

# Ethnic Minorities' Social Media Political Use: How Ingroup Identification, Selective Exposure, and Collective Efficacy Shape Social Media Political Expression

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*Latinos represent a large ethnic minority group in the United States, but their political participation, including on social media, is low compared to other groups. Guided by social identity and social cognitive theories, this study examines the influence of two dimensions of ingroup identification (i.e., group self-definition, group self-investment) on Latinos(as)' political expression about immigration and Latino culture on social media, the mediating role of pro-attitudinal selective exposure to media content related to these topics, and the moderating role of collective efficacy. Results suggest a positive and consistent association between group self-definition and social media political expression (SMPE) about both topics. Further, pro-attitudinal selective exposure was found to mediate the relationship between group self-definition and expression about both topics. Finally, collective efficacy moderated the relationship between group self-definition and SMPE about immigration.*

**Keywords:** Collective Efficacy, Latinos, Ingroup Identification, Pro-Attitudinal Selective Exposure, Social Media Political Expression (SMPE).

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Social psychology has long argued for the interdependence between individual cognitions and the social environment in explaining individuals' behaviors (Turner & Reynolds, 2012). For example, within the realm of political communication and social media use, individuals' ingroup identification can help explain their media content choices (Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2010; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2011), and political attitudes and behaviors, including political participation (Dvir-Gvirsman, Garrett, & Tsfati, 2018; Feezell, 2016). Furthermore, individuals' evaluations about their group capabilities can also influence their political behaviors on social media (Velasquez & LaRose, 2015). While individuals' political actions are partly driven by their membership to a group,

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such social drivers might be attenuated or intensified depending on whether they believe their group is capable of reaching its objectives (Bandura, 1997).

Guided by the social identity tradition (Tajfel, 1974), including social identity theory and self-categorization theory, and by social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997), the present investigation examines how Latinos(as)' political expression on social media can be partly explained as a function of their identification as members of their ethnic group, how pro-attitudinal selective exposure mediates this relationship, and whether these associations are conditioned by their perceptions of collective efficacy. These theoretical approaches share the assumption that cognitive and environmental processes are inter-related (Hogg & Abrams, 1999) and conjointly shape individuals' behaviors.

This study differentiates between *identity* and *identification*, where identity reflects self-concepts that contribute to one's personal and social sense of self (Turner & Reynolds, 2012). Comparatively, ingroup identification reflects a more dynamic and multifaceted psychological process including, but not limited to, one's sense of liking, attachment, and belonging to the group, and the group-related behaviors an individual demonstrates (Reysen, Katzarska-Miller, Nesbit, & Pierce, 2013). Prior research on selective exposure and political participation has defined and measured ingroup identification as a uni-dimensional construct, which may overlook how individuals might identify with different groups in different ways. Therefore, the current study contributes to the current literature by employing Leach et al.'s (2008) bi-dimensional conceptualization of ingroup identification, and examining how the relationship between ingroup identification and social media political expression (SMPE) will depend on collective efficacy beliefs.

Social media can be characterized as a third space (Wright, 2012) where mundane, everyday conversations happen together with political talk. Political expression in these spaces is a form of political participation that can foster and lead to traditional modes of political participation (Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014). Additionally, social media allow for mass personal communication, defined as simultaneous engagement in mass and interpersonal communication (O'Sullivan & Carr, 2018). Such mass personal communication properties enable the overlap of information, communication and action (Rainie & Wellman, 2012), influence how people form perceptions of opinion climate, as well as the likelihood they will express their opinion on different issues (Neubaum & Krämer, 2017).

Consequently, as research suggests that SMPE increases political participation (for reviews see Boulianne, 2015, 2018), it is important to understand how Latinos(as)' ingroup ethnic identification is related to SMPE. We define Latinos as people living in the United States whose descent can be traced back to Latin American, Spanish-speaking countries. Currently, more than 29 million Latinos(as) are eligible to vote, but their political participation lags behind other ethnic groups, including non-Hispanic whites and non-Hispanic African Americans (Smith, 2013). However, they tend to use social media as much as blacks and whites (Krogstad, 2015). As the majority of Latinos(as) perceive it has become harder in recent years to be a Latino(a) in the United States (Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera & Krogstad, 2018), social media may continue to be important sites of political expression for this ethnic group.

We chose to examine this mechanism with regards to two specific issues (i.e., Latino culture; immigration) that are salient for this ethnic group. The topic of Latin America and Latino culture is important to many Latinos(as), as many maintain connection and close ties to their heritage, either through family or institutional (e.g., religious) ties (Waldinger, 2007), and feel proud about their culture (Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera & Krogstad, 2018). Additionally, political discourse remains heavily focused on immigration trends and policies, and immigration is an important issue in determining the Latino vote (Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera, Krogstad, & López, 2016), and in shaping their perceptions about their economic and social standing in the United States (Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera & Krogstad,

2018). Data for the present study were collected roughly one year after the 2016 U.S. presidential election, during which immigration was an intensely debated topic.

