

¹WORKING PAPER

**The medium is the motivator? Perceptions of Facebook influence and Political Interactions
on Facebook as Antecedents of Online Political Expression**

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Abstract

Research has shown that individual predispositions and online network characteristics shape users' attitudes and behaviors including posting and reacting to political content on the site. This study advances research on political opinion expression on social network sites among the general public, by highlighting the importance of perceived efficacy of the site for expressive purposes. We show that perceiving Facebook to be influential in shaping public opinion predicts political expression on the site. Perceived Facebook influence also mediates the effect of seeing political interactions among social contacts on the site on opinion expression. These findings, found among a nationally representative sample of Facebook users in Colombia, suggest that political expressive behaviors on social media are contingent not only on individual motivation and network activities, but also on the perceived utility and impact of the platform for expressive practices.

Key words: online expression, social networks, perceived influence, Facebook, Colombia.

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Introduction

The emergence of new technologies have widened the possibility for individuals to engage with politics. Studies have noted how citizens are increasingly using social networking sites not only to acquire information and connect with others but also to express and exchange opinions related to politics and current issues.

The current literature on the implications of social media for political outcomes has produced mixed results. On the one hand, studies have shown that online social networks can benefit political engagement among the young, increase participation among the less politically interested, and increase social capital (Kim & Geidner, 2008; Utz, 2009; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). On the other hand, some scholars consider the increased homogeneity in political perspectives due to disproportionate interactions with only like-minded others on social media to be unsettling (Sunstein, 2009; Ancu & Cozma, 2009). Some found evidences that are much less optimistic on the political uses of social networking sites (Baumgartner & Morris, 2009; Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010).

As social media endow users with accessible and convenient tools for self-expression, expression on social networking sites on political issues has gained increasing scholarly attention as a new form of participation. Using social media for self-expression is among one of the most common sources of psychological gratification from online social networking sites (Macafee, 2013). However, political posting and opinion expression on sites like Facebook is a practice more commonly seen among the politically interested rather than general users (Baumgartner & Morris, 2009).

With increasing evidences found on how perceptions of political content and discussion on social media platforms like Facebook matter for online behaviors including content blocking, user 'unfriending' and self-censorship (Vraga, Thorson, Kligler-Vilenchik, & Gee, 2015; Thorson, Vraga, & Klinger-Vilenchik, 2014), the extent to which perceptions related to the political use of social media affects opinion expression online remains unclear.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of the relationships between motivation, perceptions and expression, with a particular focus on the role of perceptions. We found two mechanisms that shed light on the conditions under which people post political content or express political opinion on Facebook. We show that expressive behavior on Facebook is shaped by whether the site is conceived to be a potent tool for political expression or not. Users gain such perceptions about the influence of Facebook either through political interactions within their social networks on the site or through general assumption about the influence of mass media in general. These findings suggest that political expressive behaviors on social media are contingent on both social network effect and the perceived usefulness of the platform.

Literature review

Expression in a digital age and the social context of online expression

Developments in new communication technologies give rise to more venues for political participation and expression. Research in the past have shown that there is a positive relationship between the use of Internet for information (Shah, Cho, Eveland and Kwak, 2004), and the use of social networking sites with expression on those sites (Hopke, Gabay, Kim and Rojas, 2016).

Hopke, Gabay, Kim and Rojas (2016) showed that interacting with weak ties through online social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook increase the likelihood of opinion expression. Different social networking site platforms with different affordances hold implications for the meaning and impact of political behaviors. Compared to Twitter which is a "publishing" application with open publicness, Facebook is more of a "social networking" tool in which connections and level of publicness are generally controlled by the users (Murthy, 2012). So on Facebook, it can be argued that social network norms and interactions are essential for individuals' activities.

Social media possess unique characteristics that can transform the way in which people communicate. boyd (2008) details four properties of the 'networked publics' on social media: persistence, replicability, invisible audiences, and searchability, and argues that these properties "fundamentally alter social dynamics, complicating the way people interact" (boyd, 2008, p. 120).

These suggest that every behavior or activity occurring in social media platforms need to be considered in light of the online 'social dynamics' unique to the platform and to each and every individual network. After all, in the online world, interactions occur within 'egocentric' networks, which hold important implications for individuals' perceptions about the world and political outcomes (Rojas, 2015; Wojcieszak & Rojas, 2011).

