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# Motivations underlying Latino Americans' group-based social media engagement

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## Abstract

Guided by the Social Identity Model of Collective Action, the current research utilizes a three-wave longitudinal study collected pre and post the 2020 U.S. Presidential election to examine the motivations underlying Latino Americans' group-based social media engagement ($N = 1,050$). Results revealed that Time 1 group (Latino) identity increased Time 2 perceptions of social media as efficacious in improving group outcomes, which in turn increased Time 3 group-based social media engagement. Although T1 Latino identification was not significantly associated with T2 perceptions of personal or group-based injustice, the former (but not the latter) increased T3 group-based social media engagement. Our findings reflect that marginalized group members engage with social media in part because they believe it is efficacious in improving their disadvantageous group status. This may be an especially attractive strategy for those who face individual experiences of unjust treatment.

**Keywords:** social media engagement, social identity, collective action, discrimination, Latino

Social media has emerged as a formidable instrument through which individuals from marginalized communities can enact collective action in opposition to the social and political injustices facing their group. Indeed, grassroots mobilization efforts such as Voto Latino and social movements such as Black Lives Matter and #StandWithStandingRock reflect how social media efforts aimed at educating and raising awareness about injustices against minorities in the United States can motivate on and offline collective actions leading to societal changes.

There are considerable variations in the conceptualization of these actions as different scholars have referred to them as collective expression, group-based social media engagement, social media political expression, online activism, and online and digital collective action (e.g., Begeny et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2022; Velasquez et al., 2019; You & Hon, 2019). In the current research, we use the term "group-based social media engagement" to refer to actions performed on social media sites in order to satisfy and serve group needs and motivations including enhancement and defense. Although these types of online actions are distinct from offline and traditional conceptualizations of collective action (Theocharis et al., 2021), they are often correlated with and at times known to directly influence offline collective action efforts (e.g., Chen, 2020; Halpern et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2022; Kwak et al., 2018; Nekmat et al., 2015).

Despite the prevalence of such actions in our contemporary environment (Auxier, 2020), quantitative research studying the antecedents of group-based social media engagement tends to focus on individual-level motivations (cf. Velasquez & Montgomery, 2020). When group-level antecedants are considered, they typically center on political identities rather than other social group memberships (Brady & Bavel, 2021; Yu et al., 2021). Accordingly, the extent to which minorities' group-based social media engagement is motivated by psychological processes tied to their social identities is inadequately understood (Lane et al., 2022a). Applying insights from the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA; van Zomeren et al., 2008a), the current study examines this relationship using a three-wave longitudinal survey of Latino Americans collected pre and post the 2020 U.S. Presidential election.

In doing so, this research addresses important theoretical and methodological gaps in our current understanding of why minoritized populations in the United States engage with social media. First, we apply a group-related focus to examine the extent to which minorities' social media engagement may be related to their group identification, perceptions of injustice, and efficacy beliefs. Extrapolating SIMCA predictions to online actions, we examine the different ways in which injustice experienced directly (e.g., I have personally been discriminated against) versus indirectly (e.g., my group is discriminated against) could motivate minorities to engage with social media. We further distinguish the mediating role of two types of efficacies (collective efficacy and social media efficacy) in explaining the link between social identity and group-based social media engagement. Although collective efficacy beliefs are known to motivate collective action in offline contexts, the potential for such beliefs to influence online action is less known. In the present study, we juxtapose perceptions of efficacy relating to the in-group (i.e., collective efficacy) and the tool itself (i.e., social media) to better understand minorities' motivations for group-based social media engagement. Finally, from a methodological perspective, the use of a three-wave longitudinal design relative to single correlational designs utilized in past work provides stronger evidence for: (a) the directionality of the proposed relations, (b) testing mediating mechanisms, and (c) the long-

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term influence of group-based processes on minorities' social media engagement.

## Group-based social media engagement among Latino Americans

In light of the intensification of anti-Latino sentiments displayed across news and politics (e.g., Dixon & Williams, 2015; Lopez et al., 2021), Latinos are increasingly using social media to take action in support of their group (Auxier, 2020). Social media provides an environment through which Latinos and other traditionally marginalized groups can affirm the value of their group, contest inequality and oppression, and organize collective action efforts. Indeed, although only 29% of White social media users indicate that they have sought information about protests and rallies on social media, 46% of Latinos report having done so (Auxier, 2020). Moreover, Latino social media users indicate that these platforms are integral for serving and enhancing their group needs; with over one-third using these platforms to post images in support of causes they endorse and to encourage others to take collective action (Auxier, 2020). These patterns suggest that social media may be seen, by a nontrivial proportion of Latino social media users, as a viable space for upending discriminatory and unjust sociopolitical practices and policies which disenfranchise their in-group. Research reveals that Latinos use online environments to circumvent offline marginalization, enhance social capital, build resources, and improve quality of life (e.g., Gonzales, 2017).

This is not to suggest, however, that the online environment is a context free of the marginalization, misrepresentation, and aggression that exists offline. Certainly, hate speech, harassment, trolling, and threats of real-world violence can and do proliferate online. Further, Latinos have been aggressively targeted on social media with misinformation and disinformation during election cycles (e.g., Cortina & Rottinghaus, 2022). Nonetheless, social media is significant in its ability to provide important connections, information, support, and group solidarity (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Chan, 2016). As Velasquez and Montgomery (2020, p. 1) contend, "social media affords the user with visibility and association through which users can coalesce around common experiences and/or shared identities . . . [and] facilitates the construction of collective strategies and actions through the expression of views and sharing of information on issues of significance to members of marginalized groups."

