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Issue-based micromobilization on social media: Mediated pathways linking issue involvement and self-network opinion congruity to expressive support

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ABSTRACT

Research has provided compelling evidence on the influence of issue involvement to mobilize individuals for collective action, but none has examined the social psychological factors linking issue involvement to such outcomes or how the process affects issue-based mobilization attempts by ideologically opposing groups on social media. To fill these gaps, the current study evaluated a mediated pathway model testing the influence of personal issue involvement via individual-group identification, perceived self-network issue opinion congruity, and perceived participative efficacy on expressive support for and against the LGBTQ issue on Facebook. Strong explanation for expressive support outcomes (commenting, 'liking,' 'sharing') between both groups, 90.1% (supporters of LGBTQ) and 74.9% (non-supporters of LGBTQ), was retrieved. Group identification is a robust mediator of issue involvement, predicting expressive support irrespective of users' attitude toward the issue. Perceived participative efficacy is the strongest predictor of support expression, but, like perceived self-network opinion congruity, vary between users with different issue attitudes and involvement. Findings suggest an intricate social media-based micromobilization process that needs to consider issue-group positions and counter-group dynamics.

1. Introduction

Social networking sites (SNSs) provide "the most common entrance to activism" among youths (Harlow, 2011, p. 229). Deemed "the catalyst that set events [waves of social protests] in motion" (Bakardjieva, 2015, p. 983), such platforms are heralded as the major force in social change and protests in today's networked society (Castells, 2013). A key enabler of such possibilities is SNSs' interactive sociotechnical configuration that enables effective coordination of collective outcomes between organizations and individual actors (Shin & Hwang, 2017). Little is, however, known about how such features can lead to the 'activation' of, otherwise, uninitiated individuals to engage in collective action on social media.

Specifically, little is understood about how *call-to-action* messages received directly on social media can mobilize users to express their support for an issue-based movement. The potential of such invitational messages to incite users into making 'on-the-click' decisions to express support through low risk, negligible cost, and easy-to-do collective activities (van Laer & van Aelst, 2010), such as 'liking,' commenting, and sharing the message received as well as cause-related information, is understudied and warrants attention. This need heightens when we consider the potential of such seemingly minor but personalized, expressive actions to reproduce *cycles of contention* (de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014), to generate critical bases for evolved forms of *cloud contention* (Milan, 2015), and to amalgamate to large scale protests in the hyperlinked, sociotechnical configuration of social media (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

Moreover, studies have tended to investigate individual expression of support in social media for groups that represent singular ideological positions on a specific issue (for review, see for e.g., Ward, 2016). In reality, users can encounter call-to-action messages by ideological groups as well as counter-groups with different standpoints on the same issue. Conservative groups would solicit support against homosexuality and abortion, for instance, while liberal groups would invoke support to fight for human's 'right to love' and 'freedom to choose.' To our review of extant research, no single study had compared the propensity of call-to-action messages between groups representing opposing issue positions to marshal expressive support on social media, and how this relates to different users who, themselves, hold varied attitudes and levels of involvement on the issue. This gap in research, plus the proliferation of single-issue protests on social media (Jørgensen, 2017), provides the impetus to investigate issue-based micromobilization processes by

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comparing the propensity of two ideologically opposing groups to solicit expressive support from social media users with different standpoints.

For this aim, the present study draws on social identity perspectives in collective action (Hunt & Benford, 2004; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008) to examine individuals' likelihood to express support when *collective vehicles* in the form of opportunity and mobilizing structures (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996, p. 3) and *social vehicles* in the form of individual-group identification (Hunt & Benford, 2004) are present on social media. In so doing, the study interrogates the premise of social identity theory that posits groups as extensions of one's self-concept and self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to evaluate whether users' reflexive deliberation on whether or not to support group-based campaigns on social media blurs between identity-based and social network factors. Specifically, the current study will test the pathways explaining how – given the opportunity to support issue-driven campaigns (i.e., mobilizing stimulus via call-to-action message from ideological groups) – individual predisposition (personal issue involvement) mediated by identity-driven and perceptual-based factors (individual-group identification, perceived self-network issue opinion congruity, perceived participative efficacy) can determine likelihood to express support (commenting, 'liking,' and 'sharing' of message and cause-related information) between users with different issue attitudes.

2. Literature review

2.1. Personal issue involvement and likelihood to express support

Individuals possess greater issue involvement when the issue, or cause, poses some levels of importance and "personal meaning" to themselves (Sherif, Kelly, Rodgers, Sarup, & Tittler, 1973, p. 311). Similar to issue importance, such inclinations can be more indicative of supportive behavioral intention than demographics (e.g., age, gender) (Boyle et al., 2006). This psychological proximity to issues differs from other involvement concepts that explain how the cognitive processes by which users experience the quality of technological experiences (i.e., control, presence, flow) shape engagement in, as well as with technologies (Shin, 2018). Individuals who personally deem an issue to be important see it necessary to 'spread the message' to others in his or her online networks and 'do something about it' (Roser-Renouf, Maibach, Leiserowitz, & Zhao, 2014). As such, issue involvement is shown to determine supportive actions "with individuals typically speaking on behalf of groups whose cause they share" (Boyle et al., 2006, p. 271) across a broad range of issues, including sexual discrimination (Gearhart & Zhang, 2014) and affirmative action (Moy, Domke, & Stamm, 2001). Issue involvement, thus, constitutes the *mobilization potential* that sets the individual thrust upon which a success of a campaign or movement depends on (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987); making it a crucial first step in the micromobilization process.