The idea of the influence of social norms on political behaviors has been explored extensively by research dated from as far as the 1970s. Huckfeldt (1979, 1986) argued that social interaction should be included in models of political participation to specify what causes individuals to become involved in politics. The theoretical assumption here is that interactions with others in sociopolitical environment, such as joining social groups or discussing politics

with neighbors, expose individuals to the social norms of political behavior as well as knowledge about participation opportunities. Diana Mutz and colleagues' research (2002, 2006) generates similar insights into the social context of political discussions and its impact.

Insofar as offline political talks are shaped by social contexts (Eliasoph, 1998), we can expect that the conditions or circumstances in which online political discussion takes place should matter for online political behaviors including opinion expression. Because social media help concatenate social networks in a much easier way (boyd & Ellison, 2007), communication via social media must be subject to "network effects", which create unique expressive possibilities (Jones, 2011). For instance, the kinds of political exchange people witness in their networks on social media can influence their perceptions of the appropriateness of those activities and trigger decision to engage in interactive behaviors. Research have shown that non-political discussion and social interaction on social media can serve as a catalyst for political expression and participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). Based on this research, we form the first hypothesis:

H1: Positive perceptions of political interactions within the network is positively correlated with expression.

We also expect that motivation to express opinion and self-efficacy in using social media for political purposes will enhance one's experiences with online political content and online interactions regarding politics. Individuals with these characteristics are naturally more likely to navigate towards political topics and issues and have more positive perceptions of political interactions among their social networks.

H2: Expressive motivation and Efficacy regarding political use of social media is positively correlated with positive perceptions of political interactions within the network.

Facebook as a medium of online expressive behavior

A majority of Facebook users employ the site to stay in touch with or keep updated about their social contacts and longtime acquaintances (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). When using the site politically, the types of political actions taken on the site such as liking candidates, posting status updates about issues or posting links to political news stories, are dependent on diverse psychological motivations, including the need for social connection, information sharing, and self-presentation (Macafee, 2013).

On Facebook, the main mechanism of interaction publicly is through the 'newsfeed' feature. Political activities on the site also occurred through more standard features: users could post status updates about politics, post political messages on friends' walls, or write and share political notes with their networks. Furthermore, Facebook allowed users to comment on their friends' posts, which enabled interaction between users who were not Facebook friends.

Social networks on Facebook is not entirely homogenous. In the US, research shows that 40% of the adult population reports that their friends post political content on social network sites, but 73% report disagreeing with a friend's post (Rainie and Smith, 2012). People also tend to overestimate the homophily in their networks (Goel, Mason, and Watts, 2010). On the one hand, research shows that for those who perceive more homogeneity, they tend to engage more on Facebook than those who perceive differences with friends on Facebook (Grevet, Terveen, and Gilbert, 2014). On the other hand, it has been found that people who engage in content-

expressive behavior online are embedded in heterogeneous information networks (Barnidge, Ardèvol-Abreu, Homero Gil de Zúñiga, 2016).

Perceptions of political content on Facebook are essential to the types of political behaviors one engages in on the site. Research on the political use of Facebook among young users (Vidal et al, 2011; Thorson, 2014) showed that college students generally consider explicit attempts to persuade or recruit others politically on Facebook inappropriate. Political disagreement and conflict is uncomfortable for some and even turns them away from politics (Thorson, Kligler-Vilenchik, & Gee, 2015). Gustafsson (2012) show that people who do not have ties with political parties or interest groups tend to remain passive, despite being exposed to requests for participation from their networks.

Little has been known about how Facebook users perceive the influence of the climate opinion on Facebook in relation to the general public opinion. It could be argued that individual factors, such as self-efficacy, and network factors, such as the norms of political interactions with others on Facebook, matter. Thus, we form a tentative hypothesis with regard to the relationship between motivation, efficacy and perceived Facebook influence:

- *Expressive motivation and Efficacy regarding political use of social media is positively correlated with Perceptions of FB as an influential platform for politics.*

Perceived media influence and perceived Facebook influence

The "influence of perceived influence" framework explains how perceived influence of media on others can lead people to adopt attitudes or behaviors that correspond to such perceptions.