Latinos were featured in this study due to their seemingly varying patterns of political participation and social media habits from other U.S. groups. More importantly, because the differentiation between the two dimensions of group self-definition and -investment will allow us to understand which dimension is associated with their SMPE. Is a perception of common and shared experiences and the emergence of group characteristics in the definition of the self what shapes Latinos(as)' SMPE? Or, is it feelings of belonging to this ethnic group, and a bond with other ingroup members what shapes SMPE? Ultimately, understanding which group identification dimension leads to Latinos (as)' SMPE is important because it can subsequently foster Latinos(as)' political participation offline. In sum, this study contributes to theories of SMPE by proposing and testing a model that integrates the two dimensions of ingroup identification to explain SMPE through selective exposure, while accounting for the moderating role of collective efficacy.

### Ingroup identification

Social psychological research explains how a person's social identity, their sense of self related to social and cultural group membership, influences their behaviors and experiences (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). *Ingroup identification*, defined as the "restrictive, subjective, or internalized sense of belonging to the group" (Huddy, 2015, p. 4), undergirds the psychological processes that constitute social identity. Thus, identification explains how positive associations, shared circumstances, and collective goals stem from group membership. Leach et al. (2008) propose a hierarchical model of ingroup identification wherein two primary dimensions capture different aspects of ingroup identification that influence individuals' attitudes and behaviors.

*Group self-definition* is a depersonalized sense of self where group characteristics emerge as part of the definition of self and manifests as a person's sense of similarity to some standardized group prototype (Leach et al., 2008). In the current study, group self-definition is formed by two subcomponents: ingroup homogeneity and self-stereotyping. Ingroup homogeneity, defined by Leach et al. (2008), is the degree to which individuals perceive their group as sharing common characteristics or experiences that reflect a homogenous group composition, which establishes the ingroup as a "coherent social entity" that is "distinct from relevant outgroups" (p. 146). Self-stereotyping is based on individuals thinking of themselves as similar to an ingroup prototype, so that they depersonalize and stereotype themselves as having similar characteristics.

*Group self-investment* is a sense of belonging and a bond with other members of the group and is made evident by how much individuals perceive their group membership as a core part of who they are and the positive distinction derived from belonging to the group (Leach, et al., 2008). Group self-investment is further specified by three subcomponents: satisfaction, an individual feeling positively about their ingroup and their belonging to it; solidarity, "a psychological bond with, and commitment to, fellow ingroup members"; and centrality, "the salience and importance of ingroup membership" (Leach et al., 2008, p. 147).

### Ingroup identification, political participation, and social media political expression

The degree to which a person identifies as a member of a particular group influences various modes of political participation (e.g., Robalo, Schram, & Sonnemans, 2017). Studies explain this increased likelihood to participate in political actions due to a sense of shared experience with other ingroup

members and a shared fate with them (Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013), which can be understood as part of the group self-definition dimension. Others explain this connection in terms of group self-investment, arguing that increased ingroup identification leads individuals to care more about the issues affecting their group, which makes them more motivated to garner benefits for their group (Holbrook, Sterrett, Johnson, & Krysan, 2015). Therefore, both group self-definition and group self-investment may influence political participation.

Political expression on social media, including social networking sites (SNSs), is becoming an increasingly common mode of political participation (Anderson, Toor, Rainie, & Smith, 2018). We define SMPE as political communication behaviors on social media that express a specific opinion or emotion on current political events and processes, or behaviors that disseminate information relevant for the interpretation of those events and processes (Velasquez & Rojas, 2017).

Aside from information seeking, social media use also enables the construction and performance of individuals' identity through sharing, posting content, and commenting (Papacharissi, 2012). Issues that are central to the identity of an ethnic minority could be expressed on social media by members of that ethnic group as a component of online identity performance, or an expression of their political selves.

Prior research on Latinos' political participation has examined how group identification was related with different kinds of political participation (Masuoka, 2008; Valdez, 2011), but their definitions of ingroup identification did not explain which specific components connect ingroup identification to political participation, leaving unanswered how individuals evaluate such ingroup identification in terms of their investment to their group or their sense of group definition. This study contributes to research on SMPE by examining which dimension of ethnic minorities' identity influences SMPE.

RQ1: Does a positive relationship exist between group self-definition and social media political expression about (a) Latino culture, and (b) immigration?

RQ2: Does a positive relationship exist between group self-investment and social media political expression about (a) Latino culture, and (b) immigration?

### Ingroup identification and pro-attitudinal selective exposure

Prior research on pro-attitudinal selective exposure, the inclination to seek out media content that confirms one's own opinions and beliefs (Stroud, 2011), primarily focuses on individuals' preexisting attitudes toward the topics about which they sought information. Research has addressed the ways in which social identity drives individuals to purposefully choose attitude-consistent information (Wojcieszak & Garrett, 2018) due to individuals' motivation to seek, maintain, and defend a positive image of their ingroup (Tajfel, 1974). Wojcieszak and Garrett (2018) found that when participants were primed to think about their national identity as Americans, those with anti-immigrant views were more likely to choose media content that reaffirmed this worldview. Participants with pro-immigrant attitudes did not behave differently when primed to think about their national identity. This suggests that social identity, not only attitudes about the issue, predicts selective exposure. Similarly, Knobloch-Westerwick and Hastall (2010) found that younger adult participants were more likely to read articles that featured their age group in a positive light. Older adults were more likely to read articles that portrayed younger adults negatively than they were to read positive articles about their own age group. Furthermore, older adults experienced a boost in self-esteem after reading articles that portrayed younger adults negatively. Age group identity predicted selective exposure, and

subsequent media choices led to positive self-esteem and, by extension, more positive ingroup attitudes for older adults.