Of course, conceptualizing Latinos at this broad level disregards the diversity of ethnic groups that comprise this population. Nevertheless, Latinos across different nationalities and ethnicities may be bonded by particular cultural traditions or expressions as well as by the challenges associated with a marginalized group status in the United States (Barreto, 2010). Given the potential for social media-based actions to raise awareness about, challenge, and even help rectify the unjust treatment faced by minority groups, understanding the factors that motivate group-based social media engagement is critical. Theorizing rooted in the SIMCA offers insights into the mechanisms likely underlying this relationship.

## Social Identity Model of Collective Action

Collective action can best be understood as behaviors performed by an individual when acting "as a representative of the group and where the action is directed at improving the conditions of the group as a whole" (Wright, 2009, p. 860). Of significance in this definition is the emphasis on strategic behaviors intended to better the position of the in-group rather than advance one's personal interests. This suggests that group identity rather than personal identity is the salient context. Importantly, collective action is not necessarily a function of the number of participants acting together in time or in proximity, but can also occur when an individual acts alone for the betterment of the relevant in-group (Wright, 2009), as is the case in online environments. SIMCA specifically outlines the psychological mechanisms motivating collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2008a, 2012). This framework identifies three primary predictors of collective action: group identity, group injustice, and collective efficacy beliefs.

### Group identity

SIMCA borrows from the tenants of social identity theory in conceptualizing group identity as the degree to which a group is important to a person, including the cognitive and affective ties to the group as well as motivation to act in support of the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; van Zomeren et al., 2008b). Within SIMCA, social identification is theorized to play a prominent role in bridging, or facilitating, appraisals of injustice and efficacy. Empirical tests of the model reveal that group identity is instrumental in social mobilization efforts, both in terms of directly motivating collective action and also indirectly by increasing perceptions of injustice and efficacy (van Zomeren et al., 2008a).

For racial and ethnic minorities in particular, group identification is an especially strong predictor of collective action given the politicization of their group identities. Indeed, groups that are involved in a struggle for power and equitable treatment within the broader sociopolitical milieu are continuously involved in efforts to produce a more inclusive and advantageous social environment for the in-group (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). These efforts transform individual identities into politicized identities, which connect people to the structural plight of the disadvantaged group, resulting in an "inner obligation" to participate in collective actions (Stürmer & Simon, 2004, p. 86). For Latino Americans, these efforts can be seen in the context of restrictive state and federal policies tied to immigration, English-only laws, proof of citizenship legislation, as well as discriminatory trends observed in hiring patterns, housing opportunities, treatment in the healthcare system, and beyond (e.g., Contreras, 2020; Corchado, 2020; Nevarez, 2016; Paz, 2022; Varela, 2022).

### Group injustice

Injustice is conceptualized in this model as biased or discriminatory treatment toward the group, ranging from moral violations to lack of opportunity to systematic exploitation (Thomas et al., 2011; van Zomeren et al., 2008a, 2012). Importantly, SIMCA considers injustice representing both the subjective experience of felt injustice (perception of discrimination) as well as its affective expression (anger felt due to injustice). Indeed, both types of injustice measures are known to predict collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2008a). What is less clear is whether the experience of bias at the group versus the individual level takes precedence in prompting perceptions of group injustice, or if neither have primacy. On the one hand, perceptions of injustice might be especially salient when

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individuals experience discrimination personally. On the other hand, research suggests that minoritized group members tend to: (a) report higher levels of group, relative to personal, discrimination (also known as personal/group discrepancy: Taylor et al., 1990) and (b) minimize their personal experience with discrimination (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997). This minimization of personal experiences of discrimination relative to the experiences of the in-group could suppress motivations for collective action, as the discriminatory treatment may not be attributed to the marginalized identity or perceived as unjust in the first place. This would suggest that perceptions of group-based discrimination, relative to personally experienced discrimination, may be more likely to motivate collective action.

### Collective efficacy

Based on the general principle of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), collective efficacy refers to a sense of control, influence, strength, and effectiveness to change a group-related problem (van Zomeren et al., 2008a). These beliefs reflect a sense of collective power and strength, motivating individuals to see their group members as capable of addressing unjust treatment and improving their status in society (Drury & Reicher, 2005). In a longitudinal study, for instance, Muslim Americans who experienced social identity threats via media stereotypes at Time 1 perceived greater collective efficacy at Time 2 and in turn reported higher online and offline collective actions at Time 3 (Saleem et al., 2021). Because group efficacy beliefs mobilize individuals for the direct purpose of changing their group's circumstances, this is considered to be a problem-focused response (i.e., a cognitive mechanism) to dealing with collective disadvantage (van Zomeren et al., 2012).

## Applying SIMCA to examine minorities' group-based social media engagement

Although traditional theoretical frameworks of collective action have focused on in-person actions, the use of digital, and specifically, social media-based, actions to address unjust treatment, particularly among minoritized groups has become increasingly relevant in the last decade. The potential for social media to create coalescence around common experiences and/or shared identities (Ellison & Vitak, 2015) and connect people with similar others across social networks (Spears & Postmes, 2015) makes it as an especially attractive tool in addressing collective disadvantage and improving group outcomes.

### Past research

Much of the existing research examining minorities' group-based social media engagement is situated within critical approaches using qualitative methodologies (e.g., Fox & Warber, 2015; Jackson et al., 2020). This work suggests that social media offers marginalized groups: (a) empowerment through a shared identity that motivates collective action, (b) the ability to promote counternarratives contesting dominant narratives, and (c) a coping outlet for voicing outrage related to experiences of injustice (Freelon et al., 2016; Leach & Allen, 2017). Although not explicitly based on SIMCA, many of these assumptions correspond with the aforementioned theoretical antecedents identified by SIMCA (i.e., group identification, injustice, collective efficacy, and using social media to improve group outcomes).