Issue involvement thus shapes user engagement on social media. When it comes to collective action, greater psychological proximity towards the social issue (e.g., children's welfare in Africa) was shown to motivate Facebook users to support social media campaigns aimed at addressing the issue (Lee, Hon, & Won, 2018). Users are more likely to use SNSs to collectively engage in news (i.e., sharing, commenting) when they perceive the movements reported in the news as personally important to them (Su, Liu, & McLeod, 2019). Accordingly, a micromobilization experiment by Nekmat and associates (2015) found that issue involvement directly motivated greater willingness to express support for a group's cause on Facebook (e.g., "liking" and "sharing" message, commenting) when invited by one's networks (i.e., friends, colleagues, family) – echoing other studies evincing how one's participation in social movements being largely due to one's ideological alignment to specific issues and causes (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Ward, 2016).

While literature has provided clear evidence on the influence of issue involvement on collective action participation, the process in which this issue predisposition affects one's motivation to publicly express support on social media is less clear and straightforward. From a cognitive elaboration perspective (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), one's involvement in the issue (i.e., issue importance and relevance) leads to more thoughtful evaluation of message characteristics (i.e., argument strength) before being persuaded. In this vein, Nekmat, Gower, Zhou, and Metzger (2019) showed how being asked to contribute to a social campaign on Facebook increases message-related thoughts (e.g., information recall, linking of personal experiences) and, consequently, greater willingness to express support for a group campaign on the platform (i.e., "liking," commenting). However, messages on social media tend to be short and lack informational heft for users to carefully scrutinize. In these instances, we postulate that personal issue involvement will indirectly lead to supportive actions via social-psychological factors – specifically users' perceived issue opinion congruity with their social networks, identification with the group soliciting support, and perceived participative efficacy – upon receiving a call-to-action message on social media.

2.2. Perceived self-network issue opinion congruity and likelihood to express support

To express one's personal stance on social issues in social media entails the evaluation of the dominant opinion so as to avoid being socially ostracized by one's networks for expressing dissenting views (Gearhart & Zhang, 2014). As such, and akin to the echo chambering process in SNSs, users who are highly involved in specific issues are known to prune ideologically dissimilar connections from their social networks (Bessi, 2016) – reinforcing the perception of opinion climate congruity made up of networks with similar psychological profiles and issue attitudes. For instance, John and Dvir-Gvirsman (2015) showed that, during the Israel-Gaza conflict in 2014, Jewish Israeli Facebook users who were more personally concerned about the conflict were more likely to unfriend their Facebook friends whom they disagreed with. Therefore, it is likely that users will perceive the opinion climate arising from their SNS networks to be consistent with their attitudes when they are personally involved with the issue.

As a *foresight mechanism*, the aggregated opinion of one's networks will help define the social agenda and social significance of acting on issues affecting others in society (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013) – especially when used as a heuristic to evaluate the public opinion surrounding social issues. Perceived network opinion, thus, triggers collective action participation by signaling how actions in support of a particular cause are valued by the people included in one's social networks (Nekmat, Gower, Gonzenbach, & Flanagin, 2015). Users' perception of whether their social networks think that they should use SNSs to participate in internet social movements, for instance, can be a strong predictor of expressive participation (i.e., commenting, sharing videos and photos) – more so than facilitating conditions (e.g., self-efficacy, prior knowledge) and effort expectancies (Borrero, Yousafzai, Javed, & Page, 2014). Moreover, such public expressions of support create *participation identities*, which, when perceived by others to be "highly congruent with existing identity," show others that "I am just like you" (Viterna, 2013, p. 51). As Ward (2016) argues, "only when (one's) pre-existing salient identities are compatible with participation identities will this then lead to individual's likelihood of becoming mobilized" (p. 861). In short, as a self-reflexive process, thinking that the people in one's online social networks feel the same way on a particular issue provides the normative function that drives participation in activism (Shamir & Shamir, 2000) and is a key motivator for civic engagement (e.g., Oh, Eom, & Rao, 2015).

On the other hand, perceiving a discernably incongruent public opinion on the issue impedes mobilization for collective action (Varughese & Ostrom, 2001) and suppresses political expression (Mutz, 2002). Matthes (2012) surmises that such demobilizing effect is

triggered by *social-accountability* as one refrains from publicly expressing support for a cause that deviates from the perceived majority's opinion in order "to maintain social harmony" (p. 25). This effect becomes more salient on social media due to *context collapse* where users experience social anxiety in order to "express themselves in ways believed to be non-offensive to the broadest group of acquaintances" in their social networks (Marder, 2018; Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 122). Accordingly, perceived self-network opinion incongruity thus predicts user's reluctance to engage in civic and political expressions on SNSs on a range of social and political issues, including surveillance and privacy (Stoycheff, 2016), migrant population (Pang et al., 2016), and gay bullying (Gearhart & Zhang, 2014). It is thus posited that:

H1. Issue involvement is positively related to perceived self-network opinion congruity.

H2. Perceived self-network opinion congruity on the issue is positively related to users' likelihood to express support in social media.

