($M = 1.49$, $SD = 1.64$); online editions of mainstream print newspapers accessed through mobiles, tablets, or desktop PCs ($M = 1.57$, $SD = 1.65$); television ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 1.61$); online television accessed through mobiles, tablets, or desktop PCs ($M = 0.68$, $SD = 1.22$); social media sites such as Facebook ($M = 0.95$, $SD = 1.20$); and alternative media, such as In-media ($M = 0.90$, $SD = 1.34$).[3]

*Movement identity.* Questions of group identification were adapted from previous studies of social movement organizations (Stürmer & Simon, 2004). Respondents answered from "1" = *strongly disagree* to "5" = *strongly agree* to the following two questions: (a) "The pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong broadly represent how I feel and think" and (b) "I identify with the pro-democracy movement." Both were combined into a single scale ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.11$; $r = .73$, $p < .001$).[4]

*Participatory efficacy.* Items from van Zomeren, Saguy, and Schellhaas (2012) were adapted to measure participatory efficacy. This dimension of efficacy was chosen because it encompasses both individual- and group-level efficacies and was designed for collective action contexts. Respondents answered from "1" = *strongly disagree* to "5" = *strongly agree* to the following two questions: (a) "I have the ability to contribute to a collective action that influences the government" and (b) "I have the ability to contribute to a collective action that influences society." Both were combined into a single scale ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.16$, $r = .83$, $p < .001$).

*Anger.* Items on general emotional states from Valentino et al. (2011) were adapted to measure anger. Respondents answered from "1" = *strongly disagree* to "5" = *strongly agree* to the statement: "I am angry about the political direction the government is taking" ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.20$).

*Protest intention.* Respondents answered from "1" = *very unlikely* to "5" = *very likely* to the statement: "I will participate in a public rally for democracy in Hong Kong within the next 12 months" ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.50$).

*Controls and demographics.* Respondents answered from "1" = *very uninterested* to "5" = *very interested* on the level of interest on political and current affairs ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.01$). In terms of demographics, collected information included gender (male = 48.3%), age ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.41$, 4 = 40-49 years old), education ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.87$, 5 = senior high school), and household income per month ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 2.66$, 4 = HK\$30,000-39,999, equivalent to US\$3,800-US\$5,100). Age and gender were weighted to be more in line with latest government census data.

## Results

Pearson's correlations were conducted for the main variables, and the results are summarized in Table 1. In general, the psychological antecedents have stronger correlations

**Table 1.** Correlations of Key Variables.

|    |              | 1       | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      | 6      | 7      | 8      | 9      |
|----|--------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1  | Newspaper    |         |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
| 2  | Online news  | −.06    |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
| 3  | TV           | .29***  | .02    |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
| 4  | Online TV    | .08*    | .40*** | .12*** |        |        |        |        |        |        |
| 5  | Social media | −.12*** | .40*** | −.09*  | .20*** |        |        |        |        |        |
| 6  | Alternative  | .06     | .52*** | .08*   | .45*** | .36*** |        |        |        |        |
| 7  | Identity     | .02     | .17*** | −.03   | .11**  | .22*** | .22*** |        |        |        |
| 8  | Anger        | .05     | .19*** | −.03   | .09*   | .20*** | .22*** | .30*** |        |        |
| 9  | Efficacy     | −.03    | .24*** | −.01   | .11**  | .35*** | .19*** | .32*** | .17*** |        |
| 10 | Protest      | .02     | .21*** | −.04   | .10**  | .30*** | .23*** | .50*** | .36*** | .35*** |

*Note.* All betas are standardized coefficients.
*$p$ < .05. **$p$ < .01. ***$p$ < .001.

with protest intention ($r$ = .35-.50) compared with the media variables, of which online mainstream newspaper, online mainstream television, social media, and alternative news had significant relationships ($r$ = .10-.30). The same four media variables were also related to the psychological antecedents of identity, anger, and efficacy ($r$ = .11-.35). The results showed that online editions of mainstream newspapers and television news do have positive influence on participation. Looking more specifically at alternative news, results showed that it was positively related to social media news ($r$ = .36, $p$ < .001) and protest intention ($r$ = .23, $p$ < .001), supporting H1 and H2. Social media news use also predicted protest intention ($r$ = .30, $p$ < .001), supporting H3.