Quantitative work empirically examining these relationships in the context of minorities' social media engagement is limited. The few studies that do exist tend to support SIMCA-based predictors. For example, in two cross-sectional correlational surveys, (Velasquez et al. 2019; Velasquez and Montgomery 2020) found positive associations between Latino Americans' social media expression and (a) in-group identification, as well as (b) perceptions of group discrimination. Similarly, Lane et al. (2022b) found a positive association between individual experiences of discrimination and minorities' political expression on social media sites. Finally, Lee et al. (2022) found that Asian Americans' perceptions of injustice and personal efficacy were positively associated with online pro-Asian activism, which in turn influenced offline pro-Asian activism. Notwithstanding the contributions of these studies, their correlational nature limits our understanding of the directionality of these effects as well as the underlying psychological mechanisms that may explain these relationships.

### Additional considerations

Given that SIMCA-based antecedents are largely supported by studies of offline rather than online actions, it is valuable to consider additional constructs that may be more relevant to understanding the latter. Indeed, there are ongoing concerns about the extent to which theoretical models of traditional collective action can explain online actions aimed at improving group outcomes (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Accordingly, the current research unpacks different types of efficacies and injustices that may be more relevant to online, relative to offline, collective actions. For instance, the extent to which collective efficacy is relevant to some online actions requires further deliberation. Offline collective actions such as participating in demonstrations or protests require organization and coordination with other in-group members, necessitating a shared belief that in-group members can work together. Online actions to improve group outcomes, however, may be more varied and independently administered without much coordination or planning with other in-group members. Sharing a social media post highlighting racial injustice in one's community, for example, is an action an individual in-group member can take without necessarily relying on other in-group members to do the same. Unlike individual actions administered offline, online actions, especially via social media, have the potential for far-reaching influence due to the affordances of social media sites (Carr, 2018; Ellison & Vitak, 2015).

Of course, individuals are only likely to perform these actions if they perceive them as efficacious[1] in improving group outcomes. Consistent with the general notion of efficacy (Bandura, 1997), if individuals perceive that their social media actions will not improve or change group outcomes then they are unlikely to engage with social media for this purpose. Although not specific to minoritized groups, research has found that political expression on social media sites was associated with perceptions that social media use is impactful for politics (Kwak et al., 2018). Germane to the present research, public opinion surveys reveal that racial/ethnic minorities, relative to Whites, are more likely to agree that social media is an effective way to enact social and political change in American society (Auxier, 2020). Thus, we propose that an important mechanism underlying minorities' group-

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based social media engagement is the extent to which they perceive their social media actions to be efficacious in improving group outcomes. In this research, we juxtapose beliefs related to social media efficacy and collective efficacy in examining the relationship between social identity and Latinos' group-based social media engagement.

Distinguishing different types of injustices is also useful when considering online group-based actions. Given that individuals can independently perform many actions online without necessarily knowing other group members' subjective experiences of injustice and/or intentions/motivations to address group-based injustice (e.g., counter-arguing against a false news story), online, relative to offline, actions may be a more adaptive coping strategy to address personal experiences of unjust treatment. Even though minorities may tend to disregard individual experiences of discrimination and not attribute them to systemic injustices (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997), digital affordances and features related to visibility, likes, and shares/retweets can enhance social support and affirmation from fellow in-group members in social media sites (Miller et al., 2021). These features may reduce the likelihood that individual experiences of discrimination are disregarded and/or not attributed to systemic injustices, especially when other members in the network share similar experiences.

## The present study

If social identity plays a pivotal role in motivating collective action efforts as articulated by SIMCA (van Zomeren et al., 2008a), then Latinos' politicized identities may encourage a shared sense of solidarity with the group and motivate social change. In this environment, social media is a powerful tool for traditionally marginalized groups, like Latinos, to oppose the discriminatory practices reinforced by structurally privileged groups and systems. However, the literature has yet to examine if and how group-level processes tied to perceptions of injustice, and different aspects of group and social media efficacy affect minorities' group-based social media engagement. Accordingly, in the present research we empirically test a series of predictions based on the theoretical assumptions rooted in SIMCA, specified in Figure 1.

We examine these relationships in the context of the 2020 U.S. presidential election, as election cycles are a particularly meaningful environment in which to explore digital actions, for several reasons. First, use of social media for political information continues to rise across all demographic groups (Walker & Matsa, 2021). Second, politicians at all levels are utilizing social media at relatively high levels in campaign efforts (e.g., Bimber, 2014). Third, group identities are especially salient during the election season given the increasingly politicized nature of many identities (Mason, 2018). Last, Latinos are aggressively and selectively targeted in political ads and messages on social media, by many political candidates (e.g., Searle & Abrajano, 2019).

## Method

### Participants

Latino Americans were recruited through a Qualtrics panel ($N = 1183$). Only participants who indicated that they use social media across all three time points were included in the main analyses. Of the 940 remaining participants, 568 self-identified as females and 370 as males, 1 as other, and 1 was missing data, $M_{age} = 47.98$, $SD = 15.34$. In terms of ethnic groups, the majority of participants identified as Mexican ($N = 409$, 43.56%) and Puerto Rican ($N = 239$, 25.45%), which are the two largest Latino American ethnic groups in the United States (Office of Minority Health, 2019). The remaining participants identified as Colombian ($N = 84$, 8.95%), Cuban ($N = 80$, 8.52%), Dominican ($N = 33$, 3.51%), Honduran ($N = 26$, 2.77%), Salvadoran ($N = 15$, 1.60%), Guatemalan ($N = 13$, 1.38%), Bolivian ($N = 9$, 0.96%), and other ($N = 31$, 3.29%). With respect to immigration status, the majority self-identified as second generation ($N = 353$, 37.55%), followed by first generation ($N = 223$, 23.72%), third generation ($N = 119$, 12.66%), fourth generation ($N = 115$, 12.23%), and fifth generation ($N = 130$, 13.83%). The average income category was \$60,000–\$79,999 on a scale that ranged from 1 (*Under \$19,999*) to 9 (*\$160,000 or higher*). When asked to think about their political views on a scale from 1 (*Extremely liberal*) to 7 (*Extremely conservative*), the average score was $M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.55$.