With the growing prominence of social media, recent research have posed similar questions with regard to how people form judgments about the influence of these new forms of media on others and whether such judgments affect their own beliefs or attitudes. In the context of health communication, the perceived influence of social media has been investigated on behavioral outcomes, such as quitting smoking, or engaging in healthy eating habits (Vaterlaus, Patten, Roche, and Young, 2015; Yoo, Yang & Cho, 2016).

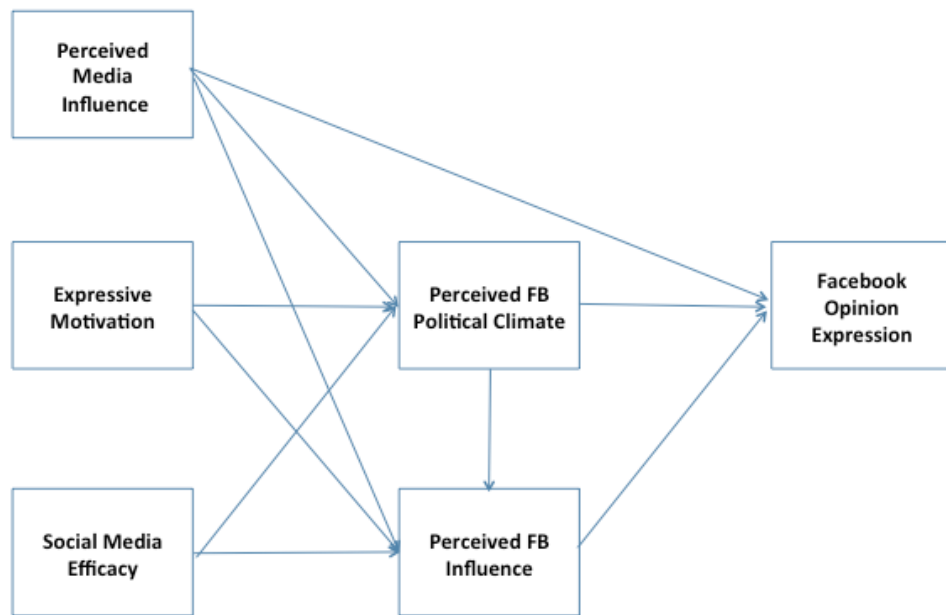
There is little empirical evidence with regard to the relationship between perceptions of media influence and perceived social media influence. If one thinks that the media in general has a lot of say in public opinion, is there a higher propensity for him to extend such belief to social media, and how such perceived influence affect the decision to express opinion?

RQ: What is the relationship between perceptions of media influence, perceived Facebook influence and expression?

H: Perceptions of FB as an influential platform for politics is positively correlated with expression.

Theorized model

Figure 1 introduces the theorized model regarding the antecedents of online opinion expression. As can be seen, we are interested in the influence of some main factors including motivation, perceptions and self-efficacy on expression on Facebook.



DATA

The data used in this research is a national survey data collected in 2014 in 10 cities in Colombia, by the Universities of Wisconsin and Externado de Colombia, as part of their biennial study of communication and political attitudes in Colombia. The sample was designed to represent Colombia's adult urban population – 76% of Colombia's 44.5 million inhabitants live in urban areas. Survey respondents were selected using a multistep stratified random sample procedure that selected households randomly based on city size and census data. Once the number of household was allocated for a given city, a number of city blocks were selected randomly according to housing district and strata. Then, individual households were randomly selected within each block. Finally, the study used the “adult in the household who most recently celebrated a birthday” technique to identify an individual respondent at random. Up to three visits to each household were made (if needed) to increase participation in the survey. A local

professional polling firm, Deployectos Limitada, collected the data and 1031 face-to-face completed responses were obtained for a response rate of 83%.

Of the 1102 total respondents, 596 people reported using SNS, and 567 reported using Facebook and were included in the analysis.

MEASURES

Main Independent Variables

Presumed Media Influence: Respondents were asked to indicate agreement to the statement "Media has a lot of influence in the opinion of people" (5-point scale from 0 to 5, $M=$; $SD=$).

Opinion Expressive Motivation (dummy variable): Respondents answered to question: "What is your main motivation to post to your online social network?", from "update the people you know about your everyday life activities" to "express your views about current events".