However, research in this area has inconsistently conceptualized ingroup identification, or used the terms identity and identification interchangeably, leading to mixed support for ingroup influence on selective exposure behaviors. For example, [Knobloch-Westerwick and Hastall \(2010\)](#) measured ingroup identity using self-reported gender and age, while [Appiah, Knobloch-Westerwick, and Alter \(2013\)](#) defined ingroup identification as self-categorization, measured by using self-reported racial identity. Such definitions of ingroup identification refer only to self-categorization into a group, leaving unanswered questions regarding which aspects of individuals' group identification perceptions led to selective exposure of media content. Were individuals' selections due to a sense of shared characteristics and experiences with others in their group? Or was it how individuals felt about their group (e.g., their satisfaction or level of commitment) that influenced their content choices?

Other studies have also mixed components of group self-definition and self-investment. [Knobloch-Westerwick, Mothes, and Polavin \(2017\)](#) examined how ingroup identity was related to increased selective exposure to positive messages about the ingroup. This study defined ingroup identification using two items addressing the importance of their feelings of pride in the United States and being an American citizen. These two items seem to measure satisfaction and centrality, two of the components of the group self-investment dimension. However, findings did not support the notion that strength of ingroup identification increased selective exposure to positive messages about the United States. Another study ([Schieferdecker & Wessler, 2017](#)) investigated the relationship between ingroup identification and biased media content selections. The three items used to measure ingroup identification addressed centrality and solidarity components of the group self-investment dimension. Their results suggest as ingroup identification increases, exposure to content showing individuals of the same race also increases. Finally, [Wojcieszak and Garrett \(2018\)](#) found that individuals who were primed to think about their national identity, thus increasing their self-definition levels of ingroup identification, tended to select more pro-attitudinal (i.e., anti-immigration) content compared to those that were not primed.

It is not possible to determine from prior research how each dimension of ingroup identification might be related with SMPE through pro-attitudinal selective exposure. Perhaps as individuals de-personalize themselves and others in their group, they will select content that align with their political attitudes, thus becoming more inclined to express their views on social media. Or, it could be that individuals' perceptions about their group and their degree of involvement with it might lead them to seek attitude-consistent information about their group. As they acquire more information confirming their views, they are prompted to express them on social media.

Studies have proposed different explanations to the process that goes from attitude congruent media exposure to political participation. [Dvir-Gvirsman et al. \(2018\)](#) found that favorable perceptions of opinion climate mediated the relationship between exposure to congruent media content and political participation, while [Wojcieszak, Bimber, Feldman, and Stroud \(2016\)](#) explain the effect of pro-attitudinal selective exposure on political participation through three different mechanisms: cognitive, affective, and attitudinal. Based on this evidence, we put forward the following hypotheses:

H1a: There will be a positive relationship between pro-attitudinal selective exposure about immigration and social media political expression about immigration.

H1b: There will be a positive relationship between pro-attitudinal selective exposure about Latino culture and social media political expression about Latino culture.

Weeks, Lane, Kim, Lee, and Kwak (2017) found that individuals who selectively exposed themselves to pro-attitudinal information online were more likely to share that content on social media. It is possible that when social identities motivate individuals to seek media content that reaffirms their attitudes, they are then more likely to share media content and express opinions that support their views. Given this connection, and evidence suggesting that pro-attitudinal selective exposure influences political behaviors (e.g., Dilliplane, 2011; Feezell, 2016), this study positions pro-attitudinal selective exposure as a mediator between two distinct dimensions of ingroup identification and SMPE. Although we posit selective exposure as mediating the relationship between ingroup identification and SMPE, it is not clear how each dimension operates differently or concurrently through selective exposure. Therefore, we pose the following research questions:

RQ3: Does pro-attitudinal selective exposure mediate the relationship between group self-definition and social media political expression about (a) Latino culture, and (b) immigration?

RQ4: Does pro-attitudinal selective exposure mediate the relationship between group self-investment and social media political expression about (a) Latino culture, and (b) immigration?

### Ingroup identification, collective efficacy and social media political expression

Political behaviors are influenced by individuals' feelings that their group is capable of achieving its goals (i.e., collective efficacy beliefs) (Lee, 2010). Collective efficacy beliefs have been examined in the online context. Velasquez and LaRose (2015) found that collective efficacy explained online political participation above and beyond internal political efficacy. Halpern, Valenzuela, and Katz (2017) found that as individuals shared more political content on Facebook, they increased their collective efficacy beliefs, which led to more political participation.

We argue that while ingroup identification will increase certain types of political expressions on social media, identification will interact with perceptions of collective efficacy when predicting SMPE. Although high levels of identification might influence the expression of views about issues relevant to the group, individuals might be more or less motivated to perform such behaviors depending on whether they believe their group actually can act together to reach their objectives. Low collective efficacy beliefs might lessen the effect of group identity on expressive behavior. On the other hand, someone that considers their group highly capable will find their own expressive behavior on social media more consequential to the group, increasing the effect of group identity on SMPE. Thus:

H2: Collective efficacy will moderate the relationship between group self-definition and social media political expression about (a) Latino culture, and (b) immigration. The relationship between group self-definition and social media political expression will be greater for those who perceive high collective efficacy than for those that have lower levels of collective efficacy.