### Timeline

The data discussed in this research are part of a larger longitudinal survey on Latina/o American voters, involving multiple waves pre and post the 2020 presidential election. Data from the three time points addressed in the current research were collected in October (Time 1), November (Time 2), and December (Time 3) of 2020. We refer to these survey assessments as T1, T2, and T3, respectively. All measures were assessed at all time points. There was moderate attrition on the final outcome between T1 and T3 (45%).

### Materials

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics and correlations among key measures. A detailed list of all items is included in Appendix A in the supplementary material. Cronbach's alphas for the variables depicted in Figure 1 are included below. Unless otherwise stated, all responses were rated on a 1—*strongly disagree* to 5—*strongly agree* scale.

#### Latino identification

Three items (adapted from Ellemers et al., 1999) assessed the strength of Latino identification. These items were: "I identify with other Latinos."; "I feel strong ties with fellow Latinos."; and "I see myself as Latino." (T1: $M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.95$, $\alpha = 0.90$).

#### Individual experiences of discrimination

Participants rated their agreement with three items (adapted from Saleem et al., 2019). These items were: "I have personally been discriminated against because of my ethnicity."; "I have personally been bullied or harassed because of my ethnicity"; and "I have personally been stereotyped because of my ethnicity." (T2 $M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.30$, $\alpha = 0.91$).

#### Perceptions of group discrimination

Participants reported their agreement with three statements (adapted from Schmitt et al., 2002). These items were: "Latinos are often discriminated against in the United States."; "Latinos are looked down on in the United States"; and "Latinos are treated unfairly in the United States." (T2: $M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.13$, $\alpha = 0.90$).

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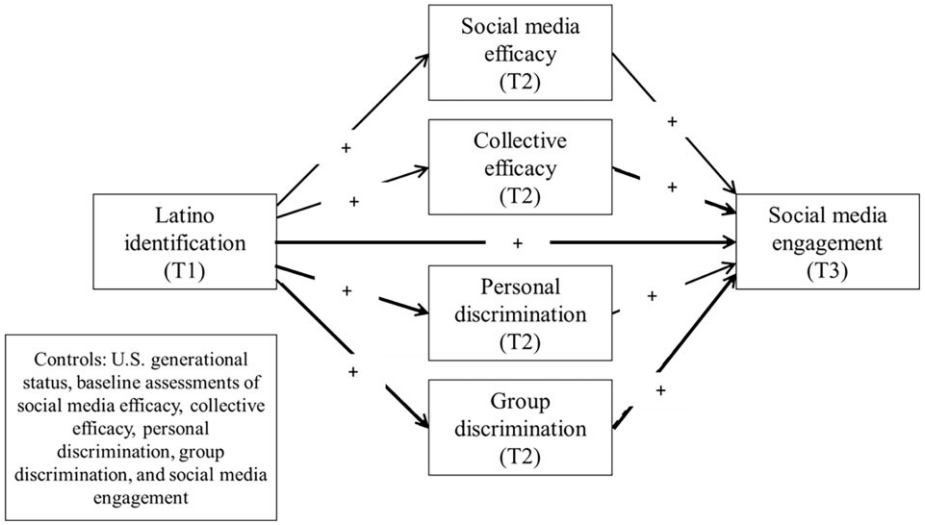



**Figure 1.** Hypothesized relations derived from SIMCA examining the influence of group identity on injustice, efficacy, and in turn social media engagement.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for key measures

| Measure | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. U.S. generation status | – | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Latin ident. (T1) | −.02 | – | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Personal disc. (T1) | .05 | .21*** | – | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Personal disc. (T2) | −.01 | .20*** | .67*** | – | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Group disc. (T1) | .04 | .33*** | .49*** | .37*** | – | | | | | | | |
| 6. Group disc. (T2) | .03 | .29*** | .48*** | .48*** | .72*** | – | | | | | | |
| 7. SM efficacy (T1) | .07 | .38*** | .25*** | .22*** | .36*** | .39*** | – | | | | | |
| 8. SM efficacy (T2) | .11* | .39*** | .31*** | .24*** | .38*** | .43*** | .62*** | – | | | | |
| 9. Collective efficacy (T1) | .01 | .39*** | .12*** | −.01 | .31*** | .23*** | .31*** | .27*** | – | | | |
| 10. Collective efficacy (T2) | .06 | .43*** | .15** | .10* | .28*** | .30*** | .30*** | .33*** | .60*** | – | | |
| 11. SM engagement (T1) | −.02 | .29*** | .29*** | .27*** | .22*** | .23*** | .52*** | .46*** | .07* | .13** | – | |
| 12. SM engagement (T3) | −.02 | .29*** | .31*** | .27*** | .16** | .21*** | .47*** | .44*** | .05 | .10 | .73*** | – |
| Means | 2.56 | 3.92 | 3.10 | 2.97 | 3.76 | 3.50 | 3.45 | 3.36 | 4.12 | 4.06 | 2.65 | 2.48 |
| Standard deviations | 1.35 | 0.95 | 1.31 | 1.30 | 1.08 | 1.13 | 0.99 | 1.03 | 0.85 | 0.83 | 1.15 | 1.12 |
| Skew | 0.58 | −0.80 | −0.23 | −0.16 | −0.85 | −0.72 | −0.47 | −0.50 | −0.85 | −0.58 | 0.19 | 0.31 |

*Notes:* ident. = identification; disc. = discrimination; SM = social media; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

### Collective efficacy

Collective efficacy was assessed using three items from previous work (Glasford & Calcagno, 2012). These items were: "Latinos in America can work together to improve their status and position in American society."; "Latinos in the U.S. can work together to fight against discrimination."; and "Latinos in the United States can work together to exert influence on political decisions in the U.S." (T2: $M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.83$, $\alpha = 0.90$).