Efficacy of Political Social Media Use: is a latent variable measured by three questions: "how confident do you feel about your ability to do the following activities using social networks (0: not confident to 5: very confident): express views about political issues, influence others about political issues, discuss political issues with others effectively (Cronbach alpha = .94).

Perceived Facebook Network Political Climate: is a latent variable measured by the degree of agreement (0 to 5) to three statements "I have seen how people persuade others about political issues on social media sites", "I have witnessed how my social contacts are capable of discussing about politics online", "I have noticed how social media can be useful for expressing effectively political opinions". (Cronbach alpha = .892).

Perceived Facebook Influence: is measured by answer to the question "In general, to what extent can the climate of opinion on Facebook influences general public opinion?" (1: not at all to 5: completely) (M=2.93, SD=1.0).

Dependent Variable of interest

Facebook Opinion Expression: is measured by the frequency of "expressing views on current issues" on Facebook (0: never to 5: frequently) (M=2.26; SD=1.56).

Control variables

Age: this variable ranges from 18-83 (M=33.76; SD=12.63).

Gender: female = 1; male = 0.

Education: from 2 to 8 (M=5.69; SD=1.22).

Income: from 1 to 9 (M=2.86; SD=1.51).

Political interest: is measured by the degree of interest in national politics (0: not at all to 5: a lot) (M=2.16; SD=1.66).

Political efficacy: is measured by the degree of agreement to four statements ("People like me can influence what local government does", "I believe that the national government care about what people like me think", "City government responds to the initiatives of individuals", and "Sometimes government and politics are so complex that someone like me can't really understand what is going on" (reversely coded). An index is created by the sum of these four answers (M=8.31; SD=4.53).

Partisanship (dummy)

Social network size: Respondents were asked to think about the people that they have commented the news, or talked politics with in the last month, and ask how many of their family members, coworkers/classmates, neighbors, and friends/acquaintances. These were transformed into log values of the size of these social networks (ranging from 0 to 5.3; $M=1.96$; $SD=1.17$).

Frequency of political talk (0: never to 5: often): is measured by the frequency of commenting the news or talking politics with family members, close friends, coworkers/classmates and acquaintances. An index is created by the sum of these variables ($M=7.87$, $SD=5.49$).

Heterogeneity of political talk (0: never to 5: often): is measured by the frequency of talking to people who "have very different ideas from your own", "are from different social strata than you" and "are from a very different age than yours". An index is created by summing these variables ($M=8.17$, $SD=4.34$).

Traditional media use: is measured by asking respondents about their sources for specific events or issues and the frequency to which they follow national daily newspapers, national news magazines, national TV news (0: never to 5: frequently). An index is created by summing these three variables ($M=6.81$; $SD=3.09$).

Online media use: the frequency of using 'online news' ($M=2.31$; $SD=1.66$).

Facebook news use: the frequency of doing the following activities on Facebook: "read news articles posted by your contacts", "read the opinions of your contacts about political issues", "share news stories with your contacts. An index is created by summing up these variables ($M=4.95$; $M=3.92$).

Results

Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	606	18	83	33.76	12.63
Female	606	1	2	1.56	0.50
Education	606	2	8	5.69	1.22
Income	601	1	9	2.86	1.51
Political interest	566	0	5	2.16	1.66
Political efficacy	533	0	19	8.31	4.53
Partisanship	589	0	1	0.26	0.44
Network size	567	0	5.3	1.96	1.17
Talk frequency	533	0	20	7.87	5.50
Talk heterogeneity	549	0	15	8.17	4.34
Traditional news use	567	0	15	6.81	3.09

Online news use	567	0	5	2.31	1.66
FB news use	594	0	15	4.95	3.92
Presumed media influence	563	0	5	3.43	1.17
SNS efficacy	550	0	15	4.39	4.32
Expressive motivation	550	0	1	0.29	0.45
Perceived FB politics	550	0	15	6.83	4.72
Perceived FB influence	541	1	5	2.93	1.00
FB expression	541	0	5	2.26	1.56