2.3. Individual-group identification and likelihood to express support

When presented with a call-to-action message, being highly involved with the issue would lead one to seek more information and consider his or her connections with the group soliciting support. From a dual-pathway social-identification viewpoint, upon receiving a group call to act, individuals first appraise the *collective disadvantage* faced by the group to "be(come) [sic] self-relevant" and the group identity to "be (come) [sic] relevant" in order to cope with the emotions associated with the cause (van Zomeren, Leach, & Spears, 2012, p. 185). Information that elicits group reference enhances group identification that "enjoin [others] to act together in a way that is socially potent" for the issue at hand (Klein, Spears, & Reicher, 2007, p. 8). Being personally concerned with a specific issue thus leads to greater emphases on the collective benefits derived from supporting the group fighting for the issue (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987) and fosters stronger individual-group identification (Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

According to the social identity model of collective action (SIMCA) (van Zomeren et al., 2008), group identification is key in explaining mobilization. Individuals who identify with a group's goals were more likely to view disadvantages facing the group collectively (collective identification) and feel stronger emotions toward injustices faced by the group (collective anger) (Shi, Hao, Saeri, & Cui, 2015; van Zomeren et al., 2012). In line with self-categorization and social identity theories (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), identifying oneself as a collective entity with a group that represents similar values establishes *in-groups* and produces individual actions to benefit the group (Yilmaz & Peña, 2014). On the basis of forming a collective identity, individuals 'activate their identification with groups so as to give sense of their "being together" with the groups and to the goals they produce' (Melucci, 1995, p. 43). A sense of collective self-esteem derived by individuals from the group's successes motivate individual actions to promote, protect, and benefit the group (van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004).

Individual-group identification, therefore, consistently predicts collective action participation across a range of issues, including environmental policies (Thomas, Mavor, & McGarty, 2012), ethnic discrimination (Cakal, Hewstone, Schwär, & Heath, 2011), and governmental protests (Chan, 2016; Shi et al., 2015). Accordingly, on social media, individuals display a common fight for shared goals (Chan, 2016) and engage in expressive support for causes advocated by in-groups – even when they do not necessarily feel better about themselves for engaging in low-threshold, non-consequential 'slacktivist' forms of collective activities (e.g., signing e-petitions, "Liking" Facebook pages) (Schumann & Klein, 2015). Hence:

H3. Issue involvement is positively related to individual-group identification.

H4. Individual-group identification is positively related to users' likelihood to express support in social media.

2.4. Perceived participative efficacy and likelihood to express support

Being personally involved in an issue would also trigger a greater awareness of the efficaciousness of individual as well as group actions, such as whether one's contribution is significant enough to help the group achieve its goals (van Zomeren, Saguy, & Schellhaas, 2013) and resolve the common problems faced (Drury & Reicher, 2005). In responding to call-for-action messages, highly involved users evaluate how capable they are in enacting social change on the issue before deciding to engage in public actions over the Internet (i.e., sign petitions, demonstrations, sharing political messages) (Vraga, Anderson, Kotcher, & Maibach, 2015), especially when participation can be socially costly (Matthes, 2012).

Perceived efficacy, the belief "in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3), can, thus, be a crucial factor behind effective mobilization of social media users and is shown to predict online civic engagement and political participation (de Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011; Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2017). That said, for someone to feel self-competent "to support a cause advocated by an activist group, does not necessarily mean that the person will support the group" (Boyle et al., 2006, p. 277). Instead, collective action studies have shown perceived collective efficacy – the belief in a group's capability as a whole to achieve a desired goal – can be a more consistent predictor of individual intentions to act collectively online (Drury & Reicher, 2005; Thomas et al., 2012; van Zomeren et al., 2004); even in spite of being a member of multiple activist groups at the same time (Besta, Jurek, Iwanowska, & Szóstakowski, 2019).

If we were to consider both efficacy aspects together, *perceived participative efficacy* – the belief that one's own contribution can make a difference to the collective effort of the group as a whole (van Zomeren et al., 2013) – differs from one's perceived ability to carry out specific actions and is more precise in predicting collective behaviors over perceived self and collective efficacy when considered separately (Mazzoni, van Zomeren, & Cicognani, 2015). Evaluating the influence of participative efficacy in an experiment, Wilkins, Livingstone, and Levine (2019) demonstrated that not only does perceived participative efficacy heighten individual support for social campaigns on social media (i.e., to end domestic violence against migrant women), it facilitates "greater beliefs about the benefits of one's own participation" and "promote generalized engagement in activism" (pp. 103, 104). Based on the discussion, it is posited that:

H5. Issue involvement is positively related to perceived participative efficacy.

H6. Perceived participative efficacy is positively related to users' likelihood to express support in social media.

2.5. Issue and mobilization context

In order to compare the propensity of two opposing ideological groups to solicit support on social media from an issue-based perspective, a discussion on the social context is warranted. The current study examines the potential of groups to micromobilize support within the context of the homosexuality issue in Singapore. Characteristic of a morally contentious topic, debates on homosexuality and sexual minority rights elicit polarized ideological stances and different expressive behaviors among Singapore citizens, as are similarly displayed in other non-Asian countries such as the United States of America (Detenber, Cenite, Zhou, Malik, & Neo, 2014). Wojcieszak's (2011) study in Poland reveals the significance of the issue in mobilizing polarized individuals as it "involves prejudice, civil rights, and intergroup stereotyping" (p.