## Model Testing

Given the above relationships, the next step was to answer RQ1 by examining the data against the SIMCA and media variables through SEM. To prepare the data, a partial correlation matrix was created by correlating all study variables while holding constant the effects of demographics (gender, age, education, income) and political interest. The subsequent matrix was then entered into the EQS 6 program (Bentler, 2004) using maximum-likelihood estimation. Paths were specified a priori in accordance with the SIMCA (Figure 1), together with (a) paths from all six media variables linking to each antecedent as well as with each other and (b) direct paths from the media variables to protest intention. The "full model" demonstrated excellent fit, $\chi^2(1)$ = .96, $p$ = .33; comparative fit index (CFI) = 1.00; Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 1.00; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .001; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .01, based on recommended cutoff criteria of .95 or more for CFI and TLI; and scores below .06 and .08, respectively, for RMSEA and SRMR to determine good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). To simplify the model, paths that were not significant were removed, and a "revised model" was run and summarized in Figure 2. Results still indicated excellent fit, $\chi^2(7)$ = 12.50, $p$ = .09; CFI = 1.00; TLI = .98; RMSEA = .03; SRMR = .01. All three antecedents predicted collective action and,
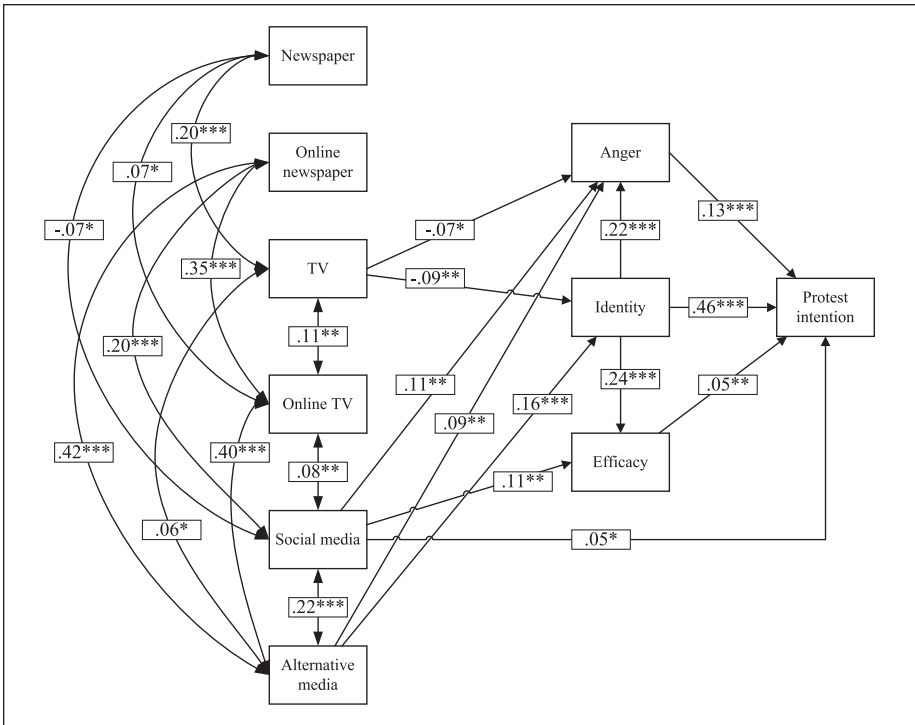
**Figure 2.** Final model integrating media use variables and the SIMCA.
*Note.* SIMCA = social identity model of collective action.

consistent with the SIMCA, social identity exhibited direct and indirect effects on collective action. A closer examination of the media variables showed significant effects of alternative media on identity ($\beta = .16$, $p < .001$) and anger ($\beta = .09$, $p < .01$) and social media on anger ($\beta = .11$, $p < .01$) and efficacy ($\beta = .11$, $p < .01$). Moreover, both alternative media ($\beta = .13$, $p < .001$) and social media ($\beta = .07$, $p < .05$) exhibited significant indirect effects on participation. Interestingly, mainstream television exhibited negative effects on anger ($\beta = -.07$, $p < .05$) and identity ($\beta = -.09$, $p < .01$) as well as an indirect effect on participation ($\beta = -.07$, $p < .01$). Of all media variables, only social media news exhibited a direct, though weak, effect on protest intention.

## Discussion

This study addressed two gaps in the literature: examining the roles of alternative media and social media in collective action, and specifying the conditions in which the relationships would occur. The SIMCA provided an empirically tested and parsimonious framework to examine the relationships in the context of Hong Kong and its pro-democracy movement in a media system that is generally pro-establishment. Overall,

the results of the study provide evidence that alternative media in Hong Kong, with its emphasis on reporting issues of democracy and social injustice, has a role to play in influencing protest intention. While correlational analyses suggest a direct relationship, SEM analyses provide a more nuanced picture, showing that alternative media influences protest indirectly through identity and anger. By emphasizing inequalities in Hong Kong society, such as the lack of genuine democracy, the massive wealth gap, and other social issues, feelings of anger and identification with the pro-democracy movement can be engendered through its news reporting and opinion articles.