Pearson Correlation between key variables

	Presumed media influence	political SNS_efficacy	motivation	Perceived FB politics	Perceived FB influence	FB expression
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Presumed media influence	1					
political SNS efficacy	.241**	1				
motivation	.137**	.318**	1			
Perceived FB politics	.336**	.491**	.328**	1		
Perceived FB influence	.294**	.278**	.121**	.436**	1	
FB expression	.105*	.397**	.205**	.305**	.252**	1
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						

Table 1: OLS Regression models predicting Perceived FB politics, Perceived FB influence and FB Opinion Expression

	Perceived FB political climate	Perceived FB influence	FB Opinion Expression
Block I: Demographics			
Age	-0.08*	-0.11*	0.03
Female	-0.01	-0.01	0.01
Education	-0.02	-0.07	-0.01
Income	0.06	0	-0.1
	6.70%	2.50%	1.40%
Block II: Pol orientation			
Political interest	0.04	0.06	0.09
Political efficacy	0.06	-0.07	0.05
Partisanship	0.03	0.01	-0.03
	26.40%	8.20%	13%
Block III: Network			
Network size	0.02	0.04	-0.1
Talk frequency	0.14*	-0.12	0.17*
Talk heterogeneity	0.05	-0.02	-0.03
	32.10%	8.00%	15.40%
Block IV: News use			
Traditional news	-0.05	0.01	-0.03
Online news	0.05	-0.09	0.20***

FB news	0.05	-0.02	0.11*
	33.50%	7.80%	20.70%
Block V: Motivation			
Expressive motivation	0.13***	-0.01	-0.01
SNS efficacy	0.21***	0.05	0.18**
	40.30%	10.30%	23.40%
Block VI: IVs of interest			
Presumed media influ	0.10*	0.19***	-0.10*
Perceived FB influence	0.28***	—	0.16**
FB political climate	—	0.40***	0.07
FB opinion expression	0.05	0.15***	
	49.40%	27%	26%
Total Rsquared	51.50%	30%	29%

Note: Estimates for each cells are standardized coefficients. *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

First, we test the proposed relationships using three sets of OLS regression models, each predicting the perceived political climate of Facebook, perceived Facebook influence, and Facebook opinion expression.

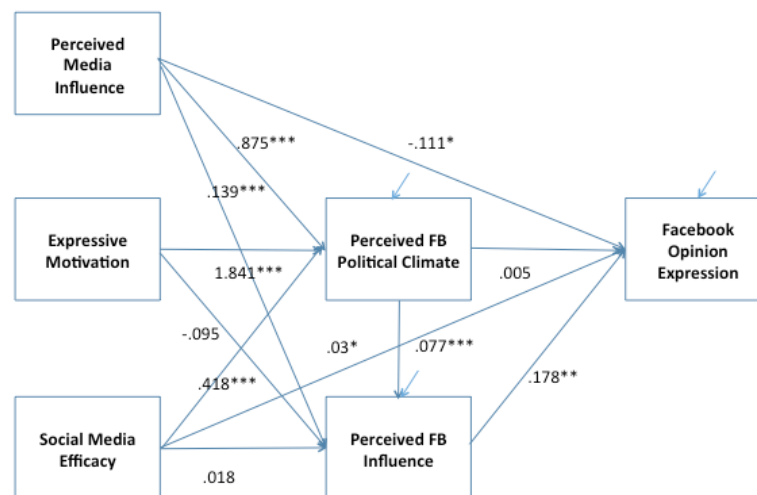
On Perceived Facebook Political Climate as a dependent variable, we see some interesting patterns. First, older Facebook users are less likely to report successful use of Facebook for political purposes in their networks, such as to discuss about politics, persuade others or express political opinions ($\beta = -0.08$, $p < .05$). Frequency of discussion about politics in real life is positively correlated with more positive perceived FB political climate ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < .05$). People who agree that media ($\beta = .10$, $p < .05$) and Facebook ($\beta = .28$, $p < .05$) has a lot of influence on public opinion tend to report higher patterns of political activities on Facebook among their social contacts. Those who cite "expressing about current events" as their main motivation to post to online social network ($\beta = .13$, $p < .001$), and possess self-efficacy related to social media use ($\beta = .21$, $p < .001$) are more likely to report positive experience of political interactions related to Facebook use. Altogether, the predictor variables explain 51.5% variation in perceived Facebook political climate ($p < .001$).