339). When it comes to supportive expressions on the issue, Detenber and associates (2014) found that proponents of homosexuality tend to utilize human rights-based arguments (e.g., equality) while non-supporters would invoke symbolic and religious-based arguments (e.g., family values, religiosity). Having a legislation that criminalizes same-sex marriages and sex between consenting male adults in Singapore (Section 377a of the Penal Code) further suppresses public expressions in support of homosexuality. Moreover, collective organizing around the issue is controlled in Singapore. For instance, public demonstrations, such as the annual "Pink Dot" event where gay rights supporters publicly express their stand on the issue are required by the law to be registered with authorities beforehand (Chua, 2012).

Against the conservative status-quo, SNSs have become the choice platform for public expressions on homosexuality issues in Singapore (Ng, 2017). Proponents for LGBTQ create Facebook groups to debate and share their views on the issue (Detenber et al., 2014). Expectedly, the growing presence of such groups in social media met with backlash from non-supporters, resulting in counter-groups such as "We are against Pinkdot in Singapore" and counter-movements such as the "Wear White" campaign to garner public support and mobilize opposition against the "Pink Dot" movement for LGBTQ rights in the country (Ng, 2017). This context provides a highly relevant dual-perspective on the same morally-charged issue by groups of differing ideologically-based identities that are supportive or non-supportive of homosexuality issue. By the same token, Singapore's conservative socio-political context would help reveal differences in issue-driven micromobilization pathways explaining expressive support for two ideologically opposed groups on social media – plausibly with individuals being more likely and finding it more efficacious to show support for the group that aligns with their issue attitudes as well as the status-quo of the issue in society. The following questions are thus asked to further examine whether:

RQ1-3: The relationship between personal issue involvement and expressive support – mediated by perceived self-network opinion congruity **(RQ1)**, individual-group identification **(RQ2)**, and perceived participative efficacy **(RQ3)** – would differ between individuals who are supportive and non-supportive of the issue?

3. Method

An online survey questionnaire was administered to collect data. Respondents were recruited from a general population sample in Singapore administered by an independent survey consultant, JNSQ Research Singapore.[1] Only those with personal social media account that included Facebook were invited to participate in the study. A total of 684 respondents completed the survey with an 82.7% response and 91.4% completion rates recorded. Overall, participants aged between 18 and 48 years (M = 27.1, SD = 6.18), mostly possessed a senior high school diploma equivalent or higher (n = 360, 52.7%), and comprised 369 (54.0%) females and 315 males (46.0%). Most participants (89.8%) reported using Facebook at least once per day, (n = 614, M = 4.19, SD = 0.72) (1 = never, 2 = once a week or less, 3 = a few days a week, 4 = about once a day, 5 = several times a day). No participants reported not using Facebook at all. On average, participants rated having about 401–600 "friends" on Facebook (M = 3.01, SD = 1.50) (on the scale: 0 = 0, 1 = 1–200, 2 = 201–400, 3 = 401–600, …, 16 = more than 3000).

[1] Je Ne Sais Quoi (JNSQ) Research is a business registered with the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority (ACRA) of Singapore under Business Registration Number (BRN) 53225933E. JNSQ adheres to the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR) International Code on Market and Social Research, and is fully compliant with Singapore's Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) and Europe's General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

3.1. Procedure

A mock call-to-action message by a fictional group, "One United People," on the issue of homosexuality (i.e., homosexuality topics being introduced to national schools' syllabus) was created as the scenario. The issue stimulus was selected based on the notion that collective identity is 'politicized' to spur mobilization (Simon & Klandermans, 2001) in activities that have public and policy orientations (Bakardjieva, 2015). To simulate a call-to-action message, two stimuli were created to represent the group being either supportive or non-supportive of the issue, and inviting respondents to show support by either promoting or challenging the policy issue on Facebook. The messages in the two opposing groups were identical except for words that depict direct opposition (e.g., "we [support v. against]), as described below.

> "Plans are being discussed to include the topic of homosexuality in primary and secondary schools' education syllabus. One United People are [supporting / against] this and are voicing our [recommendations for / concerns against] it. Please support the campaign by One United People to [encourage / prevent] the introduction of homosexuality topics in schools!"

A two-step procedure was carried out to assign respondents to the group that is congruent with their attitudes toward the issue. First, a pre-test survey collected respondents' attitudes toward homosexuality and LGBTQ (see personal issue attitude measurement in following section). Overall, 361 respondents held positive attitudes toward homosexuality ($M \geq 4.01$), and 276 were non-positive ($M \leq 3.99$). Second, respondents were assigned to one of the two opposing conditions that matched their attitudes toward homosexuality with the group's stand on the issue. Those who held neutral positions (M = 4.0) were not assigned to any conditions and excluded from analysis. Respondents who were supportive of homosexuality were exposed to stimulus with the group soliciting support to promote the issue, and those who were non-supportive exposed to the group opposing it. Manipulation check asking participants on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all, 7 = totally) "how much do you agree with the call for supporting/not supporting the inclusion of homosexuality topics in schools?" was done to check whether respondents in the different conditions had perceived congruity with the group they were exposed to. No significant differences in individual-group issue congruity levels were found between the two groups, $t(635) = 0.87$, $p = .54$.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Personal issue involvement

Also referred to as one's predisposition toward a certain cause or issue (Boyle et al., 2006), this variable indicates the degree to which one feels a specific issue is salient and important to his or her life (Kim, 2009; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Combining measures from prior studies to the current study's issue context (e.g., Bishop, 1990; Krosnick & Schuman, 1988), respondents indicated on 7-point semantic-differential scales on four statements "In your life, you personally find issues related to homosexuality to be – relevant/irrelevant (II1), important/unimportant (II2), valuable/worthless (II3), and significant/insignificant (II4)."