H3: Collective efficacy will moderate the relationship between group self-investment and social media political expression about (a) Latino culture, and (b) immigration. The relationship between group self-investment and social media political expression will be greater for those who perceive higher levels of collective efficacy than for those that perceive lower collective efficacy.

Collective efficacy should condition the relationship between pro-attitudinal selective exposure and SMPE, and hence, moderate the mediation of selective exposure. The relationship between pro-attitudinal selective exposure and political participation can be explained through the strengthening of previous attitudes (Wojcieszak et al., 2016). However, for those who doubt the capacity of their group

to effectively achieve their goals, the reinforcement of selective-exposure will be attenuated by doubts in the capacity of the group to act effectively. We hypothesize:

H4: Collective efficacy perceptions will moderate the mediation of selective exposure in the relationship between group self-definition and social media political expression about (a) Latino culture, and (b) immigration.

H5: Collective efficacy perceptions will moderate the mediation of selective exposure in the relationship between group self-investment and social media political expression about (a) Latino culture, and (b) immigration.

## Method

### Sampling

Data were collected online between 27 November and 6 December 2017 through Offerwise, an online research panel company that specializes in the Latino population. The sample was drawn from a panel of over 350,000 members that resembles the U.S. Latino population. The sampling method followed a stratified quota sampling procedure using age, gender, U.S. region, language spoken at home, income and education level as criteria; thus, making sure our sample represented the U.S. Latino adult population, including Spanish-dominant Latinos(as). Participants could answer the online survey either in Spanish or English.

### Sample characteristics

The 601 participants ranged in age from 18- to 80-years-old ( $M = 38.48$ ,  $SD = 14.41$ ), 52.4% identified as female ( $n = 315$ ) and 46.1% identified as male ( $n = 277$ ). Nine participants (1.5%) did not report gender. Table 1 details socio-demographic information of the sample and compares it with national surveys and U.S. census data of the Latino population.

Only those participants that reported having a social media account (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) were included in the present analyses ( $n = 503$ ). Demographic information of this new sample was slightly different from the original sample. Age range was still 18- to 80-years-old,  $M = 38.61$ ,  $SD = 14.28$ , 49.9% identified as male and 50.1% as female.

### Measures

*Group self-investment* ( $M = 4.24$ ,  $SD = .85$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ) was measured using 10 items (Leach et al., 2008) measuring three factors of the participant's Latino identity. Participants rated the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale. Three items measured solidarity (e.g., I feel a bond with Hispanic/Latino people.); four items measured satisfaction (e.g., I am glad to be Hispanic/Latino[a].); and three items measured centrality (e.g., I often think about the fact that I am Hispanic/Latino[a].).

*Group self-definition* ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = .99$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ ) was measured using four items (Leach et al., 2008). Participants rated the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with four statements on a 5-point Likert scale. Two items measured individual self-stereotyping (e.g., I have a lot in common with the average Hispanic/Latino person.) Two items measured ingroup homogeneity (e.g., Hispanic/Latino people are very similar to each other.).

**Table 1** Comparison of Latino Sample and Population Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Characteristic	Sample	Population
Gender	52.4% female	49.5% female <sup>a</sup>
Age (Median)	35 years	28.9 years <sup>a</sup>
Education (Median)	Two-year college degree	Some college education <sup>a</sup>
Income (Median)	\$50,000–\$59,000 annually	\$47,675 annually <sup>a</sup>
Party identification	71% Democrat	64% Democrat <sup>b</sup>

*Notes:*

<sup>a</sup>U.S. Census Bureau (2016). Sex by Educational Attainment for the population 25 and over (Hispanic or Latino). *American Fact Finder American Community Survey*. Retrieved February 22, 2018, from <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>

<sup>b</sup>Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera, Krogstad & López (2016). Latinos and the political parties. *Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends*. Retrieved February 22, 2018, from <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/10/11/latinos-and-the-political-parties/>.

*Social media political expression about immigration* ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ) was measured using four items adapted from Velasquez and Rojas (2017). Participants were asked how frequently (1 = never, 5 = frequently) they performed a set of activities on social media. Items were “Express your views about immigration issues,” “Share news stories with your contacts about immigration,” “Post or share photos, videos, memes or gifs created by you that relate to the issue of immigration,” and “Click like, or share, political information related with immigration issues.”

*Social media political expression about Latino culture* ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ) was measured adapting items from Velasquez and Rojas (2017). Participants were asked to report on a 5-point scale (1 = never, 5 = frequently) how frequently they did a set of activities on social media. The items comprising the scale were: “Express your views about the Hispanic/Latino population,” “Share news stories with your contacts about Hispanics/Latinos,” “Post or share photos, videos, memes or gifs created by you that relate to Hispanic/Latino people” and “Click like, or share, political information related with the Hispanic/Latino people.”