The significant results of social media news could be due to two factors. First, it is primarily used by the younger cohorts who are generally more likely to participate in protests.[5] Second is the overlap between social media news and alternative media news because alternative media rely heavily on social media to disseminate content, given their lack of financial resources to do any promotion. As Leung and Lee (2014) note, while alternative media has a readymade audience from pro-democracy supporters, activists, and those critical toward the government, it can also draw traffic from social media news among those users who do not have strong attitudes toward politics. For example, the *In-Media* web page features Facebook "Like" buttons in very conspicuous positions next to each headline compared with more subtle Facebook integration in the online editions of mainstream newspapers. Thus, those readers with strong political orientations can "Like" the news articles and have the content appear on their Facebook walls for their friends to see. The indirect effects through anger could be due to shared news content that is critical of the government, such as highlighting policies or lack of action that engender economic and social inequality. In terms of efficacy, social media news is more conducive to disseminating mobilizing information that provides opportunities for individuals to participate in protests as calls to action can be disseminated more quickly through what Bennett and Segerberg (2012) call "connective action," a form of collective action characterized by the sharing of personalized content across networks. For example, dissemination of collective action frames from alternative media can cascade exponentially through Facebook as users receive and share the information among their own connected friends. They may also add their own commentary and endorsements, and in doing so increase the authority, urgency, and veracity of the news. Future studies need to further examine the alternative/social media relationship, so as to have a better understanding of their mutual dynamics and possible complementary effects on protest and its psychological antecedents.

Interestingly, television news exhibited negative effects on anger and identity. One possible reason is that television adheres more to what Iyengar (1991) calls "episodic news frames" and focuses on the dramatic and disruptive nature of protests rather than the underlying issues behind them. Thus, rather than identify more with the protesters, it is possible that frequent viewers may end up identifying *less* with what they may perceive to be antagonists and troublemakers. More specific to Hong Kong, television news is also heavily dominated by one free broadcaster (TVB), which has been aggressive in cultivating greater ties with Chinese businesses and entering the vast mainland media market. Thus, economic interests may exert pressure on news editors to engage in self-censorship when reporting on negative aspects of China (Lee & Chan, 2009).

While no other media exhibited effects on the psychological antecedents of protest nor participation willingness, they nevertheless exhibited positive correlations with media that do. For example, online mainstream newspaper use has moderate-sized correlations with alternative media news ($r = .52$, $p < .001$) and social media news ($r = .40$, $p < .001$), both of which were actually higher than the relationship between alternative media news and social media news ($r = .36$, $p < .001$). This can be explained by individuals' constructing "news repertoires" of *online* news consumption on politics and current affairs (Taneja, Webster, & Malthouse, 2012). That is, individuals do not necessarily confine their news exposure to one media channel, but through a variety of channels that share certain structural and technological characteristics. For example, through the Internet, a user can easily shift back and forth between online alternative and mainstream online news. To gain a deeper understanding of how other news media influence social media news, however, requires future studies to delineate its various sources, that is, whether the news comes from a Facebook "Friend," alternative media, or online version of traditional media.

In all, the findings of this study suggest that for the Hong Kong context, alternative media and social media such as Facebook are important purveyors of information that can engender the psychological antecedents of participation, which may in turn motivate individuals toward actual participation. Challenges remain, however. First, readership of alternative media is low relative to other media despite high Internet penetration and literacy (Leung & Lee, 2014). Thus, pro-democracy organizations and activists who want to leverage its power need to consider appropriate strategies to increase and sustain readership. The second challenge is economic sustainability. *House News* is a case in point. The news portal aspired to be Hong Kong's *The Huffington Post* and was launched in July 2012 to coincide with student protests against the government's plan to introduce a Moral and National Education curriculum in secondary schools. Ultimately, the protest was successful and forced the government into a humiliating U-turn. The news site eventually accumulated more than 200,000 "Likes" on its Facebook page and more than 300,000 unique visitors per month, but was eventually shut down by its founder in July 2014, citing political pressure and the inability to attract advertising revenue. Despite the site's potential to attract a relatively young and educated demographic, corporations and businesses were not going to risk the political and economic consequences of associating with media that openly challenges the status quo.

## Limitations and Further Research

Several limitations of this study and suggestions for further research need to be addressed. First, this is strictly an individual-level analysis of the mobilizing potential of participants in a collective action and does not address other levels of analyses, such as macro-level opportunity structures. Such an endeavor would require interdisciplinary collaboration, given that certain fields are better placed to study different aspects of social movements at different stages. For example, a more ambitious study can examine the congruence of collective action frames disseminated by the alternative

media before, during, and after a protest, with individuals' subjective perceptions of such frames during the span.