3.2.2. Individual-group identification

This is the extent to which individuals perceive overlaps between their personal values and goals with the group's (van Zomeren et al., 2008). Adopting the diagrammatic scale of self-other psychological closeness (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), respondents rated how much they feel that their "values (A) overlap with that of the group, One United People (B)" on the diagram as shown in Fig. 1.

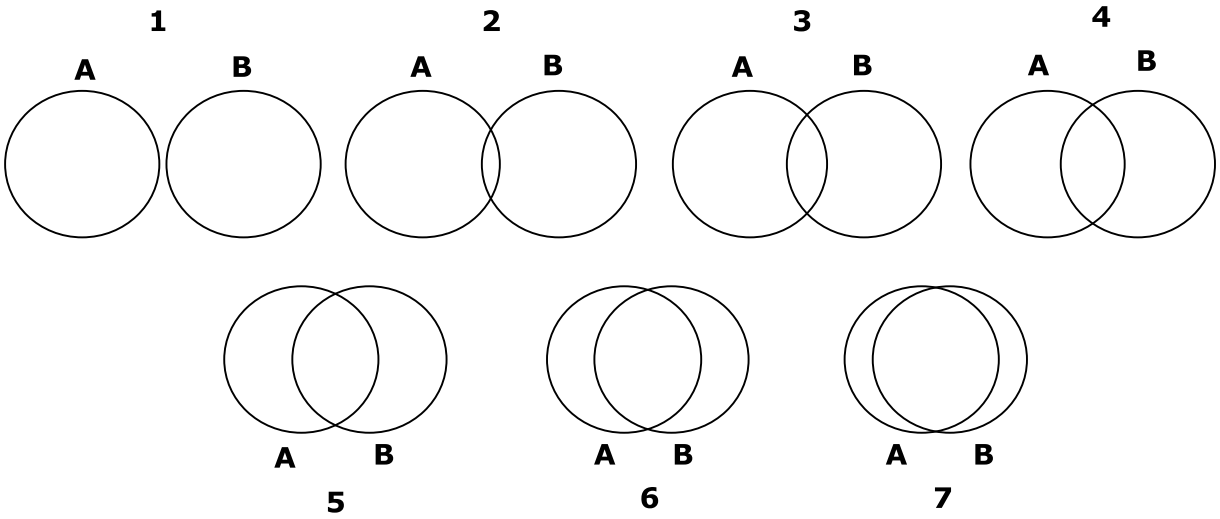


Fig. 1. Measurement for inclusion of other in self-scale for individual-group identification. *Note.* As participants identified with the group more, there would be greater overlap of their values (A) and values of the group, One United People (B), in the diagram.

3.2.3. Perceived participative efficacy

This refers to the belief that one's own actions will make a difference to the collective effort of the group toward achieving a common goal (van Zomeren et al., 2013). Adapting measures from van Zomeren and colleagues (2013), participants rated on a 7-point Likert-scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) to statements, "I believe that I can – contribute effectively to the group, One United People, to achieve the goal" (PE1), "work together meaningfully with the group to achieve the goal" (PE2), "significantly add on to the group's work to achieve the goal" (PE3), and "aid the group in important ways to achieve the goal" (PE4).

3.2.4. Self-network issue opinion congruity

This variable is operationalized as the deviation between one's *personal issue attitude* and one's perception of what the majority of people in his or her social media (Facebook) feel about the issue. Attitudinal measurements from the modern homonegativity scale (MHS) (Morrison & Morrison, 2003) were adapted to measure participants' agreement, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree, for six issue attitudinal statements – "homosexuality is acceptable" (OC1), "laws regulating homosexuality should be loosened" (OC2), "there is nothing wrong with people showing homosexual behaviors" (OC3), "homosexuality is merely a different kind of lifestyle" (OC4), "I am open to having homosexuals as friends" (OC5), and "people should accept homosexuals as part of society" (OC6) ($\alpha = 0.93$, $M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.89$). Respondents then rated the same statements with "I think majority of people in my Facebook feel that …" to indicate the perceived majority opinion of the people in their Facebook network about the issue ($\alpha = 0.90$, $M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.68$). Absolute values of differences between the two measurements indicated perceived self-network opinion congruity (e.g., Petrič & Pinter, 2012), ranging between 0 = perfect congruence and 6 = greatest incongruence.

3.2.5. Expressive support

This refers to publicly expressive activities that can be done on social media to show one's support for a shared cause. Such personalized, public expressions facilitate the crossing of the 'private-public boundary' necessary for collective action participation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Adapting prior measures of expressive participation on SNS (e.g., Borrero et al., 2014; Nekmat et al., 2015), respondents rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = very unlikely to 7 = very likely, their likelihood to – post comments in support of the campaign in social media (Facebook) (EX1), "Like" the campaign message received in support of the campaign in social media (Facebook) (EX2), and "Share" message related to the campaign (EX3) in support of the campaign in social media (Facebook).