### Social media efficacy in improving group outcomes

Three new items were created based on the standard collective efficacy items (Glasford & Calcagno, 2012), but adapted to assess efficacy of social media actions to improve group outcomes. These items were: "Social media allows me to confront discrimination against people like me."; "Social media is an effective way to raise awareness about the issues concerning my racial/ethnic group."; and "Social media allows me to support people who belong to the same racial/ethnic group as I do." (T2: $M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.99$, $\alpha = 0.86$).

### Group-based social media engagement

Participants reported how often (1 = *Not at all*, 5 = *All the time*) they were engaged in three different social media actions (adapted from Velasquez & Rojas, 2017). These items were: "Express your views about your ethnic group on social media."; "Click, like, or comment on news stories about your ethnic group."; and "Share news stories about your ethnic group on social media." (T3: $M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.12$, $\alpha = 0.92$).

## Results

### Analysis strategy

The hypothesized model displayed in Figure 1 was tested in a path analysis using Mplus 8.7 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Autoregressive paths from T1 baseline assessments to the T2 mediators and T3 outcome assessed residual change as a function of the hypothesized predictors. Standard errors and

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confidence intervals (CIs) were obtained through percentile CIs from 5,000 bootstrapped replicates to account for non-normal distributions of indirect effects (Hayes & Scharkow, 2013). Given that generational status is known to influence reports of discrimination, we included immigration status in the United States (i.e., 1 = first generation, 2 = second generation, etc.) as a control for the hypothesized mediators and outcome.[2] Correlations among T1 variables were freely estimated along with correlations among the residuals for the T2 variables. Maximum likelihood estimation was used to include participants with missing data.

## Preliminary analyses

Figure 2 depicts the results of the hypothesized model (see Table 2 for complete results). Overall, model fit indices indicate a good fit with the data based on conventional fit statistics (Hu & Bentler, 1999), as evidenced by low RMSEA (0.05) and SRMR (0.036) values, and high CFI (0.97) and TLI (0.94) values. The chi-square test of model fit was significant [$\chi^2(20) = 64.87$, $p = .000$], which can indicate a mismatch between the model and the data; however, this test is sensitive to sample size, and likely to reject the null hypothesis in samples as large as this one ($N = 871$). Autoregressive paths for the T2 mediators and T3 outcome being predicted by their T1 levels were positive and significant, demonstrating considerable stability in these constructs over time. Thus, hypothesis tests are interpreted in the context of controlling for earlier levels of each construct. Immigration status significantly predicted T2 social media efficacy ($\beta = 0.08$, $p = .015$), but did not predict T2 collective efficacy, T2 personal discrimination, T2 group discrimination, or T3 social media engagement.

## Test of hypotheses and research questions

Results indicated that Latino identification at T1 significantly predicted perceptions of social media efficacy ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < .001$) and collective efficacy ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < .001$) at T2, such that stronger Latino identification 1 month before the election was associated with higher perceptions of social media actions as efficacious in improving group outcomes and collective efficacy right after the election. T1 Latino identification, however, did not significantly predict T2 personal or group discrimination. The direct effect of T1 Latino identification on T3 group-based social media engagement was also nonsignificant.

Social media efficacy at T2 significantly predicted T3 group-based social media engagement ($\beta = 0.13$, $p = .008$). Specifically, stronger belief in the efficaciousness of social media actions in improving group outcomes immediately following the election predicted greater group-based social media engagement 1 month later. Interestingly, collective efficacy at T2 was inversely but marginally associated with T3 social media engagement ($\beta = -0.09$, $p = .06$), suggesting that *lower* levels of collective efficacy at T2 predicted greater group-based social media engagement at T3. Greater personal experiences with discrimination at T2 also predicted higher group-based social media engagement at T3 ($\beta = 0.09$, $p = .029$). T2 perceptions of group discrimination, however, did not significantly predict T3 group-based social media engagement.

Percentile bootstrapped CIs around the indirect effects indicated significant indirect effects from T1 Latino identification to T3 group-based social media engagement through T2 social media efficacy (95% CI: 0.004–0.044). These results reflect that participants with higher levels of Latino identification before the election reported increased perceptions of social media efficacy right after the election, which led to greater group-based social media engagement 1 month after the election. None of the other indirect relationships were significant, suggesting that the indirect relation between Latino identification and group-based social media engagement in our sample is via increased perceptions of social media efficacy beliefs.

It is worthwhile to mention that there could be a reciprocal relationship between the hypothesized predictors, mediators, and the outcome variable. The data allow us to test this relationship.