The cross-sectional design also means that assumptions of causality cannot be taken for granted. While the causal effects of identity, efficacy, and anger on collective action have been well established by numerous experimental studies (van Zomeren et al., 2008), the role of the media within the SIMCA still requires further investigation. It is also important to note that the SIMCA employed in this study was a basic one that measured one dimension of identity, efficacy, and emotion. Concurrent efforts are under way in the collective action literature to incorporate more motivations and develop more complex integrated models. For example, van Zomeren (2013) argued that violations of moral standards can be a very powerful motivation underpinning identity, efficacy, and anger because moral convictions represent the very core of an individual's beliefs. van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2013) emphasize the importance of "social embeddedness," operationalized as memberships in civil society organizations. Drawing from the concept of social capital, they point out that such organizations provide a variety of resources to facilitate collective actions, such as network connections, trusting interpersonal relationships, and shared systems of meaning. Different compositions of social embeddedness may also give rise to other motivations. For example, it has long been noted that individuals in more homophilous networks are subject to more social pressure to conform to group norms (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001).

In the Hong Kong context, both motivations can certainly be influenced by media. For example, videos uploaded to alternative media sites showing police brutality against protesters can violate the moral convictions of pro-democracy sympathizers, which can in turn lead to social identification with the victims and greater feelings of anger. For social embeddedness, the ability to "Like" and hence follow the updates of social activists and organizations through Facebook provides protesters with trusted sources of information.

It should also be noted that the framework in this study only examined the media role. While information consumption is an obvious avenue toward stimulating feelings and beliefs toward the psychological antecedents of collective action, another important set of variables that can be considered in future models is interpersonal communication. Recent theoretical frameworks of political campaign communication place a strong emphasis on political discussion as a mediator of media use and political attitudes, such as political efficacy, because it engenders a variety of "reasoning" processes that involve greater cognitive reflection, consideration, and understanding of the media content (Shah et al., 2007). These processes could in turn amplify or weaken political attitudes and subsequent political participation. Based on a similar logic, interpersonal discussions can feasibly serve as a link between media use and psychological antecedents of protest.

Methodologically, it should be noted that protest intention was measured with a single item. For greater validity, future studies should consider incorporating more diverse measures, such as those adopted in the Asian Barometer (2015) Survey, which include a range of "moderate" and "extreme" actions such as signing petitions and using violence for a cause. In the case of Hong Kong, public rallies are considered

moderate actions because they are generally legal gatherings sanctioned by the government. However, extreme actions like blocking roads are a direct challenge to the rule of law and entail a much greater risk for participants. In such cases, media and antecedent variables may operate differently. Collective action studies in general should also make efforts to address the consistency and reliability of psychological antecedent measurement, such as the case of anger, which has both an environmental dimension (e.g., toward society in general) and a personal dimension (e.g., toward a person). Measurement of news exposure can also be improved beyond the use of single-item exposure measures used in this study. For example, Eveland, Hutchens, and Shen (2009) recommend combining media exposure items with attention items, so as to capture both time spent *and* cognitive resources used on a single news media channel.

Finally, it is important to note that the characteristics and mobilizing potential of any alternative media, social media, and social movement vary according to the political, social, and technological development and dynamics of a given culture. In the post-colonial context of Hong Kong, the development and evolution of online alternative media are closely aligned to the pro-democracy movement. Moreover, it is a media-rich city with relatively high degree of freedom of expression that gives such media and citizens an open platform to question and challenge the status quo. So caution is needed to generalize the present findings to other societies. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, this study does provide an initial picture and integrative framework to understand the mutual dynamics of media use and protest participation, and the role of identity, anger, and efficacy in mediating the relationship.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

## Funding

## Notes

1. For conceptual clarification, the term *collective action* here is defined in accordance with the social-psychological literature as "a specific case of intergroup behavior that is strategic in its intent to improve the position of the in-group" (Wright, 2009, p. 861). Protest is a form of collective action because it is enacted on behalf of the in-group (e.g., fellow protesters) to put pressure on or influence the out-group (e.g., the government, a corporate entity, or other perceived antagonists).
2. van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2013) also present a different motivational model to SIMCA, such that efficacy, not identity, has a path to anger.
3. There were more media types in the original survey design, such as radio and paid TV, but were finally not included due to space and time limits of a computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) survey.

4.   It is important to emphasize that there is no single social movement organization representing the "pro-democracy movement" in Hong Kong. Rather, it is composed of diverse interest groups and individuals from different strata of society, which typically converge on an "event basis," such as a pro-democracy rally. Therefore, it is more appropriately considered an "opinion-based" group (see Musgrove & McGarty, 2008) rather than a group based on political or union membership, or psychological attachment to a specific institution or organization.

5.   Correlation between age and social media news use was $r = -.50, p \leq .001$, and that between age and protest was $r = -.23, p < .001$.

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