4. Analysis and results

A two-step multigroup structural equation modelling with maximum likelihood estimation was done with lavaan package in R to compare pathway variances between two groups. Confirmatory factor analysis revealed a consistent model factor structure across both groups, χ^2 (252) = 284.87, $p = .08$, RMSEA = 0.03, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99, SRMR = 0.04. Test for measurement invariance was then done. As results supported metric invariance and scalar invariance, ΔCFI < 0.01, *p's* > 0.581, (see Table 1 for fit indices and Fig. 2 for factor loadings), *t*-test analyses were carried out to compare the latent variables between the groups. The two groups significantly differed on self-network opinion congruity, $t(371) = 20.28$, $p < .001$, (supporters: $M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.44$; non-supporters: $M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.43$). All other between group variable comparisons were non-significant (*p's* ≥ 0.10). The descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alphas, and correlations in the final measurement model are provided in Table 2.

A second step analysis via multigroup structural equation modelling (bias-corrected) showed that the overall model fitted the data well, χ^2 (278) = 307.34, $p = .11$, RMSEA = 0.02, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99, SRMR = 0.05, and accounted for 90.1% (group: supporters of LGBTQ) and 74.9% (group: non-supporters of LGBTQ) of variances in likelihood to participate in expressive support. Table 3 shows the indirect effects retrieved at 95% confidence interval, and Fig. 2 shows the pathway

Table 1
Goodness of fit indices for measurement invariance.

Model	*Df*	χ^2	$\Delta\chi^2$	*p*	CFI	ΔCFI ΔCFI
1	252	284.87			.990	
2	265	295.98	11.11	.601	.991	.001.001
3	278	307.34	11.35	.581	.991	< .001 < .001

Note. Model 1 refers to the configural model with same factor structure for both groups. Model 2 refers to the metric (partial) invariance model with factor loadings constrained to be equal for both groups. Model 3 refers to the scalar (strong) invariance model with the intercepts of the latent variables constrained as equal between both groups. A non-significant, $p > .05$, chi-square difference test and $\Delta CFI < 0.01$ were used as indicators to test measurement invariance (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002).

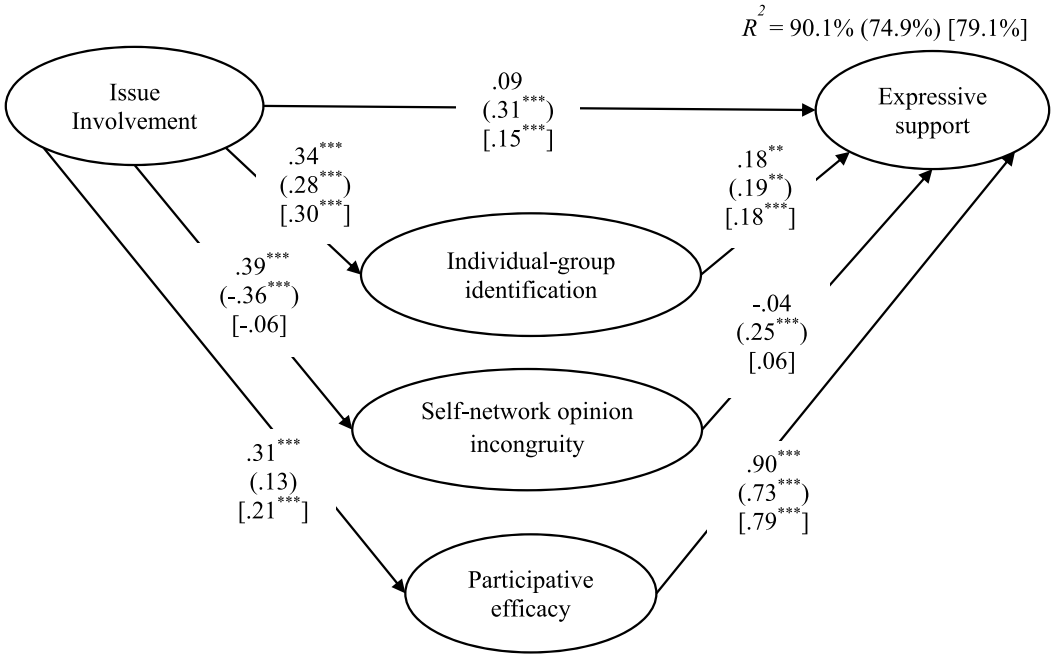


Fig. 2. Standardized pathway coefficient results. Factor loadings of observed to latent variable: II1 = 1.0, II2 = 0.95(0.04), II3 = 0.92(0.04), II4 = 0.96(0.04); PE1 = 1.0, PE2 = 0.88(0.07), PE3 = 0.92(0.06), PE4 = 0.87(0.06); OC1 = 1.0, OC2 = 0.68(0.03), OC3 = 0.71(0.03), OC4 = 0.74(0.04), OC5 = 0.76(0.04), OC6 = 0.92(0.04); EX1 = 1.0, EX2 = 0.82(0.05), EX3 = 0.82(0.05). *Note*. Results of group with non-supportive issue attitudes in parentheses. Results of group with supportive and non-supportive issue attitudes in square brackets. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

coefficients for the measurement model between the groups.