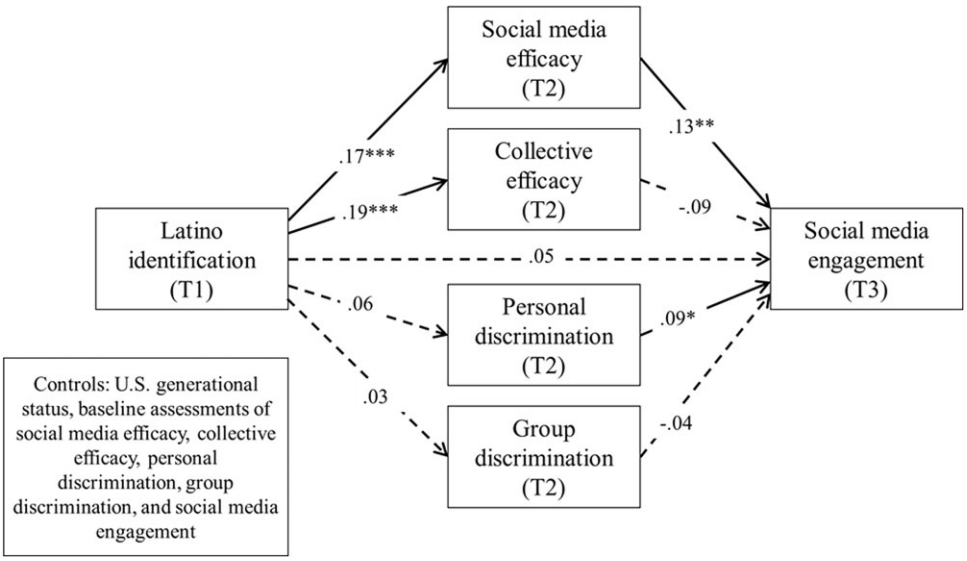



**Figure 2.** Path analysis testing the hypothesized relations predicted in Figure 1.

*Note.* Generational status was included as a control variable in predicting T2 and T3 outcomes. In addition, T2 mediators and the T3 outcome were regressed on T1 assessments of the same construct, but these autoregressive paths (all significant at $p < .001$) are omitted from the figure for clearer interpretation. Also included in the model but omitted from the figure are covariances among the T1 predictors and controls, and covariances between the residuals of the T2 mediators. Standardized coefficients are shown. Solid lines indicate significant paths and dotted lines indicate nonsignificant paths. $N = 871$. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

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**Table 2.** Results of the path analysis tested in Figure 2

| Outcome | Predictor | Estimate | SE | 95% Bootstrapped CI |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| T2 Social media efficacy (40% variance explained) | | | | |
| | Social media efficacy (T1) | 0.54*** | 0.04 | 0.46 to 0.61 |
| | Latino identification (T1) | 0.17*** | 0.05 | 0.08 to 0.26 |
| | Generational status (T1) | 0.08* | 0.04 | 0.02 to 0.15 |
| T2 Collective efficacy (41% variance explained) | | | | |
| | Collective efficacy (T1) | 0.54*** | 0.04 | 0.45 to 0.61 |
| | Latino identification (T1) | 0.19*** | 0.04 | 0.11 to 0.28 |
| | Generational status (T1) | 0.06 | 0.04 | −0.02 to 0.13 |
| T2 Personal discrimination (42% variance explained) | | | | |
| | Personal discrimination (T1) | 0.63*** | 0.04 | 0.56 to 0.71 |
| | Latino identification (T1) | 0.06 | 0.04 | −0.03 to 0.14 |
| | Generational status (T1) | 0.01 | 0.04 | −0.08 to 0.08 |
| T2 Group discrimination (47% variance explained) | | | | |
| | Group discrimination (T1) | 0.68*** | 0.04 | 0.60 to 0.75 |
| | Latino identification (T1) | 0.03 | 0.04 | −0.05 to 0.11 |
| | Generational status (T1) | 0.00 | 0.04 | −0.07 to 0.07 |
| T3 Social media engagement (54% variance explained) | | | | |
| | Social media engagement (T1) | 0.66*** | 0.04 | 0.59 to 0.73 |
| | Social media efficacy (T2) | 0.13** | 0.05 | 0.03 to 0.22 |
| | Collective efficacy (T2) | −0.09 | 0.05 | −0.18 to 0.00 |
| | Latino identification (T1) | 0.05 | 0.04 | −0.03 to 0.13 |
| | Personal discrimination (T1) | 0.09* | 0.04 | 0.01 to 0.16 |
| | Group discrimination (T1) | −0.04 | 0.03 | −0.12 to 0.05 |
| | Generational status (T1) | −0.01 | 0.03 | −0.07 to 0.06 |
| Indirect effects from T1 Latin identification to T3 social media engagement through T2 mediators | | | | |
| Social media efficacy (T2) | | 0.02* | 0.01 | 0.00 to 0.04 |
| Collective efficacy (T2) | | −0.02 | 0.01 | −0.04 to 0.00 |
| Personal discrimination (T2) | | 0.01 | 0.01 | −0.00 to 0.02 |
| Group discrimination (T2) | | −0.00 | 0.00 | −0.01 to 0.00 |

*Notes:* The path analysis tested the unique effects of Latino identification, personal experiences with discrimination, and group discrimination on social media efficacy, collective efficacy, and social media engagement, controlling for U.S. generational status and earlier assessments of hypothesized mediators and the outcome. Standardized estimates are reported. Standard errors (SEs) and CIs are based on 5,000 bootstrap replicates. $N = 871$.
T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

To increase our confidence in the causal chain tested here (e.g., from identification to injustice/efficacy to group-based social media engagement), we estimated a post-hoc model predicting changes in our hypothesized predictor (Latino identification) and mediators (personal discrimination, group-based discrimination, collective efficacy, social media efficacy) at Time 3 from T1 group-based social media engagement. Not surprisingly, each of the outcomes at T3 were significantly associated with their autoregressive baseline effects at T1. More importantly, T1 group-based social media engagement was associated with increased T3 Latino identification, suggesting that greater group-based social media engagement may increase group identification over time ($\beta = 0.09$, $p = .044$). Similarly, T1 group-based social media engagement increased T3 social media efficacy ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = .008$), suggesting that the relationship between these two constructs is likely nonrecursive. Personal experiences of discrimination, group-based discrimination, and collective efficacy at T3 were not significantly associated with group-based social media engagement at T1. In light of this, the observed significant effect of T2 personal experiences of discrimination on T3 group-based social media engagement suggests that the former is likely the antecedent of the latter.