*Pro-attitudinal selective exposure* was measured using one item (Weeks et al., 2017) capturing participants’ pro-attitudinal selective exposure behaviors about Latino culture ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ) and one item capturing participants’ pro-attitudinal selective exposure about immigration ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ). Participants reported how often in the past month (1 = none, 6 = every day) they intentionally searched for information online that supported their views (e.g., How often in the past month have you intentionally searched for information online that supported your views about Latinos; How often in the past month have you intentionally searched for information online that supported your views about immigration?).

*Collective efficacy* ( $M = 4.14$ ,  $SD = .91$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ) was measured using four items (Bandura, 2006). On a 5-point Likert scale, participants rated the degree to which they believed Hispanic/Latino people were capable of achieving their goals (e.g., acting together, can make society better.).

For all item wordings and correlations among the study variables can be found in Tables 1 and 2 of supplementary materials.

*Control variables.* Participant age, gender, education, and income, and three other variables (i.e., general social media use, internal political efficacy, and political interest) were controlled for in the analyses.



*General social media use* (Velasquez & Rojas, 2017) ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ,  $\alpha = .80$ ) was measured using four items asking respondents how frequently (1 = never, 5 = very frequently) they performed a set of social media activities (e.g., How often do you post on Facebook?).

*Internal political efficacy* (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991) ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ,  $\alpha = .91$ ) was measured using four items. On a 5-point Likert scale items asked respondents the degree to which they felt capable of participating in politics (e.g., To the extent that citizens can influence politics, my efforts to do so would be more effective than the average person.)

*Political interest* ( $M = 7.24$ ,  $SD = 2.78$ ) was measured using a single item scale that asked respondents the degree to which they are interested in politics (1 = not interested at all, 10 = very interested).

## Results

The two primary independent variables (i.e., group self-investment, group self-definition) and the items measuring their subfactors, the two dependent variables, and the moderator were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in Mplus 7.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012). All items were significantly associated with their respective latent factor, and all latent factors showed good model fit.<sup>1</sup>

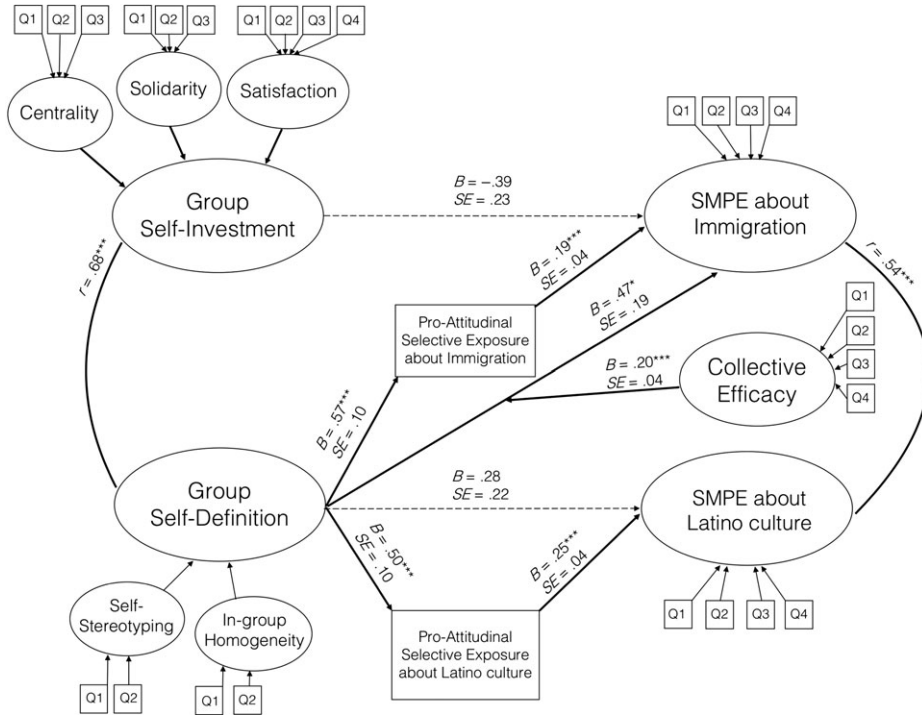
RQ1 and RQ2 investigated the influence of group self-definition and group self-investment on SMPE about (a) Latino culture, and (b) immigration. To answer both research questions simultaneously, a hybrid path model was constructed with both latent independent and latent dependent variables in the same model. When the seven control variables were included, with internal political efficacy and general social media use represented by latent factors, the paths from group self-definition to SMPE were significant for each topic: Latino culture:  $\beta = .36$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $p = .021$ ; immigration:  $\beta = .45$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $p = .003$ .<sup>2</sup> The path from group self-investment to SMPE about immigration was significant and showed a negative association,  $\beta = -.40$ ,  $SE = .19$ ,  $p = .031$ , but the path to Latino culture was not significant,  $\beta = -.20$ ,  $SE = .19$ ,  $p = .309$ .

### Mediation analyses

H1a and H1b predicted a positive association between selective self-exposure and SMPE for both Latino culture and immigration respectively, and both paths were supported. RQ3 examined if there was an indirect relationship between group self-definition and SMPE about (a) Latino culture, and (b) immigration through pro-attitudinal selective exposure. RQ4 examined if there was an indirect relationship between group self-investment and SMPE about (a) Latino culture, and (b) immigration respectively through pro-attitudinal selective exposure. To be conservative in exploring these mediated relationships, the path model with covariates was tested with both mediators in the same model.<sup>3</sup> The results suggest that the indirect paths between group self-definition and SMPE about Latino culture,  $\beta = .27$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p < .001$ , and immigration,  $\beta = .15$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p = .045$ , through selective exposure were significant. In response to RQ4, self-investment shows no such indirect relationship to either topic (Figure 1).

