



professor of communication studies. But in the case of a new study on social media and Latino political participation, Velasquez and his co-author looked at the effect on the ones pushing out the message.

Their results illustrate that individuals' political expression on [social media](#) increases their feelings of efficacy – that one's actions can influence the political environment.

In a new edition of the journal *Mass Communication and Society*, Velasquez and Andrea Quenette, assistant professor of communication studies at Indiana University East, published their study titled "Facilitating Social Media and Offline Political Engagement During Electoral Cycles: Using Social Cognitive Theory to Explain Political Action Among Hispanics and Latinos." It's part of a special issue on media theory and the 2016 U.S. elections.

The authors collected their data during the 2016 presidential election cycle. Their analysis included 227 participants who self-identified as Hispanic or Latino and who had a Twitter or Facebook account. Given the statistical methods they employed, they believe their sample can be considered closely representative of Latino Americans as a whole.

"The idea was to look at whether social media and social media political expression contributed to actual participation," Velasquez said. "We didn't look at voting, but other participatory behavior: taking part in a demonstration or march, donating money to a campaign and the like.

"And what we found was that general social media use, and specifically social media use for political purposes – sharing political information, political news, political views" resulted in a statistically significant rise in political participation in real life.

Velasquez and Quenette write that they analyzed their data in light of

"[social cognitive theory](#)," and particularly its concept of "efficacy," or individuals' beliefs in their capability to perform the actions needed to attain desired goals.

"That means the more you use social media for political purposes – and the more you increase your belief in your own capacity—the more you will participate; the more you will go out and explain your opinions and engage in different types of political behaviors," Velasquez said.

He said the study found two things that drive this behavior: the reaction one gets to his or her own social posts, and the reactions one witnesses to social posts made by friends.

"Say you posted something on social media related to politics," Velasquez said. "You got a lot of discussion on your Facebook wall. People agreed with you, liked the post, shared your post. It made you feel, 'I can make a difference through social media posts, and I will do it again.' ... The study was not so much about how my posts influenced you, but how my posts influenced me. They increased the likelihood that I would participate in politics."

Velasquez said the study does not really address the chicken-or-egg question of which came first: More social [media](#) use or more participation? Nor, he said, does it compare Latino Americans to other ethnic groups. Those are questions for future studies, or at least more analysis of the 2016 data.

**More information:** Alcides Velasquez et al. Facilitating Social Media and Offline Political Engagement During Electoral Cycles: Using Social Cognitive Theory to Explain Political Action Among Hispanics and Latinos, *Mass Communication and Society* (2018). [DOI: 10.1080/15205436.2018.1484489](https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2018.1484489)

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