## Discussion

> Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world.—Dolores Huerta

Given the increased hostility targeting racial/ethnic minorities in recent years, the above quote represents the sentiment of many marginalized group members who are turning to social media to address injustices and enact change. Although offline collective actions have been systematically studied for some time across social scientific disciplines, the antecedents underlying minorities' social media engagement are relatively understudied (Lane et al., 2022). Guided by the SIMCA, the present research tested the social identity related psychological processes underlying Latino Americans' group-based social media engagement across a three-wave longitudinal survey administered during the 2020 U.S. Presidential election.

Results revealed that participants who strongly identified with their Latino identity at Time 1 perceived social media actions as efficacious in improving group conditions at Time 2, which in turn increased their group-based social media engagement at Time 3. Mediation tests confirmed that the indirect relationship between Time 1 Latino identification and Time 3 group-based social media engagement was via increased perceptions of social media efficacy at Time 2. Although social identity is theorized to motivate collective actions directly and indirectly via increased efficacy and injustice (van Zomeren et al., 2008a), only the indirect effect via increased social media efficacy was observed in the present research. These differences in the effects observed in the present and past research could be due to several factors.

Although there should be some overlap in the psychological motivations driving online and offline forms of collective

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actions, there is also evidence suggesting that digitally networked (e.g., social media) actions may be distinct from other types of participation including voting, civic participation, institutionalized participation, and consumerist participation (Theocharis et al., 2021). Digital actions, many of which are individualized and allow for self-expression (e.g., sharing personal experiences of discrimination) often represent a way for citizens who are dissatisfied with the traditional forms of political action to participate on their own terms, in the political issues of their choice, and through the aspects of the identities they wish to express (Bang & Sørensen, 1999). Considering these differences, predictors and theories of traditional forms of collective action may not be *as* influential in predicting online actions aimed at improving group outcomes (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

In the current study, for example, efficacy beliefs related to the potential for social media actions to improve group outcomes rather than efficacy beliefs related to the in-group increased future group-based social media engagement. This is likely because many online actions (e.g., sharing a post about an incident of group injustice) aimed at improving group outcomes can be taken independently without much organization or coordination with other in-group members. Despite their underlying motivation to address a collective injustice, these types of actions are less likely to be influenced by collective efficacy beliefs, which reflect the potential for in-group members to *collectively* resolve group problems. This is not to suggest that collective efficacy beliefs are not relevant for *all* types of online actions (e.g., Velasquez & LaRose, 2015). Rather, our assessment of group-based social media engagement included behaviors that were not necessarily interdependent on other group members' efforts and thus less likely to be influenced by collective efficacy beliefs.

Of course, many SIMCA identified antecedents have been associated with minorities' social media engagement in past correlational studies (e.g., Lane et al., 2022b; Lee et al., 2022; Velasquez & Montgomery, 2020). The longitudinal design of our research, however, is an important methodological difference from past studies, which could further explain why certain theorized effects were nonsignificant. For one, longitudinal analyses that incorporate autoregressive effects typically yield smaller effects relative to bivariate correlations observed outside of cross-lagged designs (Adachi & Willoughby, 2015). Second, the temporal lag between assessments can influence the strength of theorized relationships. For instance, in Thomas et al.'s (2020) longitudinal study, efficacy was not associated with collective actions. Further, this study highlighted the nonrecursive relationship between some of the SIMCA concepts. Specifically, previous collective actions were positively associated with later group identification. Similarly, our results reveal the potential for group-based social media engagement to increase group identification over time. This finding is consistent with the notion that public expressions of identity and identity-relevant norms affirm group identification (Klein et al., 2007).

Methodological differences aside, the nonsignificant effects of efficacy on collective action have also been observed in other research (e.g., Cohen-Chen & van Zomeren, 2018; van Zomeren et al., 2008b, 2012). These nonsignificant effects have been attributed to perceptions of reduced hope (Cohen-Chen & van Zomeren, 2018), low participatory efficacy (van Zomeren et al., 2012), and system justification beliefs (Jost et al., 2017). Finally, there is some evidence suggesting that collective efficacy beliefs can moderate the relationship between group identification and social media engagement (Velasquez et al., 2019).

Contrasting SIMCA predictions, Latino identification at Time 1 was not significantly associated with perceptions of either type of injustice at Time 2. The nonsignificant effect could be due to the longitudinal nature of the study, our specific sample, and/or the social and political context in which the study took place. It is also important to note that we assessed injustice through experiences and perceptions of discrimination rather than emotions derived from appraisals of injustice (anger). Though both are conceptualized as injustice in SIMCA, affective assessments are stronger predictors of collective actions (van Zomeren et al., 2008a).

Distinguishing different types of injustice in the model did reveal an important finding. Specifically, personal experiences of discrimination, but not group-based perceptions of discrimination, at Time 2 increased group-based social media engagement at Time 3. Individuals who personally experience a discriminatory incident may be looking for immediate affirmation and social support from their communities (Miller et al., 2021), which is likely easier to find online rather than offline. Digital affordances and features related to visibility, likes, shares/retweets, and emoticons can enhance social support from fellow in-group members in social media sites (Carr, 2018). Additionally, social support is easily accessible in online spaces designed specifically for in-group members (e.g., Black Twitter; Facebook groups). These features reduce the likelihood of disregarding individual experiences of discrimination and/or attributing them to systemic inequalities, especially when other in-group members in one's network are sharing similar experiences. Though group discrimination is theorized to motivate collective action, appraisals related to the stability and legitimacy can undermine these motivations (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It is possible that the nonsignificant relationship observed in our sample between group discrimination and group-based social media engagement is due to these factors, although a direct assessment of these constructs is needed in future work.