### Moderation analyses

H2 predicted that there would be a conditional relationship between group self-definition and SMPE about (a) Latino culture, and (b) immigration based on participants' level of collective efficacy. H3 predicted that there would be a conditional relationship between group self-investment and SMPE about (a) Latino culture, and (b) immigration based on participants' level of collective efficacy.<sup>4</sup> The relationship



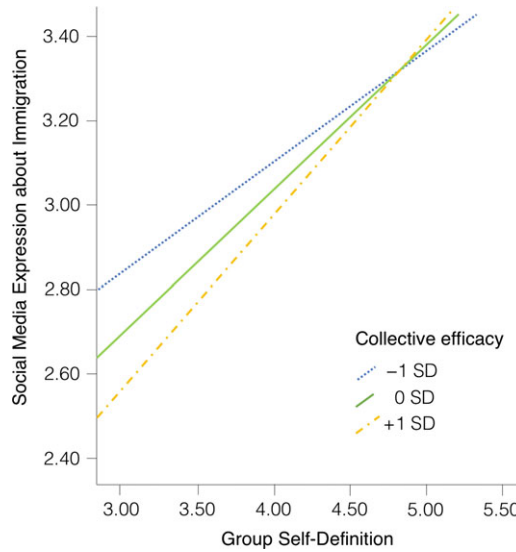
**Figure 1** Structural equation model of social media political expression about immigration and Latino culture. *Notes:* Estimates include all covariates, significant paths and significant moderating variable. RMSEA = .084 (90% CI = [.081, .087]), CFI = .85, SRMR = .128,  $\chi^2/df = 4.48$ ; \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

between group self-definition and SMPE about immigration issues (H2b) was conditional with collective efficacy.

There were four hypothesized conditional indirect effects. The first two (H4a, H4b) were tested, but not significant.<sup>5</sup> Hypotheses 5a and 5b were not tested as selective exposure did not show an indirect relationship between group self-investment and SMPE about Latino culture or immigration.

Model 1 of Hayes' (2013) PROCESS for SPSS was used to probe location of the single significant moderator (see Figure 2). The unstandardized simple slope for participants 1 SD below the mean of collective efficacy was .268 ( $SE = .07$ ,  $p = .00$ ), the unstandardized simple slope for participants with a mean level of collective efficacy was .348 ( $SE = .07$ ,  $p = .00$ ), and the unstandardized simple slope for participants 1 SD above the mean of collective efficacy was .420 ( $SE = .08$ ,  $p = .00$ ).

Finally, we conducted a post hoc power analysis with the purpose of determining the probability we had of detecting the relationships we found in our study using the online tool G Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). To calculate power we used the average correlation coefficients between all the variables of interest in the study. The post hoc power analysis showed that given a sample size of  $N = 503$ , an average correlation of  $r = .43$  and the usual alpha level of 5% (two-tailed), the achieved power of this study was 1; meaning that there was an extremely low probability of Type II error.



**Figure 2** Interaction effect of group self-definition and collective efficacy on social media political expression about immigration.

## Discussion

Findings in this study contribute to a greater understanding of which dimension of ingroup identification should be examined when studying the associations among ingroup identification, selective exposure, and political expression. As Latinos feel that members of their group share common characteristics and experiences, and as they see themselves as prototypical members of that group, they seek out information that is consistent with their views and, subsequently, express their views or share that information on social media for both Latino culture and immigration.

By contrast, our findings did not support the idea that group self-investment has an indirect effect on SMPE through selective exposure. This dimension was inconsistently and negatively associated with social media expression in the total effects model but was not related with social media expression about Latino culture in subsequent models. That is, a negative relationship was found for social media expression about immigration, but only when the mediating and moderating effects were unaccounted for. Although any explanation for this result will be unsatisfactory as it is both novel to the present study and was not predicted, one plausible interpretation could be related to the current hostile opinion climate regarding the issue of immigration. Those that feel more committed and satisfied with their Latino identity might refrain from or become less likely to express their opinion as they feel they are part of the minority opinion. A greater sensitivity of their perceived audience could influence their posting behavior, fearing negative repercussions from out-group members. This would mean, however, that motives for online self-presentation vary depending on the salience of each ingroup identification dimension given the current opinion climate. Future studies could examine the veracity of this proposition.

Research concerned with both Latinos' political participation (e.g., Masuoka, 2008; Valdez, 2011) and with individuals' selective exposure (e.g., Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2010; Schieferdecker & Wessler, 2017) have defined ingroup identification either uni-dimensionally, as self-categorization, or have mixed elements from both dimensions. For those studies that mixed elements of both

dimensions, it was the aspects concerned with self-definition that may be most relevant. For those that defined ingroup identification as self-categorization into a group, it clarifies that it is perceptions of commonality with other group members that best explain prior results. Findings from the current study seem to corroborate prior research that suggests that an approach to ingroup identification as self-categorization was sufficient. Given the importance of group self-definition in the current study, the results present evidence that individuals' information selection and political behaviors on social media can be explained in terms of depersonalization processes of the self (i.e., self-stereotyping) and other ingroup members (i.e., ingroup homogeneity).