Turning to the model predicting Perception of Facebook influence, as expected in our hypothesis, perceptions of media influence are positively correlated with perceptions of Facebook influence ($\beta = .19$, $p < .001$). Experiencing political activities on Facebook ($\beta = .40$, $p < .001$) is also correlated with perceiving that the climate opinion on Facebook can influence general public opinion. Interestingly, the frequency of expressing opinion on Facebook is significantly related to greater belief about the influence of Facebook ($\beta = .15$, $p < .001$).

With regard to our main dependent variable of interest, which is political expression on Facebook, in accordance with what has been found in previous research, frequency of offline political talk ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$), following online news ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$) and news on Facebook ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$) are significant predictors of expressive behaviors on Facebook. Thinking Facebook is influential ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$) and be efficacious in social media use ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$) are

also positively related to expression. The relationship between presumed media influence and expression is significant but negative ($\beta = -.10$, $p < .05$) suggesting that the effect of this variable might be mediated by some other variables, which I will return to later.

Based on the results of regression analyses, a structural equation model was constructed using the lavaan package in R, as shown in Figure 1. Maximum likelihood Robust was used to estimate the parameters and method of Full information maximum likelihood was used to address the issue of missing data. For the sake of presentation, the main dependent variable (expression) were residualized by the control variables before being included in the analysis. The model converged normally after 41 iterations and used 567 observations out of 606 total observations. The result shows that the model does not hold true for the population, with all of the supporting assumptions, chi-square ($df=3$) = 10.969, $p = .012$; robust comparative fit index (CFI)/Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .977/.907, Akaike information criterion/Browne-Cudeck criterion (AIC/BCC) = 11257.754/11322.859, root mean square error approximation (RMSEA) = .07 (CI .029-.117) ($p = .190$) (indicating a moderate data fit), SRMR = .026 (a measure of discrepancy not tied to chi-square indicating a good approximate fit).



Results show that perception of Facebook influence ($\beta = .178$) is a significant predictor of Facebook expression ($p < .01$), whereas the influence of political climate on Facebook, though positive, is not significant ($\beta = .005$). This finding provides partial support for our hypothesis about the importance of perceptions related to FB politics and FB influence on opinion expression. Expressive motivation, efficacy in social media is positively related to expression ($\beta = .03$, $p < .05$), whereas presumed media influence is negatively related to expression ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .05$).

On factors predicting perception of the influence of Facebook, we see that thinking the media has a lot of influence in general is extended to similar evaluation about the influence of Facebook ($\beta = .140$, $p < .001$). Having a Facebook network which is heavily involved in political interaction also makes one more likely to highly estimate the influence of Facebook on public opinion ($\beta = .077$, $p < .001$).

Interestingly, motivation to post ($\beta = 1.842$, $p < .001$), efficacy in social media use ($\beta = .418$, $p < .001$) and perceived media influence ($\beta = .875$, $p < .001$) are all positively and significantly correlated with having a vibrant political interaction on Facebook.

[Table 1] Indirect effects and total effects

	Estimate	SE	Z-value	p
Indirect effect of Presumed media influence on Expression through perceived FB influence	.025*	.01	2.59	.01
Indirect effect of FB political climate on Expression through perceived FB influence	.014**	.004	3.13	.002

Total Effects of Efficacy in social media use on Expression	.035**	.012	3.03	.002
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** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Turning to indirect effects on Expression, from the mediation analysis, some interesting patterns are observed. First, presumed media influence has a negative significant direct effect on expression ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .05$), but it indirectly and positively is related to expression through the mediator of perceived Facebook influence ($\beta = .025$, $p < .05$). This indicates that when Facebook users view Facebook as a media platform with similar influential potential as the potential they ascribe to general media, their tendency to employ this platform to express increases. Moreover, expressing only under the condition of positive evaluations of Facebook as a powerful medium suggests that expressive action by Facebook users in this sample may involve the intention to affect a change in the opinion of others in their networks.

Second, there is a significant indirect effect of perceived Facebook political climate on expression through the path of perceiving Facebook as an influential medium ($\beta = .014$, $p < .01$). Judging from the insignificant direct effect and total effect, we can conclude that the impact of perceived Facebook political climate on expression is fully mediated through this path. The implications of this finding is that while having a politically engaged network on Facebook is not enough to trigger expressive action, perception about Facebook influence which users gain through such interactions would encourage opinion expression.