Finally, it is important to highlight that Latino identification at Time 1 increased perceptions of social media actions as efficacious in improving group outcomes at Time 2. Given that social media allows minorities to coalescence around shared identities (Ellison & Vitak, 2015) and connect with similar others across social networks (Spears & Postmes, 2015), highly identified group members are especially likely to seek opportunities that allow them to bolster their group's positive distinctiveness (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This reasoning is in line with public opinion surveys which reveal that racial/ethnic minorities, relative to Whites, perceive social media to be important in: (a) finding other people who share their views about important issues, (b) getting involved with political and social issues, and (c) giving them a venue to express their political opinions (Auxier, 2020).

Though there are contrasting viewpoints about the effectiveness of online collective actions (i.e., slacktivism hypothesis), research finds that online actions are often correlated with and translate into offline actions (Chen, 2020; Halpern et al., 2017; Kwak et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2022; Nekmat et al., 2015). Indeed, we also found significant and positive correlations between our group-based social media engagement measure and traditional offline collective actions (see Appendix C of supplementary material). Further, online

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participation, especially when perceived as effective, can lead to collective actions across multiple offline social issues, building a generalized activist identity (Walgrave et al., 2011). This is cause for optimism for Latino Americans specifically, as research reveals that despite adopting social media at an increasing rate, political engagement has not reached the level of Whites and non-Latino racial and ethnic groups in the United States (Lopez et al., 2018). It is possible that the type of group-based social media engagement we observed in our study has important implications for influencing offline political mobilization for Latinos in the long-term. Future studies can more directly test these important relationships.

## Limitations and future research

When interpreting these findings, several limitations need to be kept in mind. First, we relied on self-reported measures of group-based social media engagement. Self-reports can lead to inaccurate and/or biased responding consistent with the motivated reasoning effects. Although intentions are known to predict actual behaviors (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009) and self-reported social media engagement items are shown to predict offline political participation (Kende et al., 2016 Lee et al., 2022), it would be ideal to track the frequency and types of actions individuals take for their in-groups, both on social media and offline, to triangulate the extent to which the processes and behaviors are comparable across these outcomes.

There are likely other important factors that influence efficacy beliefs with respect to social media actions that need to be considered. For instance, more frequent and/or more engaged social media users may perceive their social media actions to be more efficacious in enacting social change (Brunsting & Postmes, 2002). Indeed, a nonrecursive relationship between social media efficacy and group-based social media engagement was observed in our post-hoc model. Individual differences in capabilities, skillsets, or comfort with performing different online actions is likely to influence social media efficacy beliefs with respect to improving group outcomes. Exposure to and success of past racial justice movements inspired by social media actions (e.g., #Black Lives Matter, #StandWithStandingRock) are further likely to increase minorities' perceptions of social media efficacy for improving group outcomes.

Distinguishing different types of online actions and their efficacy in improving group outcomes is also useful to consider in future work. Indeed, racial/ethnic groups differ in the way they use social media sites (Auxier, 2020). For instance, Black users are about twice as likely as their White (22%) or Latino (23%) counterparts to say they have used a hashtag in the past month related to a political or social issue. These differences may relate to perceptions of how effective each online action is in improving the group's status. Future studies can examine the efficacy of specific social media actions for improving group outcomes and their likelihood of predicting online and offline collective actions.

Certain limitations apply to our sample. Latinos are ethnically, culturally, politically, socioeconomically, phenotypically, and linguistically diverse with unique sociopolitical histories in the United States. Although representation in social scientific research is essential to ensure that our understanding of the social world effectively represents those who populate it, collapsing a heterogeneous group into a single category can both erroneously amplify perceived similarities across groups as well as obscure meaningful differences. Future work with a more robust sample of Latino Americans, allowing for the necessary differentiation, is needed to determine the generalizability of these results. Relatedly, it is uncertain whether the results we observed generalize beyond Latino Americans to other ethnic groups in the United States. Given that different cultural, religious, historical, economic, and political contexts make each group unique, it is important to examine the specific factors motivating marginalized groups to use social media for collective expressions and efforts.

## Conclusions

Overall, this study makes important theoretical, social, and methodological contributions. Theoretically, we provide empirical evidence linking group-related processes rooted in SIMCA with Latinos' group-based social media engagement. In doing so, our findings reveal the different ways in which Latinos' experiences of individual versus group discrimination relate to group-based social media engagement. We further consider and find support for the mediating role of social media efficacy (but not collective efficacy) in understanding why social identity may motivate group-based social media engagement among Latino Americans.

Socially, our findings reflect the potential for social media to do "good", especially for marginalized group members who do not enjoy the same privileges as the advantaged group. For Latino Americans, in particular, this provides a mechanism for enfranchisement, both by creating an opportunity to counter harmful and inaccurate narratives about Latinos in U.S. media, politics, and society as well as serving as a source of political mobilization.

## Supplementary material

Supplementary material is available online at *Communication Theory* online.

*Conflicts of interest*: None declared.

## Notes

1. Bandura (1977) noted the importance of contextualizing efficacy beliefs in relation to the specific context and behavior under study. Indeed, researchers have conceptualized different types of efficacies for a range of actions such as political efficacy for political actions (Holbert et al., 2007); participatory efficacy for collective actions (van Zomeren et al., 2012); response efficacy for health-related behaviors (Frank et al., 2015); and internet efficacy for the use of internet (Eastin & LaRose, 2000). Note that our specific interest is in assessing the extent to which minorities perceive their social media actions to be efficacious in improving *group* outcomes. This concept is distinct from generalized beliefs about self-efficacy and political efficacy, both of which are not necessarily specific to the use of social media for improving group outcomes.
2. Including other controls (sex, age, income, education, political orientation, and social media news use) did not significantly change the results (see Appendix B in supplementary material). The dataset analyzed in this manuscript can be requested by contacting the first author.

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