This study treated the collective efficacy construct as an antecedent to political expression on social media, proposing a casual order that opposes evidence in previous studies (Halpern et al., 2017). However, efficacy beliefs can be both considered as antecedents and outcomes of behaviors. As suggested in previous research (Velasquez & Quenette, 2018) social media political use can increase efficacy perceptions through enactive experience, which can explain the efficacy increases due to social media political sharing (Halpern et al., 2017), and confirm how efficacy influences different modes of political participation.

Collective efficacy might operate as moderator when the issue expressed on social media has policy implications and supposes an action component. Collective efficacy is defined as the perceived capability that the group individuals belong to is capable of acting together and achieving its common objectives (Bandura, 1997, p. 477). The topic of immigration differs from posting about Latino culture in that immigration is a central policymaking issue, thus implying a need for action by voting for specific candidates, calling representatives, or in general, supporting a particular view on that issue. Sharing content about Latino culture, although influenced by group self-definition, might not necessarily depend on how much individuals perceive that Latinos, in this case, can act and achieve their common objectives.

This study did not find support for the idea that collective efficacy conditioned the mediation of selective exposure between ingroup identification and SMPE. We believed this would be the case because attitude reinforcement is one of the mechanisms that explains the relationship between selective exposure and political participation. However, these results are inconclusive since that mechanism was not tested. It might have been that other mechanisms operating at the same time might have obfuscated the one that would explain the moderation of collective efficacy.

### **Implications for social media use among minority groups**

The significance of group self-definition suggests the key role of depersonalization and self-categorization processes for SMPE among Latinos. Social media offers a platform in which expressions of a collective self and a linked fate enable Latinos(as) to connect with others as they perceive they have many characteristics in common. Those expressions of Latino(a) identity performance on social media become even more frequent when Latinos(as) perceive that they can actually achieve something together.

These findings lead to questions about whether for other minorities, such as African Americans, group self-definition dimensions would also help us understand their political expression on social media, more than perceptions of membership and a bond with other African American individuals. Research supports the notion that perceived discrimination is a driving force in perceptions of group identity for both Latinos and African Americans (Sanchez & Vargas, 2016). It might be the case that such depersonalized sense of self could be related with specific aspects of the experience of Latinos and African Americans in the United States, including perceptions of discrimination.

Likewise, it could also be speculated that for groups of a political nature, such as political parties, characterized by a sense of community, membership and belonging, it would not be depersonalization

and a definition of self as sharing core group characteristics, but rather group self-investment what might explain such social media political behavior. Indeed, it might be the case that individuals evaluate their social media expression in terms of how it would meet group goals and interests, in other words, in terms of attachment and solidarity to others.

As political expression on social media influence traditional modes of political participation, an increase in Latinos' pan-ethnic identification might result in more political engagement through exposure to media consistent with individual's political views and through social media expression. In consequence, social media strategies could be created to foster SMPE, and, ultimately, political action. While these strategies would have as a goal the engagement of Latino social media users in political expressive behaviors in such online outlets, social media can also be used to induce social identity perceptions. Consequently, social media experiences could be designed to contribute to an increase in perceptions of a common group identity. For example, information about similarities and common traits among Latinos could be emphasized, leading to a higher level of ingroup homogeneity and self-stereotyping. Likewise, a clear definition of the boundaries of the group in terms of those shared characteristics, as well as the differences with other groups, could instill greater feelings of ingroup self-definition.

Collective efficacy beliefs could also be cultivated. Modeling and enactive experiences will likely increase Latinos' perceptions that they can achieve their goals as a group. As Latino individuals are able to observe how other individuals and groups are able to achieve their political goals, they will model such use and increase their capability perceptions. Positive experiences using social media will also help them shape their perceptions of what they can do as a group, and serve as positive reinforcement, perhaps further increasing SMPE and greater perceptions of efficacy. Such an increase in collective efficacy perceptions will make their ingroup identification more determinant of their SMPE and subsequent political actions.

However, negative consequences could also be possible. A strengthening of in-group identification and collective efficacy beliefs might also lead to societal polarization, as stronger in-group identification could also come with out-group denigration, especially in conditions of higher efficacy beliefs. This could potentially lead to hate speech and other uncivil expressions of out-group members disparagement.

## Conclusions, limitations, and future studies

The limitations of a cross-sectional sample, while evident, open up opportunities for future studies. While the causal relationship between ingroup identification and selective exposure has been proven in experimental settings, future studies should explore the reciprocal causal relationship between expression, exposure, and identity as another instance of potential self-effects present on social media. Although the causal link between selective exposure and participation has been proposed in prior research, this relationship could also be reversed. More participation could lead to individuals' pro-attitudinal selective exposure as a form of dissonance avoidance. Additionally, while this study controlled for general political interest, it did not contemplate the level of interest or strength of opinion with regards to the issues (e.g., Latinos, immigration) examined in this study. Strength of opinion or issue salience could potentially explain the relationship between selective exposure and social media expression.