Finally, we see that efficacy in political use of social media is directly and fully explains the act of expression ($\beta = .035$, $p < .01$). Being confident in one's own ability to use social media for political purposes is positively associated with expressing on Facebook.

Discussion and Conclusion

Research has found copious evidence that citizens are increasingly making use of social media not only to gain information, or interact with others, but also to engage politically, through expressive activities such as posting political content, sharing links, commenting on political issues or interacting with politicians.

Moving on from individual factors as predictors of online political expression on social media, scholars have recently turned attention to how perceptions and attitudes towards political content on social media affect whether an individual would engage or not.

This research addresses the question of how perceptions of political interactions within online social networks matter with regard to the particular act of opinion expression on Facebook. We also look at the nature of relationships between motivation, perceptions and expression. As expected, motivation to express, self-efficacy of political use of Facebook are strong predictors of expression. More importantly, the norms of political activities within social networks and the perceived influence of Facebook are important both as direct and mediator precursor of political expression.

Political scientists have been trying to explain and predict political behaviors of the electorate through the standard model of cost/benefit, assuming that in order to participate in politics, citizens have to overcome the 'costs', for instance, finding and getting to polling place in order to vote or gathering information in order to select candidates. An optimistic account of new communications technologies would say that social media platforms have decreased such costs significantly by allowing easier access to information, or providing a new platform for individual opinion to be heard. With regard to our findings, to assume that people increasingly express

political opinions on Facebook because it requires less 'cost' is myopic. Considering that the act of expression is embedded within online social network, by openly vocalizing political and preferences, a person might gratify an 'intrinsic value' by the act of expressing while at the same time risking the relationships with others if their online social networks do not appreciate or encourage discussion about politics in a 'social networking' platform like Facebook. Under such circumstances, individuals are likely to avoid paying such social 'cost' by remaining silent. In contrast, engaging with politics through expressing opinion can be sustained and boosted if discussions and exchange of ideas are considered the norms initiated and supported by social networks. Betsy Sinclair, in her book "The social citizen", argued that social influence or social pressure shapes political behaviors like casting a ballot, preferring a candidate or identifying with a party. It is not a stretch at all to say that this embraces also the act of opinion expression.

With the ramifications of social network on individual expressive behaviors, we also return to the kind of concerns expressed by Sinclair: whether there are any circumstances in which we should be concerned that the opinion expression is contingent on both the norms of political interactions within the networks and the perceived advantage of Facebook. In our view, there is less reason to worry that this is the case, as it has been shown that the exchange of views are beneficial for the normative implications of democracy. Different from voting behavior, there seems to be less potential that individual opinions are under great pressure to conform with the opinions of those in her network. There have been evidences found that individuals might avoid expression in the face of conflict or disagreement or even more extremely, unfollow or 'block' other users; however, the act of conformity in terms of opinion or views on Facebook, to our best knowledge, has not yet been discovered.

We found that perceptions of Facebook influence mediates the relationship between the perceived political interactions within networks on Facebook and opinion expression. We also showed that the perceived influence of Facebook on general public opinion is positively correlated with perceptions of media in general and the degree of political interactions within one's networks on the site. This puts the perceived utility of Facebook for influential purposes at the centre of two possible mechanisms for opinion expression on Facebook to occur. An important question remains unanswered is the actual content of what is 'expressed'. If what matters is that one only expresses on Facebook when she views that it worths of the effort, then we have to question the extent to which the decision to vocalize on the site and publicize one's own view is based on the norms or the behavior of the network. Our cross-sectional data shows that the network effect is positive but insignificant as it is fully mediated through the path of perceived Facebook influence. Future research could look into under what conditions do positive or negative political interactions on social matter play a role in expressive activities.

The significance of social network becomes more and more important because of the tendency to associate with similar others. Social networks can increase the exposure to more diverse views that inform behaviors. Social networks could also create pressure that motivate behavior.

This suggests that when Facebook users extend their perceptions about media influence on others to the influence of Facebook opinion climate on general public opinion, the frequency of opinion expression on Facebook increases.

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