Personal issue involvement was positively related to self-network opinion incongruity for supporters (β = 0.39, $p < .001$) and negatively related for non-supporters of homosexuality (β = −0.36, $p < .001$). **Hypothesis 1** was, thus, only supported for respondents who were non-supportive of homosexuality. Similarly, perceived self-network issue opinion incongruity (instead of congruity as hypothesized) was significantly related to likelihood to express support for those holding non-supportive issue attitudes (β = 0.25, $p < .001$), but not for those holding supportive attitudes (β = −0.04, $p = .48$). **Hypothesis 2** was, thus, not supported for both groups, with respondents who held non-supportive issue attitudes being more likely to express support in incongruent self-network opinion climate conditions than those holding supportive attitudes. Personal issue involvement was positively related to individual-group identification for both groups (supporters: β = 0.34, $p < .001$; non-supporters: β = 0.28, $p < .001$), with group identification positively related to likelihood to express support (supporters: β = .18, $p < .01$; non-supporters: β = 0.19, $p < .01$). **Hypotheses 3 and 4** were, thus, supported. Personal issue involvement was positively related to perceived participative efficacy for those with supportive attitudes toward homosexuality (β = 0.31, $p < .001$), but not significant for non-supporters (β = 0.13, $p = .11$). Perceived participative efficacy was, as predicted, positively related to likelihood to express support from respondents in both groups (supporters: β = 0.90, $p < .001$; non-supporters: β = 0.73, $p < .001$). Thus, results showed support for H5 only for those who held positive attitudes toward issue, and support for H6 in both groups. The results also indicate differences in the mediated micromobilization pathways between individuals who are supportive and non-supportive of the issue via perceived self-network issue opinion congruity (**RQ1**) and perceived participative efficacy (**RQ3**), but not via individual-group identification (**RQ2**).

Table 3
Indirect effects of issue involvement on expressive action.

Indirect Pathways	Non-Supporters		Supporters		Combined	
	β_{ind}	95% CI	β_{ind}	95% CI	β_{ind}	95% CI
II → GI → EX	.05	[.01, .09]	.06	[.03, .10]	.06	[.03, 09]
II → PE→ EX	.09	[-.04, .22]	.27	[.11, .43]	.17	[.06, .27]
II → OC → EX	-.10	[-.15, −.03]	-.02	[-.07, .03]	-.00	[-.03, .00]

Note. β_{ind} refers to standardized indirect effect of the mediated pathway. 95% confidence intervals (CI) was estimated through 8000 bootstrapped samples. II = Issue Involvement, GI = Group Identification, PE = Participative Efficacy, OC = Self-network Opinion Congruity, EX = Expressive support.

5. Discussion

By investigating the micromobilization process from an issue-based perspective, the current study has provided a more detailed account of

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and correlations between latent variables.

Latent Variables	*M* (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	α
1. Issue involvement	2.93 (0.89)						.93
2. Individual-group identification	4.94 (0.96)	.30***					–
3. Perceived participative efficacy	2.83 (0.49)	.21***	.08				.83
4. Self-network opinion incongruity	3.94 (0.66)	-.06	.07	.07			.93
5. Expressive support	3.88 (0.72)	.38***	.31***	.84***	.12**		.82

Note. Cronbach's alpha coefficients in rightmost column.
$^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

the social-psychological factors affecting users' response to express support for collective action on social media. Findings bolster that of prior studies' evincing the salience of personal issue involvement on collective action participation across a range of issues (see for e.g., Boyle et al., 2006; Gearhart & Zhang, 2014; Moy et al., 2001). More significantly, the study provides strong confirmatory evidence of the mediated pathways (90.1% and 74.9%) explaining the influence of issue involvement on expressive support (i.e., commenting, 'liking,' 'sharing' of cause-related message and information) via individual-group identification, perceived self-network issue opinion congruity, and perceived participative efficacy on social media.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

The finding that group identification is a robust mediator of issue involvement and expressive support expands current understanding of how the "personal dimension of networked individualism" plays out in activating collective action participation on social media (Priante, Ehrenhard, Van den Broek, & Need, 2018, p. 15). Irrespective of one's personal attitude toward the issue (supportive or non-supportive), being more involved in the issue leads to greater identification with the group that is fighting for the cause in ways congruent to one's position and, subsequently, predicts expression of support for the group (van Zomeren et al., 2008). While this finding echoes prior evidence on the strength of group identity (e.g., Hunt & Benford, 2004; van Zomeren et al., 2008), it highlights a more intricate self-reflexive process that links individual predispositions (i.e., issue attitudes and involvement) to individual-group identification in activating user collective action participation on social media.

The current study also offers empirical evidence to advance the theorization of SNS-based collective action research that lacks "analytically distinct steps explaining micromobilization" on social media (for a review, see Ward, 2016, p. 855). Notably, we now know that when it comes to soliciting support on social media, the influence of personal issue involvement is consistent across different individual issue positions – those supportive of the issue (i.e., more liberal) and those non-supportive of the issue (i.e., more conservative) – but differs in how perceived participative efficacy and perceived self-network issue opinion congruity affects users' likelihood to show support for groups expressing different ideological stances. These differences offer deeper theoretical implications to the issue-based micromobilization process on social media, especially when interpreted based on the socio-political context in which the call-to-action occurs.