Another set of limitations is related to measurement. The selective exposure measures were based on a single item. Although the use of this item was based on prior research, a single item does not represent all the different aspects of the selective exposure construct. While the item used shows face

validity as a measurement of participants' perceived purposeful online exposure to pro-attitudinal information, other researchers have conceptualized selective exposure in terms of confirmation bias, and have thus argued for the use of unobtrusive measures in experimental designs in the study of selective exposure (Knobloch-Westerwick, Westerwick, & Johnson, 2015). Additionally, our measures for ingroup self-investment were negatively skewed (i.e., many participants scored high). This could have led to ceiling effects and less variance for this variable, and might explain the results for this group identification dimension. Replications of this study should develop measures more able to capture variability in self-investment.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to theories of SMPE by suggesting how different forms of ethnic ingroup identification relates to such social media behavior. Moreover, it illustrates a set of mechanisms and conditions in which this relationship becomes apparent.

## Supplementary material

Supplementary material are available at *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* online.

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## Notes

- 1 For the two independent variables, the ten items measuring group solidarity, group satisfaction, and group centrality were fit to three subfactors, and group self-definition was treated as a higher-order factor. The four items measuring individual self-stereotyping and ingroup homogeneity were fit to two subfactors, and group self-investment was treated as a higher order factor (see supplemental materials for items and estimates). The two higher-order latent factors did not show a significant difference in chi-squared or fit indices compared the model without second order factors. However, past research (e.g., Leach et al., 2008) suggests that each higher-order factor meaningfully represents the theoretical constructs. The overall fit of the independent variable model with the higher-order factor was a good fit to the data: CFI = .962, TLI = .949, RMSEA = .082, SRMR = .035;  $X^2/df = 4.35$ . The two dependent variables (i.e., social media political expression about Latino culture; immigration) and the moderator (i.e., collective efficacy) were subjected to a separate CFA. The overall fit of the moderator and dependent variables with three latent factors was a good fit to the data: CFI = .974, TLI = .964, RMSEA = .079, SRMR = .029;  $X^2/df = 4.10$ . A CFA with a single dependent variable measuring both DVs together was a worse fit to the data: CFI = .919, TLI = .893, RMSEA = .136,  $X^2/df = 5.15$ .
- 2 The measurement model and the path analysis were tested in the same model. Although testing of a hybrid model is the recommended use of path analysis, the increased number of parameters in a hybrid model increases the chance of model misfit (Holbert & Stephenson, 2008). The goodness-of-fit statistics should be interpreted in light of following this recommendation. The four latent factor

- hybrid model with the four paths proposed in the RQ1 and RQ2 showed a good fit to the data: CFI = .954, TLI = .944, RMSEA = .071, SRMR = .052,  $X^2/df = 3.58$ . The paths from group self-definition to social media political expression about both topics were significant: Latino culture:  $\beta = .44$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $p < .001$ ; immigration:  $\beta = .51$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, the paths from group self-investment to social media political expression about both topics were not significant: Latino culture:  $\beta = -.12$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $p = .400$ ; immigration:  $\beta = -.25$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $p = .083$ . Total  $R^2 = .10$  for social media expression about immigration, and  $R^2 = .12$  for social media expression about Latino culture. When the seven control variables were included in the hybrid model, with internal political efficacy and general social media use represented by latent factors, the paths from group self-definition to social media political expression were still significant for each topic. Total  $R^2 = .43$  for social media expression about immigration, and  $R^2 = .42$  for social media expression about Latino culture.
- 3 In total, four indirect effects were tested: (a) group self-definition → selective exposure about Latino culture → social media political expression about Latino culture; (b) group self-investment → selective exposure about Latino culture → social media political expression Latino culture; (c) group self-definition → selective exposure about immigration → social media political expression about immigration; and (d) group self-investment → selective exposure about immigration → social media political expression about immigration. All four indirect effects were tested in Mplus with a Sobel test. The indirect path between group self-investment and social media political expression about Latino culture through selective exposure was not significant:  $\beta = -.14$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $p = .185$ . The indirect path between group self-investment and social media political expression about immigration through selective exposure was not significant:  $\beta = -.04$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .712$ .
  - 4 The four moderations specified by the hypotheses were estimated one by one in four separate moderation models, and three of the four moderations were not significant. The relationship between group self-definition and social media political expression about Latino culture was not moderated by collective efficacy:  $\beta = .15$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p = .073$ . The relationship between group self-investment and social media political expression about Latino culture was not moderated by collective efficacy:  $\beta = .15$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .106$ . The relationship between group self-investment and social media political expression about immigration was not moderated by collective efficacy:  $\beta = .11$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .229$ . The analyses were repeated by adding all moderators in the same model and engage in path pruning (i.e., step-by-step removal of non-significant paths) and the same single, significant path remained.
  - 5 The relationship between pro-attitudinal selective exposure and social media political expression about Latino culture was not moderated by collective efficacy:  $\beta = .04$ ,  $SE = .24$ ,  $p = .086$ . Neither was the relationship between pro-attitudinal selective exposure and social media political expression about immigration moderated by collective efficacy:  $\beta = .008$ ,  $SE = .024$ ,  $p = .73$ .

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