As earlier discussed, the study was conducted in the context of a conservative status-quo on issues related to homosexuality and LGBTQ. This context helps explain why, despite being a strong predictor of expressive support as similarly found in prior studies (Mazzoni et al., 2015; van Zomeren et al., 2013; Wilkins et al., 2019), perceived participative efficacy mediates the influence of personal issue involvement only among users with supportive attitudes toward the issue. Plausibly, believing that one's action is more meaningful to the collective success of the group challenging the status-quo is more instrumental in driving supportive expressions than for groups that intend to preserve it on social media. That said, future studies should examine whether societal pressures from one's offline networks who are embedded in the status-quo (e.g., friends, family, colleagues) would impede the translation of such expressive support on social media to real-life settings (i.e., demonstrations, rallies).

The conservative context might also explain why highly involved users who were non-supportive of LGBTQ were found to perceive greater opinion congruity with their networks in social media (see for e.g., echo chambering in Bessi, 2016), and why perceiving opinion incongruity with one's SNS networks impedes expressive support among users who were non-supportive of the issue (i.e., conservatives) but not for those who were supportive. Theoretically speaking, the former group of users are said to demonstrate a greater tendency to cross the *private-public boundary* for collective action and express support for ideologically-consonant groups on social media despite facing a perceivably oppositional opinion climate on the platform – plausibly with the confidence of projecting a *participation identity* that more closely represents the *moral majority* of the people in society (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013; Ward, 2016). In other words, when it comes to expressing support for a particular cause, showing others on social media that "I am just like you" (Viterna, 2013, p. 51) might not be as important as showing them that "I represent the views of the majority of people in society."

5.2. Practical implications

The study's findings reflect the need for group mobilization efforts on social media to carefully consider the role of issue publics and the socio-political context. Groups aimed at challenging the status-quo would do best to forge a sense of participative efficacy among social media users. One suggestion would be to communicate *collective successes* by accentuating individual actions into a *patchwork of actions* that, when taken together, curates a strong collective identity and signals collective achievement (Milan, 2015). Examples include how new social movements spawned off social media, such as '#MeToo' and '#BlackLivesMatter' in the U.S., leverage on individual accomplishments of networked actions (i.e., sharing of personal experiences) for specific issues (e.g., workplace harassment) to fight for broader, universal ideals (e.g., human rights, racial and gender equality).

On the other hand, findings suggest that groups looking to mobilize supporters for campaigns aimed at preserving the status-quo in society would thrive when users perceive the climate of opinion from their social media networks to diverge from general societal issue positions. As such, we can expect counter-movements against conservative groups on social media to gain better traction in relatively more open societies, and vice-versa when it comes to liberal groups soliciting support on social media in conservative social contexts. Such scenarios suggest the growth of counter-movements and counter-groups on social media, such as #BlueLivesMatter and #AllLivesMatter in response to the #BlackLivesMatter movement that began in the U.S. This extrapolation based on current findings warrants a greater understanding on the counter-dynamics and counter-narratives between opposing groups to polarize issue opinions and activate new supporters.

In conclusion, the current study has shown that issues-based micromobilization process in social media is explained by an intricate self-reflexive deliberation involving individual issue predispositions (issue attitudes and involvement), individual-group identities, and social network characteristics. Findings suggest that differences in the process hinges on the status-quo of the issue in society, proffering an agenda for future research to more closely examine counter-group and counter-movement dynamics in social media across different socio-political contexts.

5.3. Limitations and future research

Findings were based on rational, self-reflexive pathways taken by individuals to engage in expressive forms of support on social media. Future studies should consider the role of emotions in this process, such as how perceived injustices toward a particular group can trigger "action-oriented emotions" (Ward, 2016, p. 862) or how group attachment heightens group-based anger activate individual participation (van Stekelenburg, Klandermans, & Van Dijk, 2011; van Zomeren et al., 2008). It would also be worthwhile for future studies to consider the influence of issue knowledge levels on the perceived importance of the issue to users and, consequently, their likelihood to express support for campaigns related to the issue on social media. Also, the ease to which users can participate in such expressive forms of collective action in social media can be interpreted as forms of *slacktivism* or *clicktivism*, and quite rightly so. Readers should, therefore, note the limitation of the

study's model in explaining individual participation in collective action in general – considering the wide repertoire of collective activities available, both online and offline (see for e.g., Lee & Chan, 2016; van Laer & van Aelst, 2010). Future studies could consider examining how participation in such low threshold, yet personalized and expressive activities done on social media can translate to effective forms of collective action engagement.

This study had examined expressive forms of participation in a particular open-group social media platform (Facebook), and individual involvement in an LGBTQ/homosexuality related issue in a relatively conservative socio-political context (Singapore). Even though the issue-type is significant due to its contentious, debatable, and politicized nature deemed essential to spur activism and collective action (Simon & Klandermans, 2001), future studies could examine mobilization based on more mainstream, less politically-charged, morally-laden issues with public and policy orientations, such as those related to health and environment. Apart from the tenability of the pathway model to also predict expressive forms of collective action participation in other social media platforms (e.g., retweeting and tagging on Twitter), future work should also investigate micromobilization via more closed-group SNS platforms. This can include examining the potential of expressive actions and information sharing in individual-group messenger applications such as WhatsApp and WeChat to mobilize individuals for higher-threshold, time-sensitive collective action participation in frontline activism and actions.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.07.008.

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